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THE SOUL AT WHITE HEAT: METAPHYSICAL TRADITION
IN THOREAU'S JOURNAL AND DICKINSON'S POETRY.

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THE SOUL AT WHITE HEAT: METAPHYSICAL TRADITION
IN THOREAU'S JOURNAL AND DICKINSON'S POETRY

by

RHODA B. NATHAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in English in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

The metaphysical tradition in seventeenth-century poetry emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in the writing of two Americans, Henry Thoreau and Emily Dickinson. In form and in content, the two resembled their predecessors in a variety of ways. Thoreau's Journal and Dickinson's poetry explored the subjects that dominated the poetry of Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, and Marvell: love, religion, death and immortality, the private and communal life, and the natural universe. In form, they both revealed the wit, epigrammatic bent, and extended cerebral metaphors which mark the poetry of the seventeenth century poets. Their complexity of approach may be characterized as a "spiritualization of the senses," a state of being attained through a paradoxical fusion of the poet's emotional response to and his intellectual awareness of a given subject.

In all areas, John Donne's influence is seen to be most prevalent. Additionally, Dickinson's love poetry, with its powerful theme of renunciation, reveals an indebtedness to Herbert, while Thoreau's interpretation of love as a "conjunction of the mind" rests on Marvell's definition. Quarles' emblems are duplicated in Thoreau's reflections about religion, and Crashaw's use of color may be recognized in Dickinson's intensely colored landscapes. In the enunciation of the "private" life one may find traces of Vaughan, the meditative spirit or "the man within."

Although there is hard evidence that Thoreau and Dickinson read and were impressed by the metaphysical poets, their own metaphysical mode was not an imitation of the former but a resurgence of an equivalent ironic temperament and highly individualistic cast of mind. In addition, the two are linked one to the other as well as to the seventeenth century by an aphoristic bent, an original and anti-romantic attitude toward such traditional subjects as death and religion, a corrective tone with respect to the community, and a moral view of nature.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Among the individuals immediately important to this dissertation, Professor Charles Walcutt merits the major portion of acknowledgment for a variety of reasons. It was during an explication of Poem #986 in his class that I conceived the idea for an analysis of Dickinson's poetry in the light of metaphysical criteria of style and content. Further, I am indebted to him for his painstaking and critical reading of all the material in this study, and for his emphasis on accuracy of contextual setting. I am grateful for his strict insistence on truth at the expense of easy and dazzling conclusions, and for his discouragement of generalizations arising from limited evidence.

I thank Professor Samuel Mintz for his enlightening comments about the seventeenth-century poets and the cultural climate which their poetry reflected. On at least one occasion he rescued me from committing an error in fact, and on more than one occasion from hasty conclusions. Thanks are also due to Professor Samuel Levin for his insistence that I define my terms clearly at the outset. In doing so, he helped me to clarify my own intention and to organize my study along logical lines.

Finally, recognition is given to Edward Nathan, whose discerning and witty observations about the seventeenth-century poets sharpened my appreciation and enhanced my sheer enjoyment of their poetry. He introduced the element of fun into the reading, and for that I am grateful.

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Chapter I

Across Two Centuries: The Emergence of American Metaphysical Style

The analytic temperament coupled with an ironic cast of thought are the two constant elements which have been recognized to be the essential components of seventeenth-century wit. In prose, these qualities have combined to produce a style noted for its emphasis on original experience, its search for the exact word to suit the new scientific imperative, and, in fashionable works such as John Earle's Microcosmography, a powerful epigrammatic bent. In poetry, the same qualities are adapted to a more demanding medium and emerge as a complex of stylistic devices, notably an eccentricity of line and meter, a heaping on of paradox and irony, and above all, a highly self-conscious telescoping of imagery. In prose, the style is classified as Senecan, baroque, and in a negative way, anti-Ciceronian, because it rejects the orotund and harmonious classical traditions of rhetoric which had characterized the period immediately preceding this one. In poetry, the many dazzling devices have been since classified and codified under the general description of "metaphysical." The essence of the new literature is the element of wit, a legitimate offspring of the intellect, defined late in the seventeenth century by John Locke in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and redefined in the twentieth century by T. S. Eliot in a variety of ways. To Locke, wit stood for the power of linking thought and expression with a precision calculated to gratify by its unexpectedness. Eliot, tracing the history

of wit, and using Andrew Marvell for his model, concludes that wit is a "tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace," and further praises the poet for playing with a "fancy which begins by pleasing and leads to astonishment."

Note, then, the two constants in the definition of wit: the element of thought and the element of surprise. The intimate emotional life of the poet is the motive force, of course, but it is never fully unleashed. In Eliot's estimate, "poetry is not a turning loose of the emotion, but an escape from emotion." In the metaphysical tradition, the intellect is the filter through which all experience is passed, ultimately to release its emotional equivalent. Thus detachment is essential for the production of the desired effect, and the end result, the subjection of experience to objective scrutiny, yields unexpected and occasionally shocking effects. Old familiar experiences take on new linguistic dimensions, fresh coloration, innovative intellectual counterparts. The essence of wit, then, is the expression of the familiar phenomenon in unprecedented intellectual terms, characterized by ingenious turns of phrase, puns, acrobatic imagery, and frequent irony. Two of the most apt definitions of the metaphysical process, each incorporating the essence of wit, have been formulated by Raymond Alden. The first, in an explication of Donne's poetry, defines it as the "interpenetration of lyric feeling and intellectual activity." The second, a definition of the Elizabethan conceit, suits the entire tradition of metaphysical poetry as well: it is "the elaboration of a verbal or an imaginative figure, or the substitution of a logical for an imaginative figure, with so considerable a use of an intellectual process as to take precedence, at

least for the moment, of the normal poetic process."¹ The work of art which ensues is a representation of the union between the cerebral and the sensuous, with the conceptual taking precedence over the purely emotional.

In America, the seventeenth century saw some transplantation of European literary modes. Masters of the "plain style," American Puritans were also highly educated Englishmen, and, allowing for the inevitable time lag in cultural transmissions, their thought and expression were profoundly influenced by the new waves of scientific anti-authoritarianism, which were to change the way in which man had traditionally regarded the universe, and by Bacon's and Donne's innovations in style. Particularly in Edward Taylor's poetry one recognizes the essential elements of seventeenth-century wit: the oblique utterance, the condensed figure of speech, the erratic line, and the spun-out conceit. Fifty years later, the same themes which had so fully exercised the energies of Sir Thomas Browne, Robert Burton, and George Herbert, were to become the obsessive concern of Jonathan Edwards, who tried with all his might to reconcile God's omnipotence with Newtonian physics. Those themes were, of course, science, philosophy, and religion.

In the nineteenth century, two Americans, one a writer of prose, the other a poet, did more to rescue the tradition of wit from the degeneracy into which it had fallen for more than a century, than any of the considerable number of their peers. Although "wit" as a term was still recognized in the eighteenth century, it was not in full use as a literary commodity during an age of serious political writing, pamphleteering, and didactic poetry. Wit, as it survived,

became synonymous with the kind of verbal calisthenics employed by a group of eighteenth-century poetasters known as the "Hartford Wits." The chief contribution made by this group was the creation of a derivative literature of mock-epic in the manner of Pope for the purpose of satirizing and reforming current American manners and morals. To restore and mold a true literature of wit, it became necessary to reintroduce the elements which nurture it: tension, skepticism, conflict, curiosity, high-mindedness, and an analytic turn of mind which was capable of producing the following epigram:

"Faith" is a fine invention
When Gentlemen can see-
But Microscopes are prudent
In an emergency.

The poem is by Emily Dickinson. Its wit and irony are not merely the end product of verbal acrobatics. But faith and science are held to the light for careful scrutiny, and the central word, "prudent," with its theological and secular connotations, is the one which links both worlds. The conflict between religion and science found in seventeenth century metaphysical literature finds continued expression in the poetry of this nineteenth-century wit, who still sees the central "emergency" in the problem.

In the same manner, the intense concern for linguistic accuracy in the attempt to deal with serious philosophical, social, or religious questions underlies the wit of Henry David Thoreau. It is not surprising that Thoreau, the working naturalist, should transfer the observant habit of mind which the careful student of nature develops, to his observation of the human condition. The essence of wit in the following Journal entry inheres in the search for the exact word (in the mode of Bacon and Earle):

In obedience to an instinct of their nature men have pitched their cabins and planted corn and potatoes within speaking distance of one another, and so formed towns and villages, but they have not associated, they have only assembled, and society has signified only a convention of men.

The Journal, V. I, March 14, 1833

The entry betrays the necessary skepticism born of detachment. The concern for the nice (in the fastidious, discriminating sense) distinction between the words "associated," "assembled," and "convened" serves as the foundation for the wit in the selected observation.

In a further pursuit of the subject of social interaction, the naturalist writer of prose finds the ultimate vehicle of wit--the conceit:

Let ours be like the meeting of two planets, not hastening to confound their jarring spheres, but drawn together by the influence of a subtle attraction, soon to roll diverse in their respective orbits, from this their perigee, or point of nearest approach.

The Journal, V. I, March 14, 1833

It is my intention in this study to link together the figures of Thoreau and Dickinson as the two genuine purveyors of wit in the nineteenth century. If indeed Melville had a greater gift for tragedy, Hawthorne for psychological insight, Emerson for philosophical synthesis, and Poe for sheer artistry, Thoreau and Dickinson bore the hallmark of the true wit. Intensely cerebral, both were keen observers of nature and the creatures which peopled the natural universe. Each was passionately introspective and profoundly idealistic and individualistic. They were both masters of the "plain style," and they shared an acerbity

of humor. They also shared a tendency to underwrite rather than to over-elaborate. They wrote a "squeezed" or condensed line, studded with dazzling figurative "turns." In temperament they were alike in that each preferred his own company and was sometimes socially abrasive. Each had an odd and original way of observing the social scene about him. Unsophisticated and provincial, they formulated cosmic philosophical judgments from the limited vantage point of the New England countryside. Like mollusks, they closed in on themselves. Above all, their literature reflects identical obsessions: nature, social interaction among men, religion, and the inner life. In the manner of their seventeenth-century predecessors, each cultivated his ironic point of view as a direct consequence of subjecting familiar objects and attitudes to scientific scrutiny. Dickinson's microscope and Thoreau's measuring devices are productive of a healthy skepticism which never degenerates into cynicism. Rather, each writer maintains a high-mindedness in the best seventeenth-century tradition. Finally, each is a metaphysical writer, with all the stylistic intricacies implicit in the description. The pun, the epigram, the quip, the unlikely comparison proliferated in their tense lines. Dickinson's poetic line is rough, her rhyme eccentric. Thoreau's prose rhythms are frequently not harmonious, but varied in length and structure, yielding a general impression of roughness and immediacy.² For immediacy is the quality which most clearly defines the metaphysical writer. Hawthorne's writing was too tortured to effect this necessary immediacy, Melville's too abstruse, Emerson's too leisurely, Poe's too self-conscious. In Thoreau and Dickinson, however, the colloquial plainness, with its spare and integrated ornamentation, produces the spontaneous urgency.

It remains for me to defend the oddly matched selection of the three volumes of Dickinson's poetry and the fourteen volumes of Thoreau's Journal for the purpose of this study. Much as Walden suits the criteria for metaphysical content and style, it will not serve as source material for this paper, not only because it is ground that has been plowed over and over, but primarily because it is largely an ordered condensation of the broad variety of materials which appear in one form or another in the Journal. The Journal in its entirety has not yet been examined in detail for the precise purpose I undertake at this time. A preliminary reading yields a rich store of hitherto unexplored material on a broad spectrum of subjects, of which I shall choose those most traditionally exploited by metaphysical writers.

In the case of Emily Dickinson, although superficially it would appear that the three volumes of her letters would provide the most likely counterpart to Thoreau's Journal by virtue of their personal nature and informal composition, a close reading reveals them to be too frequently fragmentary and scattered in content. The three volumes of poetry, however, demonstrate a powerful kinship, almost a twinship, with the Journal. The two bodies of literature have in common the two basic components of wit according to its most classic definition: the element of illuminative cerebration and the element of surprise. Each makes ample use of discordia concors, the metaphysician's trick of yoking together seemingly dissimilar elements. In addition, they share a quality of immediacy which is singularly lacking in spontaneity, and a tone which is intensely personal and self-aware. Finally, to defend the linking of a work of prose with a work of poetry for the purpose of establishing parallels between the

two, this approach is not unique to this study. Thoreau's closest companion, William Ellery Channing, entitled his memoir of his friend, Thoreau, The Poet-Naturalist, basing his judgment on the poetic nature of Thoreau's prose. Then in 1968 Charles Anderson wrote a new full-length explication of Walden, called The Magic Circle of Walden, in which he offered a new reading of Walden on the grounds that the book "can be thought of as poetry rather than prose, if one does not insist on the mechanical distinction of verse as opposed to paragraph form." So the notion of regarding Thoreau's prose as poetry is not new. I submit that one can also waive the technical criteria for verse in the Journal, especially since Anderson himself uses the Journal for his defense, citing its many references to the author's concept of his mission as poet and pointing to the poetic nature of the Journal's exposition. Since Anderson cites two modes of language, wit and metaphor, as the most necessary components of metaphysical poetry, I feel justified in treating the Journal as a largely poetic document.³

More important a link between the two writers, however, is the matter of the poetry and the Journal. In addition to the manner of the metaphysical writer--the aphoristic bent, the ironic tone, the social satire--Thoreau and Dickinson ring all the changes on the conventional subject matter of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry. I have separated these subjects into five individual units, assigning to them appropriate titles as chapter designations. Each chapter bears the title of a pertinent quotation from a seventeenth-century metaphysical poet, to serve as a reminder of the continuity between the earlier and later cycles as well as between the two nations, England and America. Each chapter will explore a given subject, trace

the origin of the cultural attitude established toward it in the seventeenth century, demonstrate its continuity into the nineteenth century in the Journal and in the poetry, and explore the metaphysical devices, with particular emphasis on the tools of wit utilized in its treatment. The object is to reinforce the original premise of this study, that the nineteenth century in New England letters was a period which nurtured the continuity of the tradition of wit through the metaphysical content and style of two of its most outstanding writers. With the exception of a chapter here and there in one or another books of critical appraisal, there has been no serious effort to explore or evaluate this tradition as there has been to analyze and document the tradition of romance in Hawthorne, of tragedy in Melville, and of philosophy in Emerson as symptomatic of and contributory to the cultural climate of the nineteenth century, the period acknowledged to be the most productive in literary art.

Notes

¹Raymond L. Alden, "The Lyrical Conceit of the Elizabethans," Studies in Philology (1917), p. 137.

²I must qualify this statement by conceding that some of Thoreau's prose (particularly in the formal essays and Walden) is as conventional and harmonious as Emerson's. The Journal, however, in its informal and spontaneous origin and style, is largely composed of irregular rhythms and assymetrical sentences.

³Charles Anderson is the only one of the Thoreau-Dickinson scholars who pays tribute to the wit in their work. He devotes one brief chapter to wit in The Magic Circle and an equally brief, though brilliant, appreciation of wit in Dickinson in Stairway of Surprise. Although his is the soundest criticism of style that I have read, he makes no connection between the two and does not treat the Journal at all except as it serves as source for Walden.

Chapter II

A Working Definition of Metaphysical Poetry

Since the purpose of this study is to document the link between the metaphysical tradition in seventeenth-century literature and the writing of two mid-nineteenth century figures, it is necessary at the outset to establish a sound working definition of metaphysical poetry. From the many sources of literary scholarship which I have investigated, I have chosen to begin with Louis Martz's excellent definition and detailed analysis in the Introduction to The Anchor Anthology of Seventeenth Century Verse:

The term "metaphysical poetry," as used by literary critics over the past fifty or sixty years, has come to include poetry, notably that of Herbert or Donne, which possesses the following characteristics. First, abrupt and dramatic openings, often with a vivid image or exclamation: "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love." Secondly, a colloquial, familiar manner of speech, used in the most adored and sanctified presence, whether it be the presence of a Lady or the presence of the Lord. Thirdly, a firm argumentative construction, which makes the last line of the poem implicit in the first and gives to the whole poem a peculiar tautness and concentration. Fourthly, an introspective quality, an element of self-analysis, particularly when the poet is dealing with the nature of love, whether sacred or profane. And finally, most distinctively, the quality that Samuel Johnson described when he found in this poetry "a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased."¹ Modern readers, more often pleased by this daring use of metaphor, have come to accept the "metaphysical conceit" as a valid and significant mode of poetical action.

Metaphysical poems tend to begin in the midst of an occasion; and the meaning of the occasion is explored and grasped through the peculiar use of metaphor. The old Renaissance conceit, the ingenious comparison, is developed into a device by which the extremes of abstraction and concreteness, the extremes of unlikeness, may be woven together into a fabric of argument unified by the prevailing force of "wit." Wit, is all the rich and varied senses that the word held in this era: intellect, reason, powerful mental capacity, cleverness, ingenuity, intellectual quickness, inventive and constructive ability, a talent for uttering brilliant things, and a power of amusing surprise.²

As justification for this inordinately lengthy quotation, I have found every one of the elements of this definition essential to my purpose. They serve as a set of indispensable ground rules for my major thesis, which is to connect the subject matter, style, and approach of two bodies of literature which are set a continent and a century and a half apart from each other. Throughout the course of my study, I shall also extract elements from the definitions of other scholars in the field, most notably, H. J. C. Grierson, J. B. Leishman, Joan Bennett, Frank Kermode, and T. S. Eliot. I shall rely on scholars such as Helen Gardner, Basil Willey, and F. O. Matthiessen for a clarification of the historical and philosophical background of metaphysical thought and expression in a given context within the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

Although it is not the intention of this paper to prove that Thoreau and Dickinson were in any sense conscious imitators of seventeenth century style, there is ample evidence that indeed Thoreau did read and was influenced by Herbert and Marvell and, most particularly, Sir Thomas Browne, and made reference to all three in his Journal. F. O. Matthiessen has made a most careful study of this derivative "metaphysical strain" in Chapter Three of American Renaissance.

He points out, for example, the philosophical basis of similarity between the view of nature held by Vaughan and Thoreau. Both saw nature as possessing the stability and balance which men lacked.³ One need go no further than the epigraphs at the beginning of the fourteen volumes of Journal, which provide one half of the basic readings on which this study is founded, to see the profound influence which the seventeenth-century mind had on Thoreau. All three of the epigraphs are by seventeenth century minds, two of the three by Herbert and Marvell, metaphysical poets, the other by Robert Burton, whose Anatomy of Melancholy contains some decidedly metaphysical philosophical and stylistic elements. The epigraph which does most to set the tone of the Journal is the excerpt from Andrew Marvell's "The Garden":

Two Paradises are⁴ in one,
To live in Paradise alone

It is a particularly apt quotation to serve as a link, both stylistic and thematic, between Marvell and Thoreau. Stylistically, the success of the couplet depends on its wit, in this case a numerical quip. Thematically, it proposes the virtue of independence, of separation from the community at large, which is fundamental to both groups of metaphysical writers. It is worth noting here that the other two epigraphs also deal with the state of solitude.

In the matter of Emily Dickinson's metaphysical influences, there is some well-documented evidence of minimal exposure to the literature of the seventeenth century, although here again my purpose is to demonstrate, not a conscious imitation, but rather a temperament and turn of mind that perpetuated an aesthetic and philosophical tradition quite naturally and with little exposure to its source. In

point of fact, there is much more evidence in her personal letters of extensive reading in the Bible and Shakespeare, a much more conventional course of mind-improvement for young ladies of upper-middle-class Puritan heritage at Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary in the mid-nineteenth century. Even here, however, there is a study entitled Emily Dickinson's Reading, 1836-1886, a Harvard University Press publication, by Jack L. Capps. Mr. Capps notes that Emily transcribed two stanzas of Herbert's "Matin Hymn" to keep for inspirational reasons. Millicent Todd Bingham later published it as Dickinson's own poem in the first edition of Bolts of Melody because the Herbert excerpt bore a remarkable resemblance to Dickinson's own style.⁵ Twice the poet quotes Edmund Waller in letters to her friends the Hollands and once to Col. Higginson she refers to Vaughan.⁶ Other proofs of exposure to the metaphysical poets are indicated from the underlining of lines from Vaughan's "Early Rising and Prayer," and some dog-eared pages of Herbert and Crashaw in Chambers Cyclopaedia of English Literature.

Having offered this somewhat trivial evidence of exposure to and familiarity with the body of seventeenth century literature known as metaphysical poetry, once again I disclaim any intention to trace a historical or purposeful continuity. Rather, I hope to demonstrate that the qualities of mind and temperament which produced the former were perpetuated as a tradition in the nineteenth century through a similar manifestation of intellect and approach, just as they were to surface again in the twentieth century in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Elinor Wylie, and Hart Crane.⁷

Notes

¹Samuel Johnson, "Life of Cowley," in Lives of the English Poets, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1952), 12.

²Louis Martz, The Anchor Anthology of Seventeenth Century Verse, Vol. I (New York, 1969), pp. xix-xx.

³F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York, 1941), p. 110.

⁴The word in Marvell's poem is "'twere." Thoreau misquotes it in the Journal as "are," perhaps as recognition of his single state.

⁵Jack L. Capps, Emily Dickinson's Reading, 1836-1886 (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 60-76.

⁶Letters #544 and 888, The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 Vols. (Cambridge, 1958), 605-606, Vol. II and 814-815, Vol. III.

⁷An interesting study of twentieth century poetry in the same tradition is a book by Sona Raiziss entitled The Metaphysical Passion: Seven Modern American Poets and the Seventeenth Century Tradition (Philadelphia, 1952). The author also lists Allen Tate, Archibald MacLeish, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren as the four other clearly metaphysical poets in contemporary American culture. Although I agree with her choice of Eliot and Crane entirely, I have reservations about the others. But that is another matter for another time.

Chapter III

"The Conjunction of the Mind": Love
(Andrew Marvell, from "The Definition of Love")

"Give all to love!" urged Emerson in an uncharacteristic outburst of emotional abandon. The wary reader will note, however, that the uninhibited recommendation at the beginning of the poem is soon withdrawn, or at least moderated, and a cooler, more temperate tone prevails. The lover then proceeds to hedge his bets and maintain his emotional reserve in the event of a spiritual emergency. If the "half gods" of the poem are the temporary deities of the conjunctive passion, then the more permanent full gods who unseat them are the eternal forces of the integrity of individual maintenance. When they are in control, then the merely sensual and romantic tie will yield to a higher unity achieved through the linking of spirit. In short, the ideal love relationship is not far removed from the refined seventeenth century platonic ideal expressed in such poems as John Donne's "The Undertaking":

But he who loveliness within
Hath found, all outward loathes,
For he who colour loves, and skinne,
Love but their oldest clothes.

If, as I have, you also do
Virtue attired in woman see,
And dare love that and say so too,
And forget the he and she, . . .

The mature love poems of Donne, like those of the nineteenth century Transcendentalist, are unanimous in their celebration of a "higher"

or more abstract expression of love. One can imagine the acquiescence of the seventeenth-century poet in Emerson's indulgent apostrophe to the lover, secure in the knowledge that the highest goal of love is the one expressed in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Spiritual or superlunary lovers will have succeeded in achieving the rarefied state of being "inter-assured of the mind," having freed themselves of the duller "sublunary" lovers' dependence upon the lower palpable union of eyes, hands, and lips.

In a vein of unrestraint seemingly similar to Emerson's panegyric to love, one of Henry Thoreau's Journal entries contains an expansive prescription to love: "All that a man has to say or do that can possibly concern mankind, is in some shape or other to tell the story of his love,--to sing: and, if he is fortunate and keeps alive, he will be forever in love. This alone is to be alive to the extremities." (May 6, 1854; J, VI, 237). This alarming excess falls into its proper perspective when one realizes that Thoreau's definition of love will be revealed over and over again as essentially platonic, an idealistic interpretation in instinctive imitation of his high-minded mentors of the Transcendentalist movement as well as the truest expression of his own nature and experience. Much has been written about Thoreau's love life, or lack of it, or fear of it, almost all of it speculative, and in the case of some biographers, romanticized.¹ The most sensible and responsible assessment, however, appears in Perry Miller's Consciousness in Concord. Miller dismisses the shadowy romance with Ellen Sewall as lacking in any real substantiation in fact and therefore entirely irrelevant in biographical significance. He makes the telling point that the very nature of Transcendental

philosophy contributes to the obscuring of the thin line separating love and friendship;² thus in the literature of the movement, love and friendship are often interchangeable terms, the object of devotion frequently of the same sex as the writer, in tribute to the high premium placed on asexual communion between kindred souls.³ There are, however, specific passages in which the love object is avowedly feminine, in which love between the sexes is explored, and marriage is frequently mentioned. These are the selections I have culled from the Journal to be read as a literary as well as spiritual biography.

Even accepting the fact that Thoreau did not personally experience the physical fulfillment of love, nonetheless one reads in the Journal ample evidence of his preoccupation with the subject. He observes his fellow man in love, he assesses the nature and character of the girls with whom he freely associates, and he records his observations in detail. Many of his observations are perceptive, some are naive, but all are, without fail, witty in conception and in idiom. The transforming sacredness of love is a recurrent theme: "Love tends to purify and sublime itself. It mortifies and triumphs over the flesh, and the bond of its union is holiness." (Jan. 23, 1854; J, VI, 76). The sacramental tone derives, of course, from the mortification of the flesh, which in turn frees the mind or the spirit for the attainment of perfect unions. It is reminiscent of Andrew Marvell's "Definition," which ends with the following lines:

Therefore the love which us doth bind,
But fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind. . . .

It is the mind as agent and recipient of love which ensures "conjunction." The Journal examines the essence of spiritual union;

"To one we love we are related as to nature in the spring. Our dreams are mutually intelligible. We take the census, and find there is one." (April 29, 1851; J, II, 184). The figurative language of the last line of the quotation is both an early approximate forerunner of Eliot's objective correlative and a late descendant of the proliferating analogies of the metaphysical poets. Like Marvell, Thoreau engages in the wit of analogy to make his point about passion kept in check. Marvell's analogy is linear:

As lines so loves obliques may well
 Themselves in every angle greet:
 But ours so truly parallel,
 Though infinite can never meet.

("Definition")

That integrity of individual maintenance, proposed early in this chapter as the essential ingredient of nineteenth as well as seventeenth century character--even in the experience of love--is repeated in the Journal, although Thoreau's analogy is not linear but broadly astrological, as befits the naturalist: "By our very mutual attraction, and our attraction to all other spheres, we are kept properly asunder. Two planets which are mutually attracted, being at the same time attracted by the sun, preserve equipoise and harmony." (April 29, 1851, J, II, 185). Physical separation and spiritual concord are the two antithetical components of the paradoxical union examined in both conceits, Marvell's and Thoreau's. It appears to be typical of the metaphysical mind to dwell on the intellectual contemplation of the many dimensions of being in love rather than its actual experience. Donne's celebrated geometrical conceit of the compass in "A Vale-diction: Forbidding Mourning" is designed to explore the experience

of parting through visualizing the pivot of the compass feet, joining and separating at the same juncture. The surprise ensuing from the juxtaposing of the joined and divided elements of an experience is the unexpected premium at the heart of wit.

The astral conceit appears to be as attractive to Thoreau as it was to the metaphysical poets. In the following poem which appears in the Journal, he examines once again the fixed character of love and the antithetical force which propels love into perpetual motion about the fixed center of heaven:

Love

We two that planets erst had been
Are now a double star,
And in the heavens may be seen,
Where that we fixed are.

Yet, whirled with subtle power along,
Into new space we enter,
And evermore with spherul song
Revolve about one centre.

(Jan. 20, 1839, J, I, 72)

Perhaps the permanence of the heavens was as comforting to Thoreau in the quest for the security of love in a rapidly changing and increasingly industrialized world as it was to the seventeenth century poets obsessed with what seventeenth century scholars have termed the "mutability" and "decay" of the world posited by the new astronomers of the Copernican and Galilean schools.⁴ Whatever the motivating force, Thoreau, like his seventeenth century predecessors, felt the need for love, or more particularly, for the stabilizing influence of love, which supersedes all the certainties of science: "Love is a mutual confidence whose foundation no one knows. The one I love surpasses all the laws of nature in sureness. Love is capable

of any wisdom." (April 29, 1851; J, II, 185). Shared love is valued not only for its stabilizing influence in an unstable, mutating universe, but as capable of any wisdom, or a vehicle for a degree of perfection that cannot be achieved singly. It is very like Donne's tribute to shared love:

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the color, and the size,
(All which before was poor and scant)
Redoubles still and multiplies.

When love, with one another so
Interinanimates two souls,
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,
Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, who are this new soul, know
Of what we are composed and made,
For the atomies of which we grow
Are souls whom no change can invade.

("The Ecstasy")

The poem stresses the exaltation of the spirit through love, but more importantly, the formation of one greater soul through the union of two loving souls, quite above and apart from sexual concourse, this in spite of the fact that the poem ends with it. Thus Thoreau's Journal entry makes a speculation about the nature of love very much in the vein of Donne's "Ecstasy": "Does not the history of knight-errantry suggest or point to another relation to woman than leads merely to marriage, yet an elevating and all-absorbing one, perhaps transcending marriage? . . . I am sure that the design of my maker when he has brought me nearest to women was not the propagation but rather the maturation of the species. Man is capable of love of woman quite transcending marriage." (April 29, 1851, J, II, 185). The preferred mode of communication between such lovers is intuitive

and highly valued. In a parallel to the meeting of eye-beams in seventeenth-century poetry, (Thoreau even uses the term "eye-beams" in an early poem), the introspective diarist marvels at the unspoken communion of lovers, "as showing how much we can know of each other through sympathy merely, without any of the ordinary information. . . . A look, a gesture, an act, which to everyone else is insignificant tells you more about that one than words can. . . . It is as if a bird told you." (Feb. 20, 1859; J, XI, 452). The bird figure, appropriate to the poet-naturalist, appears frequently throughout the pages of the Journal, not merely for ornithological study, but as emblem for the kinship between lovers. One of the most touching entries appears as a powerful refutation of Robert Louis Stevenson's famous and rather brutal attack on Thoreau's character, labeling him cold and loveless and distant.⁵ The Journal entry is a tense outcry, with the bird as submerged metaphor: "Where is my mate, beating against the storm with me?" (Oct. 26, 1857; J, X, 128). The utterance is touching for its manifest anguish, but it is also remarkable for its structure. The need for support, for love, for strength and comfort are all telescoped into a single figurative sentence, encapsulating a world of emotion into a perfectly natural observation drawn from the commonplace events of nature itself. That, in the best metaphysical tradition, is the essence of wit. It is also a telling rebuttal to Stevenson and the school of critics who saw in Thoreau an "egoist, . . . dry, priggish and selfish."⁶

Aloof and emotionally rigid he may not have been, although he was so characterized not only by Stevenson but also by the editors of a magazine called Seven Arts, but a sporadic anti-feminist he

certainly was, much in the manner of the metaphysical poets.⁷ The combination of idealistic love and anti-feminism is not an unlikely one, as C. S. Lewis points out in The Allegory of Love. In the great medieval romances, in Chaucer and in Spenser, idealization of women and cynicism are merely positive and negative expressions of the same attitude, which is essentially romantic.⁸ Donne and Marvell inherited this dualistic legacy, composed of equal parts conventional Christian excoriation of women as agents of Original Sin and romantic adulation of women as objects of courtly love Troubadour poetry. That Thoreau read Marvell's and Donne's poetry is indisputable. He could not have failed to respond to the sentiments as well as the forms of the models. If, indeed, as Henry Wells points out in an appraisal of Thoreau's poetry, he modelled his most successful poems directly upon the "fluid and controlled stanzaic structure" of Marvell as well as the octosyllabic verse and "subjective insight" of Donne,⁹ it must be concluded that he did not remain insensitive to the blatant cynicism about women revealed in much of the love poetry. It is the anti-feminist posture which stimulates the sauciest epigrams, the unlikeliest paradoxes, the wickedest wit. On the limitations of women's intellect, the following epigram from the Journal is a fair example: "In the East, women religiously conceal that they have faces; in the West, that they have legs. In both cases, they make it evident that they have but little brains." (Jan. 31, 1852; III, 257). The tirade, childish and ungenerous, is not far removed from Donne's outburst in "Elegy VII," in which he apostrophizes the woman who has scorned him as "Nature's lay idiot." In a number of Journal entries, the naturalist dismisses women as "unprofitable" in their companionship, scatterbrained, and

generally incapable of cerebration by reason of an innate frivolity and dim-wittedness.¹⁰ In short, women disturb the serenity of Paradise or the blissful solitude of nature, owing to the very limitations of their sex. They are "tamely bred," and therefore not given to originality of thought or boldness of judgment. (Nov. 13, 1851; J, III, 112). The entries are direct heirs to Marvell's wistful mythic recollection of the bliss of Eden before Eve's coming:

Such was that happy garden state,
While man walked there without a mate.
After a place so pure and sweet,
What other help could yet be meet!
But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two Paradises 'twere in one
To live in Paradise alone!

("The Garden")

Thoreau's invective against the two young women who stopped at his door one Sunday, asked for water and then walked off with the proffered dipper, prompted an anti-feminist outburst that touches all recognizable conventional sources:

They never returned the dipper, and I had a right to suppose that they came to steal. They were a disgrace to their sex and to humanity. Pariahs of the moral world. Evil spirits that thirsted not for water but threw the dipper in the lake. Such as Dante saw. What the lake to them but liquid fire and brimstone? They will never know peace till they have returned the dipper. In all the world this is decreed.

(Jan. 17, 1852; J, III, 197)

The compendium of social outrage, half-serious moral fundamentalist doctrine, and formal decree is rather more than drollery. It is language rich with allusion--to theology, literature, social mores, and law. There are no transitions among the various utterances, yet

they are all of a piece because they share a unity of tone. The juxtaposition of lengthy and choppy sentences produces the rough irregular rhythms of the Senecan or anti-Ciceronian style so popular among the metaphysical prosodists, without in any sense impairing the sense of the passage. The logic is an interior one, arising from the sparsity of descriptives as well of the pointedness of those allusions which are utilized. In short, compression and pointedness are productive of wit, and this is a dryly witty passage.

Wit is also dependent upon comparison and contrast to provoke an intellectual weighing of ideas presented by the writer for the reader's judgment. Therefore the writer makes wide use of antitheses, not only for syntactical or structural balance, but for the purpose of stimulating the reader to awareness of new or at least fresh and unexpected ways of responding to familiar subjects. In one instance of anti-feminist antithesis, Thoreau explodes the myth of superior feminine sensibility with the following observation: "The animal nature of them is stronger, the reason weaker," this is in spite of the fact that we ordinarily attribute to them "a somewhat finer more sybilline nature." (Nov. 26, 1850; J, III, 116). Before him Donne had also written many antithetical lines in the attempt to understand woman's nature, particularly their propensity to love, as in the following figurative lines about the number of love affairs proper for a woman:

To live in one land in captivity,
To run all countries a wild roguery.

("Elegy 3. Change")

In employing the wit of antithesis, Thoreau, like Donne, saw no

inconsistency between the generalized anti-feminism of his views and individual commitment to the experience of love. If indeed women were "unprofitable companions," whose only function was to ensnare men in the social gears of the "marriage machine," still, "to be married at least should be the one poetical act of a man's life." (Aug. 11, 1853; J, V, 369). Another antithetical statement, this time entirely in praise of love: "Love never degrades its votaries, but lifts them up to higher walks of being." And still another, in the same entry: "We will have no vulgar Cupid for a go-between, to make a plaything of each other; but rather cultivate an irreconcilable hatred of this." (Mar. 20, 1840; J, I, 129). Antithesis gives way to the more powerful paradox, that indispensable tool of wit: "Love is the tenderest mood of that which is tough--and the toughest mood of that which is tender. It may be roughly handled as the nettle, or gently as the violet. It has its holidays, but is not made for them." (Feb. 22, 1841; J, I, 220). The compulsion to define and redefine seems to be intrinsic to the process of understanding an emotion, for the purpose of going beyond mere feeling about love to a thorough intellection of the experience. It is therefore, necessary to define the term in all its facets and manifestations, establishing that which it is not as well as that which it is. In that spirit Thoreau fashions a great many epigrams about love, all calculated to define love's limitations along with its extensions:

Love never perjures itself, nor is it mistaken.
(1845-7; J, I, 412)

Love never degrades its votaries.
(Mar. 8, 1840; J, I, 129)

Love does not analyze its object.
(Sept. 5, 1841; J, I, 285)

Nothing is plain but love.

(Mar. 7-10, 1841; J, I, 236)

Love is the burden of all nature's odes.

(Feb. 24, 1840; J, I, 125)

The diarist's preoccupation with love's capacities and powers is a natural consequence of the metaphysical emphasis on mind. Wit, after all, is a product of mind, fashioned solely through the tool of language. The mind can take the measure of love only as it is able to estimate the interdependencies which it generates, its distances as well as its contiguousnesses. Thus the consequences of love are often paradoxical in their realization, as they are in the images in Donne's "Valediction." The closest unification of two spirits is often achieved through a forced separation. Love then becomes an "expansion" rather than a "breach," as in the simile of the beaten gold in the poem. So, in one of the many astronomical conceits which dot the Journal, Thoreau idealizes the love relationship as a supra-physical balance between self maintenance and spiritual union: "Let ours be like the meeting of two planets, not hastening to confound their jarring spheres, but drawn together by the influence of a subtile attraction, soon to roll diverse in their respective orbits, from this their perigee, or point of nearest approach." (Mar. 14, 1838; J, I, 28).

It is noteworthy that the foregoing elaborate conceit, like all the extended Thoreauvian reflections on love, has the virtue of absolute fidelity to the governing or central simile around which it is constructed, without in any sense appearing forced and artificial. The figurative structures he builds are faithful illustrations of the structures on the fashioning of the materials of wit in "Ode. Of Wit,"

by Abraham Cowley, a metaphysical poet, in the year 1668:

In a true piece of wit all things must be,
Yet all things there agree;
As in the ark, joined without force or strife
All creatures dwelt, all creatures that had life.

In the astronomical conceit, therefore, all the "things" which Cowley decrees must be included for the manufacture of wit are there, and all terminology "agrees," the planets, spheres of influence, orbits, and perigee. Whichever central image is employed, the evolving radial images are always entirely relevant, never solely ornamental or merely baroque. Thus, if love is to appeal to as well as originate in all of the senses, it is of necessity a sensation which must be heard as well as seen or felt. When the metaphor for love derives from music, for instance, all the appropriate terms of the art are gracefully used in the making of the conceit with the ease and artful unself-consciousness prescribed by Cowley in the phrase, "without force or strife." Marvell's tribute to the fatal conquest of love employs this species of extended musical metaphor with a naturalness which is singularly metaphysical or at least, post-Elizabethan:

To make a final conquest of all me,
Love did compose so sweet an enemy,
In whom both beauties to my death agree,
Joining themselves in fatal harmony;
That while she with her eyes my
 heart does bind,
She with her voice might captivate
 my mind.

(Andrew Marvell, "The Fair Singer")

Thoreau employs the musical metaphor in a still farther-reaching fashion, warning the lover of the realities of love rather than its more dramatic "killing" power: "Love will have its chromatic strains--discordant yearnings for higher chords--as well as symphonies. Let us

expect no finite satisfaction." (Mar. 7-10, 1841; J, I, 236). The skepticism of the sentiment is a constant in the wit of the aphorist throughout the ages, as an end product of the struggle to ferret out the truth from the unachievable ideal. Witness Bernard Shaw, a turn of the century wit, in one of his many aphorisms about love from "The Revolutionist's Handbook": "He who desires a lifetime of happiness with a beautiful woman desires to enjoy the taste of wine by keeping his mouth always full of it." It is not so much a deprecation of love but a necessary concession to actuality. The writer typically recognizes and accepts the limitations of the love experience, which fall far short of the ideal. The end product is a wry or ironic appraisal, a compromise achieved through the superimposition of the rational processes of the mind upon the soul's infinite longings. Marvell understood that the ecstatic moment does not extend itself into eternity, that the music of love can never become eternal harmonic perfection:

This is the only banneret
That ever love created yet:
Who though, by the malignant stars,
Forced to live in storms and wars,
Yet dying leaves a perfume here,
And music within every ear.

(Andrew Marvell,
"The Unfortunate Lover")

The metaphysical mind confronts the question of temporality and eternity in the moment of love, sometimes overtly as a reflection of the nagging pressure of fleeting time in "To his Coy Mistress," and often subtly, as the writer acknowledges the changing and evanescent nature of love. "Love never stands still," records Thoreau in his Journal, "nor does its object. It is the revolving sun and the

swelling bud. If I know what I love, it is because I remember it." (March 14, 1842; J, I, 329). Still, in the paradoxical world of the metaphysical, "there is nothing so stable and unfluctuating as love. . . . It is a resource in all extremities, and a refuge even from itself," (Feb. 22, 1841; J, I, 220), balancing the temporal with the eternal in the perpetual seesawing of perspective.

There are yet two additional perspectives of the love relationship which Thoreau shares with the seventeenth-century poets. The first, the "private mode," discussed in great detail by Earl Miner in The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley,¹¹ appears to be as much an element in the approach to love among the nineteenth century metaphysical writers as among the earlier poets. Donne's lovers reject the public world in a number of songs and sonnets, designing the court as a repellent microcosm of the world at large. Thus in "The Canonization," the lover pleads for privacy with his beloved, urging his unwelcome audience to fritter away their time at court, leaving the lovers to their exclusive intimacy. The public world is dangerous and corrupt, as the poet makes plain in the poem, "The Curse," while the court is described as the seat of venality in "The Will." Thoreau's Journal reflects the same plea for the privacy of the lovers's court: "The most ardent lover holds yet a private court, and his love can never be so strong or ethereal that there will not be danger that judgment may be rendered against the beloved." (Feb. 7, 1841; J, I, 205).

The second perspective of love derives from the paradoxical mode, in the sense that the lover interprets the secular experience of love in sacred terms. The room in which the lovers are sequestered

becomes a cloister, while those outside remain "profane." ("The Canonization" and "The Valediction"). Even as trivial a seduction piece as "The Flea" is filled with the imagery of sacramental objects and ritual. Thus the flea itself becomes the living symbol of consecrated love, as the blood it sucks from the two lovers causes it to be transformed into a sacred sanctuary, its protective walls of jet the flea's outer shell. Henry Thoreau, a transcendental and metaphysical lover, senses the reverential nature of love: "The bond of its union is holiness." (Jan. 23, 1854; J, VI, 76). The note of sanctification in the excerpt is not exceptional. It runs through all of Thoreau's more transcendent panegyrics to love as evidence of the sacredness of man's primal relationship to the universe expressed through the bonds of love for one another. The following entry is probably the most accurate index of the prose-poet's reverence for the experience of love as an authentic organic outgrowth of man's indissoluble link with nature: "Love is the burden of all Nature's odes. The song of the birds is an epithalamium, a hymeneal. The marriage of the flowers spots the meadows and fringes the hedges with pearls and diamonds. In the deep water, in the high air, in woods and pastures, and the bowels of the earth, this is the employment and condition of all things." (Mar. 2, 1840; J, I, 125). The extended heterosexual and connubial metaphor aside, the excerpt is totally documentary, not only of the writer's wit, but of the spontaneous holiness which springs from natural love in a natural setting. It could well be a restatement of Donne's poem, "Love's Growth," which also describes the way in which love takes its shape from the observable truths of the natural world:

Love by the spring is grown;
 As, in the firmament,
 Stars by the sun are not enlarges, but shown
 Gentle love deeds, as blossoms on a bough,
 But love's awakened root do bud out now.

Finally, the organic link between love and the world of nature is responsible for the two most purely metaphysical and profoundly personal comments about love in the Journal. They appear in the "Lost Journal," that portion of Volume III covering the period from July 30, 1840, to January 22, 1841, and published separately by Perry Miller in 1958 in a book called Consciousness in Concord. The central emblems in each of the entries are respectively the sun and the moon, developed, as Miller pointed out, as typically metaphysical conceits.¹² The first entry is enigmatic in that it conceals the identity of the woman, but remarkably intense in its revelation of commitment. Every element of metaphysical love poetry is present: the organic link between the lovers and nature; the ascendancy of spirit in love; the sun's rays as metaphor for the "eye-beams" which are central to the interweaving of spirit in the seventeenth century lexicon of love; and inescapably, the linguistic playfulness of the stretched simile, which drifts effortlessly into metaphor and then culminates with an artful pun:

I know a woman who is as true to me and as incessant with her mild rebuke as the blue sky. . . . She is far truer to me than to herself. Her eyes are like the windows of nature, through which I catch glimpses of the native land of the soul and from them comes a light which is not of the sun. (The sun shines for this inner and lower world, but through them gleams a milder and steadier light than his.) His rays are in eclipse when they shine on me. Methinks in these soular rays there is no refraction of the light.

(Jan. 4, 1841)

The second entry employs the same astral emblems, but with ambiguity this time, as familiar symbols are wrenched from their traditional associations--that is, the sun with love requited; the moon, with love unrequited. Here, in a typically metaphysical approach, is the shock or surprise inherent in the assigning of unprecedented and unconventional values to conventional imagery--the association of the dark night and the cold moon with fulfilled longing in place of the legendary despair of scorned lovers: "Love's accounts are kept by single entry. When we are amiable, then is love in the gale, and in sun and shade, and day and night, and to sigh under the cold cold moon for a love unrequited, is to put a slight upon nature; the natural remedy would be to fall in love with the moon and the night, and find our love requited." (Tuesday, Jan. 19, 1841). As T. S. Eliot says of the metaphysical poets, "A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility,"¹³ so too was a thought to Thoreau. The very thought of love was sufficient to cause him to wrench the traditional associative role of the moon as inhospitable auditor of the lover's sighs into a fresh and optimistic symbolic equivalence. He examined love in the fashion of the authentic seventeenth century wit, using a wide variety of analogies for the universal abstraction of love, always employing concrete emblems from the familiar world of nature for man's most compelling and innate drive: the need to love:

I thought that the sun of our love should have risen as noiselessly as the sun out of the sea, and we sailors have found ourselves steering between the tropics as if the broad day had lasted forever. You know how the sun comes up from the sea when you stand on the cliff, and doesn't startle you, but every thing, and you too are helping it.

(Monday, Nov. 2, 1840)

This last excerpt is the final piece to complete the many-angled definition of love in the Journal. The element of a natural order and fitness of love which the lover takes as his due, a phenomenon as inevitable as the rising sun, establishes the necessary tone with which the definition is invested. It is the evidence that the motivating force behind the love literature is not merely "brain-spun," to quote Theodore Redpath's fitting judgment about Donne's Songs and Sonnets, but that it derives from a "passionate heart,"¹⁴ and is characterized by the metaphor of the rising sun, thus linking human love with beneficent nature.

The completed definition of love, then, as it appears in the Journal during a twenty-four year period, is neither a consequence of haphazard observations made at various junctures of the naturalist's life, nor a necessarily maturing or ripening understanding of the "conjunctive" passion. It is rather the anticipated response to experience of the sort of man who did not find it necessary to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar. With the few exceptions of the notations in the "Lost Journal" and the one plaintive lament previously quoted in this chapter, the many facets of the definition are the products of a mind trained in the minutiae of observation. If, as Krutch suggests, his sexuality was somehow sublimated or blocked after the shadowy events of the Ellen Sewall affair, it is a mistake to assume that he ceased to think about love or to take the measure of men and women in the grip of love.¹⁵ He continued to make his notations about love throughout the entire course of his Journal notation, and all the entries reveal the writer as wit, with the wry humor of the ironist emerging more and more as the process of

intellectual detachment modifies the immediacy of emotional involvement: "When presumptuous womanhood demands to surrender my position, I bide my time--though it be with misgiving--and yield to no mortal shove, but expect a divine impulse; for not now can I give you a clear seat, but must leave part of my manhood behind and wander a diminished man, who at length will not have length and breadth enough to fill any seat at all."¹⁶ Renunciation thus becomes the final element in the completed definition, as the "divine shove" serves to clarify the distinction between the higher and lower faculties of man, much as the seventeenth-century poets distinguished between the sublunary and superlunary lovers, those who yielded to lust and those who aspired to a "purified" love.¹⁷ Like Donne, Thoreau carries the theme of love to its highest metaphysical level, distinguishing the subject of empirical love from the abstraction of love as pure concept--the process by which metaphysical poets transmute the subject of secular love into sacred.

The transfiguration of the profane into the holy, through a carefully selected vocabulary, occurs in Emily Dickinson's love poetry as regularly as it does in Thoreau's Journal--with one major difference. Whereas Thoreau is cast primarily in the role of definer, refiner, and observer, Dickinson begins with the premise of experience, real or fancied, as necessary prerequisite for expression. That emotion which is almost entirely speculative in Thoreau is palpable in Dickinson. She has felt, where he has only observed, all the shadings and gradations of love. The element of struggle is explicit in her writing; in his it is not even implicit. Hers is a hot and engaged

voice; his cool and disengaged. She is Herbert to his Browne, if one is to compare the tone of "The Collar" with the dispassionate appraisal of the complications of love and marriage in the Religio Medici. Against Thoreau's quasi-scientific detachment, she offers a commitment which is beyond rational control. His metaphysics cause him to know and feel simultaneously, enabling him to translate the concrete emblem into an abstract arrived at through harmonious thinking and feeling; she knows one thing but feels another, as a discussion of her poetry will demonstrate. In his lexicon of love terms, we have seen that "holy" and "sacred" are frequently employed as descriptives much as in Donne's. In hers, the vocabulary is white hot, transcending Donne's and achieving the rarefied heights of Herbert and Vaughan. The nouns most often used are "ecstasy," "bliss," and "that white sustenance, despair." The renunciation articulated so lucidly in the last excerpt from the Journal quoted in this chapter is effortless for the simple reason that Thoreau had much earlier renounced the sensual side of life and was at this juncture in his life merely re-viewing or reevaluating. Dickinson's renunciation, on the other hand, is a consequence of the central struggle of her mature years. Again, her anguish is more reminiscent of Herbert's, whose wrestling with the flesh was painfully reflected in his poetry, than of Donne, who waited out the earlier life of the senses until they were gradually replaced by the life of the soul. In Donne and in Thoreau the reader may trace a gradual displacement of one state of awareness by another. The young Jack Donne had his mistresses; the mature John Donne had his God. So too, the young Henry Thoreau had his fleeting sexual fantasies recorded so briefly in the "Lost Journal." The more

mature Henry contented himself with sister Sophia's ministrings and Lidian Emerson's maternal care. His sexual fancies increasingly were preempted by transcendental or even mystical flights to nature. In Dickinson's mature poetry, however, the pain of deeply felt but unfulfilled love is a central crucial theme. Moreover, while Thoreau's writings about love are unstructured, random divagations, Dickinson's are sorted into a number of categories: awareness-commitment; bliss-ecstasy; reevaluation-renunciation; despair-resignation. In all these categories, there are direct earlier parallels from seventeenth century metaphysical poets both in England and America. The wit apparent in these poems will be seen to derive from the boldness of the images, the surprising homeliness of the emblems of love, the colloquial manner of treating the romantic theme, and the power of intuition, which is so piercing that it forces the reader trace it, not so much to its emotional, but rather to its intellectual source.

The Poetry of Awareness-Commitment

Just as the seventeenth-century poet reacted in his love poetry against the prevalent Elizabethan mode of ornamental embroidery and sensuous figurative imagery--a carry-over from the decorative formalism of courtly love postures--so too did Dickinson react against moralism and romanticism in the genteel love poetry of early nineteenth century poets like William Cullen Bryant and his conventional successors--Longfellow and the school of poets nourished by the proprieties of Boston Brahmin decorums. One has only to glance at the very first poem in the three volume Johnson edition of the poems to see how far Dickinson broke from the accepted conventions of love

religious poetry, particularly his Meditations, which are discussed more fully in the chapter on religion, rely heavily upon the Canticles for their imagery, imparting a profoundly sensual tone to material which is sacred in its subject matter. The shock in the Dickinson invitation to her brother resides in its unabashed close paraphrase--so close as to be a literal facsimile of some translations--of the Biblical maiden's invitation to the young man whom she desires. It is not to suggest incestuous intention in this early poem that I cite from it but rather to point to the intensity of commitment which is the hallmark of metaphysical poetry, an intensity which is both direct and uninhibited.

The most powerful of Dickinson's awareness-commitment poems appear during the years 1859 to 1863, the precise period of time during which she met and was deeply impressed by and quite possibly fell in love with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, the pastor of a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, a married man of forty-seven and a father. Although the relationship with him has remained--and probably will always remain--purely speculative, much like Thoreau's shadowy relationship with Ellen Sewall, there is no doubt that the Reverend aroused in her an awareness of her own erotic nature, which she was to record in the startlingly frank "Wild Nights," whose governing conceit was woven from the poet's indulgence of her "luxury," a word derived from the Latin root "luxuria," or lust. There is some biographical evidence of casual flirtatiousness in the young Emily's social life, and some documentation of her strong affection for older men, chiefly friends of her father's, to whom she gave a large measure of trustful affection, but the earliest articulation of conscious love

appears in poems #192 and #199. The first poem bears quoting in its entirety because of the special nature of its structure and its imagery:

192

Poor little Heart!
Did they forget thee?
Then dinna care! Then dinna care!

Proud little Heart!
Did they forsake thee?
Be debonnaire! Be debonnaire!

Frail little Heart!
I would not break thee--
Could'st credit me? Could'st credit me?

Gay little Heart!
Like Morning Glory!
Wind and Sun--wilt thee array!

The poem is highly introspective, revealing the source which Henry James once called the "deep well of unconscious cerebration," a reflection he had made in conjunction with the writing of "The Figure in the Carpet." The poem has an emotional bias; it engages in an exploration of the sensitive and responsive heart. But the poet proceeds from an unconscious impulse to dissect, or, in Lear's word, to "anatomize" that vulnerable organ. The interior logic which governs the poem, both structurally and syntactically, is impeccable in its spontaneous organization. The consequence is a natural and fluid fusion of the intellect and the emotion. The stanzaic form is closer to the triolet in its repetitions and overlapping rhymes than to any other form.¹⁸ The verse moves in disciplined fashion from apostrophe to rhetorical question to an affirmation in the form of balladic repetition, incremental in nature. There is perfect harmony between the tight structure and the economic language, between heart and mind,

as the poet fulfills her analytic intention. In addition, the poem has the added dimensions of dramatization and compassion, two factors which distinguish the poetry of Herbert from Donne's, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson from other nineteenth century Americans. The dramatization of the plight of the troubled heart is similar to Herbert's dramatization of man's nature as a "brittle crazy glass" in "The Windows." Each poet thus transcends the merely narrative description of man's emotional state to achieve a dramatic presentation. The second dimension, the tone of compassion, contributes to that state which can only be referred to as transcendence, a cumulative supernal quality which derives from the joining of the intuitive to the intellectual in a personal way not often seen in Thoreau's Journal.

Poem #199 is a bold statement of unreserved commitment. The poet swells with the authority of power as she announces:

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

The final line of the poem continues in the authoritative vein: "I'm 'Wife'! Stop there!" The romantic tone usually associated with love poetry is supplanted by a note of imperiousness. It is a hallmark of the Dickinson personality and is present in much of her "exclusivity" poems, such as "The Soul Selects her Own Society," a statement which establishes the individual's aristocratic privilege of choosing and limiting the soul's companionship. The insistence on absolute commitment with its attendant rejection of compromise may be seen in the love poetry of Thomas Carew, the seventeenth century poet who has been variously classified in the ranks of both Cavalier and metaphysical poets.¹⁹ Some particularly fine examples of the Carew intensity of

commitment appear in the poems "Mediocrity in Love Rejected" and "Eternity of Love Protested." In the first the poet expresses an unaffected scorn of compromise:

Give me more love or more disdain:
 The torrid or the frozen zone
 Bring equal ease unto my pain,
 The temperate affords me none;
 Either extreme of love or hate
 Is sweeter than a calm estate.

In the second, the characteristic intensity and high-mindedness coupled with the test of absence as proof of the lover's mettle--a theme so popular in Donne's poetry--find appropriate expression in the alternating flowing and abrupt lines:

How ill doth he deserve a lover's name,
 Whose pale weak flame
 Cannot retain
 His heat in spite of absence or disdain,
 But doth at once, like paper set on fire,
 Burn and expire;

Dickinson uses the theme of separation as the test of lovers' devotion in a great many love poems. Poem #474 begins: "They put us far apart--as separate as Sea," and continues with a concrete emblem of separation:

With Dungeons--They devised--
 But through their thickest skill--
 And their opaquest Adamant--
 Our Souls saw--just as well--

Certainly the dungeon is as much a verbal emblem of isolation and separation as Richard Crashaw's nest is an actual visible emblem of the origin of Christianity in Crashaw's "A Hymn of the Nativity," or the flea an emblem of the joined bloods of sexual intercourse in Donne's "The Flea,"--the title of the poem in this case, as in Herbert's "The Pulley" and "The Collar" serving as coordinating emblem for the poem--or the ring as concrete emblem for eternity in Vaughan's "The

World." The dungeon, in the tradition of emblem poetry, makes a profound appeal to the senses, in this case the sense of sight, or absence of sight, as the dungeon plunges the prisoner into darkness. The reader notes that the committed lovers see with their souls--most particularly see each other--as their inner eyes pierce through the adamantine walls of the dungeon deep in the earth. They are united even in death, another favorite ultimate extension of love's constancy, particularly in Donne. And in the last two lines, the poet applies all her wit as she puns on "face" and "disc," taking advantage of the roundness of both, implying another level of interpretation of disc through the participle "setting," thus enlarging the emblem into a metaphysical dimension. If eyes and their eye beams are conventional emblems in love poetry for the stars and their light, then Dickinson's extension of the beloved human face into solar dimensions are in an accepted tradition of causing the elements of the natural universe to parallel man's emotional life:

#474--Final Stanza

Not Either--noticed Death--
Of Paradise aware--
Each other's Face--was all the Disc
Each other's setting--saw--

The fidelity of the lover until death, suggested by the image of the setting sun, is a variant of another popular Donne equivalent, the separation of lovers as the separation of dying. The prime example of parting as dying is, of course, the simile which begins "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning": "As virtuous men pass mildly away," . . . "So let us melt, and make no noise." Even more explicit is the death-separation commitment in Donne's "A Valediction of my Name in the

Window," in which the lover adjures his mistress to remember him during his absence by the reminder provided through the glass window into which he has had his name cut. There is an ambiguity here which is not present in the other poems of parting, causing the poem to appear not only as treatment of separation as death, but of separation by death as well. Not only is the custom of engraving of names into windows a memorial rite, but the sentiment of the last two lines increases the ambiguity, bringing the poem very close to the many Dickinson poems about commitment of the lover beyond death into the afterlife. The final lines of the Donne poem are: "Impute this idle talk to that I go/ For dying men talk often so."

The Dickinson poem which takes the committed lover beyond this life into the realms of immortality is #625. After the "long parting" in the first stanza, the lovers are brought before the judgment seat. Their commitment is maintained:

These Fleshless Lovers met--
 A Heaven in a Gaze--
 A Heaven of Heavens--the Privilege
 of one another's Eyes--

The relationship is sanctified and renewed in Heaven, this time through a marriage in infinity, with Paradise as setting, and cherubim and seraphim as unobtrusive guests. It is one of the many secular-sacred love poems in the Dickinson canon. Others will be cited in the next sub-sections.

The final poem to be discussed in this section on awareness-commitment is so dazzling an exercise in imagery culled from one secular enterprise, and so suggestively sexual in its concluding sentiment--always maintaining fidelity to that original source for the disciplined singleness of the image--that it bears quoting in its entirety:

580

I gave myself to Him--
 And took Himself for Pay,
 The solemn contract of a Life
 Was ratified, this way--

The Wealth might disappoint--
 Myself a poorer prove
 Than this great purchaser suspect,
 The daily Own--of Love

Depreciate the Vision--
 But till the Merchant buy--
 Still fable in the Isles of Spice--
 The subtle Cargoes--lie--

At least--'tis Mutual--Risk--
 Some--found it--Mutual Gain--
 Sweet Debt of Life--Each Night to owe--
 Insolvent--every Noon--

The central source of the imagery is of course the secular enterprise of finance or commerce. The American seventeenth-century metaphysical poet, Edward Taylor, often used the world of commerce as source for his imagery in his sacred meditations. In Meditation Six, desiring assurance from God of his election into grace, the poet makes use of imagery derived solely from the world of banking, and ends with what Dr. Johnson surely would have termed a gross example of the loathed discordia concors: "Then I shall be thy money, thou my hoard." Because the "thou" of the poem is God, the imagery takes on the boldness and crassness associated with the most daring of the metaphysical poets.

Dickinson's #580, quoted above, is just such a bold and shocking poem of commitment. The imagery and vocabulary from the world of finance--"pay, contract, ratified, purchaser, won, depreciate, merchant, mutual risk, mutual gain, debt, owe, insolvent"--would seem to invest the experience of love with the grossest, most mercantile motivation and response. Still, despite the incongruity of the lowly

imagery with the elevated subject matter, the poem succeeds in its intention to state the maximum of commitment in the most intense and sincere fashion. It reveals a disciplined effort to convey meaning with absolute clarity through carefully selected familiar imagery from the real world of commerce, stripping illusion and ornamentation from love. The poem is both honest and effective, and sexually frank in a witty fashion comparable to Donne's "The Apparition" and "To His Mistress Going to Bed." The last two lines, completing the extended metaphor of investment finance, demonstrate a clear conception of physical passion. Their terseness as well as its fidelity to the imagery is the soul of wit: "Sweet debt of Life--Each Night to owe-- /Insolvent every Noon--"

The Poetry of Bliss-Ecstasy

The second category of love poems presumes the fulfillment of love's expectation. The poems are more explicitly sexual in nature, and they are characterized by wild bursts of abandon, which, again, one would expect to appear incongruous with the economy of line, but instead are oddly suited to the style, as if the poet knew that passion was characterized by staccato outbursts, self-limiting and dramatic. The key words in these poems are "bliss" and "ecstasy," and the most prevalent image, or rather, emblem of love--by virtue of its traditional theological legitimacy--is Eden or Paradise. Anderson makes the following analysis of her most popular and provocative sex poem; it serves as a guide to the interpretation of all the "bliss" poetry:

Wild Nights--Wild Nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild Nights should be
 Our Luxury!

Futile the Winds--
 To a Heart in port--
 Done with the Compass--
 Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden--
 Ah, the Sea!
 Might I but moor--Tonight--
 In Thee!

The opening declaration--"Wild Nights should be/
 Our Luxury"--sets the key of her song, for luxuria
 included the meaning of lust as well as lavish-
 ness of sensuous enjoyment, as she was Latinist
 enough to know. This is echoed at the end in "Eden,"
 her recurring image, in letters and poems, for the
 paradise of earthly love. The theme here is that
 of sexual passion which is lawless, outside the
 rule of chart and compass. But it lives by a law
 of its own, the law of Eden, . . . Such love was
 only possible before the Fall.²⁰

The poem was written in 1861. Thirty years later, Col.
 Higginson, Emily's first literary mentor and publisher, wrote to
 Millicent Todd Bingham, her executor and editor: "One poem only
 I dread to print--that wonderful 'Wild Nights,' lest the malignant
 read into it more than that virgin recluse ever dreamed of putting
 there."²¹ The ambiguity of the poem's origin--the troublesome
 question of whether the love poems have personal as well as literary
 validity--brings Dickinson's love poetry very near to Thoreau's ob-
 servations on love in the Journal. There is little doubt that the
 poems are a dramatization of the inner life and betray a very accurate
 account of the emotion of sexual passion, if not its fulfillment.
 The rest is speculative.

There is no doubt, however, that the figures of "compass" and "chart" are the valid emblems employed by the seventeenth century poets. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, in The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effects of the "New Science" on Seventeenth Century Poetry, points out that the seventeenth-century mind was so enamored of the new "mystical Mathematicks" which fascinated scientific writers as the key to the structure of the universe, that "delight in mathematics led Marvell to think of lovers in terms of parallel lines that never meet, [and] Donne to describe them as a pair of compasses."²² Compasses, both geometrical and nautical, charts, maps, and all geometrical measurement tools, serve for the metaphysical mind as the proper metaphors for the emotional states of being, as the appropriate concrete mensural tools of the rational mind. Dickinson, a nineteenth-century continuum of that delight in the scientific and mathematical mode of assessing the universe, is of the opinion that the "Best Witchcraft is Geometry/ To the magician's mind-" (#1158). Because of this turn of mind, she is able to extract from the bliss and liberation of love, however brief and dangerous, the "scientific" symbols which contain the meaning of the poem.

There are other "Paradise" poems, in which paradise is defined solely in the terms of the beloved. In #1268, she claims that Paradise was "fictitious until the Realm of You--," one of those dramatizations of love in which Paradise is inhabited by regal types, love having conferred upon man and woman the absolute authority of selfhood. The lover as suppliant or groveler is odious: "When a Lover is a Beggar/ Abject is his Knee--/ When a Lover is an Owner/ Different is He--" (#1314). The total absorption of the lover is

made concrete through symbolism drawn from a properly intellectual source: "We learned the Whole of Love--/ The Alphabet--the Words--/ A Chapter--then the mighty Book--." Then, with the ironic self-deprecation of the wit--not to be confused with modesty or abdication of self--the poet concludes with the truth which every scientist must accept: "But in Each Other's eyes/ An Ignorance beheld/ . . . Attempted to expound/ What Neither understood--/ Alas, that Wisdom is so large--/ And Truth--so manifold!" (#568).

Wifehood is the primary source of bliss. The poet imagines the state of wifehood realized and recollects that before she was a "Woman white," she "pondered how the bliss would look," (#271) and could she "take it in her Hand?" (#271). She takes the spatial measurement of bliss, its dimensions and depth, its linear footage and its volume. Bliss draws from her the most astonishing metaphors, as if she would make states of being concrete and visual and tactile through the agency of vocabulary alone. She wonders if she could make "a Diagram--of Rapture!" and exploit it and sell it at "a Sixpence at a Show." (#184). Poems #211 and #213 are Eden poems of a highly sexual nature, equally daring in their imagery, but here the poet protects herself by cloaking their direct meaning in nature imagery of a singular provocativeness and lushness. The first poem is a franker description of sexual intercourse than the last two lines of the previously quoted #580, which merely touches upon the anticipation and consequences of love-making. The tone is entirely seductive, rendered more personal and less literary by virtue of the reference to the poet's spinsterhood:

Come slowly--Eden!
 Lips unused to Thee--
 Bashful--sip thy Jessamines--
 As the Fainting Bee--

Reaching late his flowere,
 Round her chamber hums--
 Counts his nectars--
 Enters--and is lost in Balms.

The "fainting bee" personification carried forward to a further personification in the nectar-counting image fashions a conceit which extends beyond the conventional bounds of figurative language in the exact manner prescribed by T. S. Eliot in his important essay, "The Metaphysical Poets":

Donne, and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically "metaphysical": the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it. . . . This telescoping of images and multiplied associations is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period which Donne knew . . . and is one of the sources of the vitality of their language.²³

Dickinson's extended personification of the bee as the symbol of the lover, with a complex personality telescoped into the two condensed descriptions, the "fainting" or swooning sensual figure--and, canceling out that picture--the venal "counter" of nectar, is a perfect illustration of Eliot's seventeenth-century metaphysical poet translated into the nineteenth century. I will go further and say that this particular poem with its dazzling imagery is a perfect example of the negative and disapproving definition of metaphysical imagery handed down by the orthodox Dr. Johnson, who would have dismissed it because "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked together by violence."

Certainly, the "fainting" and the "counting" are heterogeneous, and their linking is unexpected. But, as Eliot says in defense of the group, "a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry."²⁴ And in Dickinson, as in Donne, there is enormous integrity in the poet's fidelity to the basic source of the imagery. Dickinson knew her bees as she knew her snakes and her orioles from her long days in the open fields of Amherst. Her observations, therefore, may be as sound as Thoreau's and as accurate. The "violence," if it exists, is not in the unnaturalness of her yokings, but only in the originality and freshness with which she records her data.

The second of the poems offers a rather more moralistic definition of Paradise. Eden is delineated by its limitations rather than by its absolute license. The Puritan temper of the poem brings Dickinson very close to her seventeenth-century forebear, Anne Bradstreet, whose love poetry reflects a clear sensuality always bounded by prudence or moral restraint. Still, the suggestiveness of explicit sexuality is apparent in the very first line. Again, nature provides the figurative cloak for the frank subject matter:

213

Did the Harebell loose her girdle
 To the lover Bee
 Would the Bee the Harebell hallow
 Much as formerly?

Did the "Paradise"--persuaded--
 Yield her moat of pearl--
 Would the Eden be an Eden,
 Or the Earl--an Earl?

In spite of the lame, graceless and awkward last line--which the poet obviously threw in to complete a rhyme requirement--the poem is an

obviously frank disquisition on the maintenance of virginity for the preservation of the highest bliss, the ultimate Eden. On another level it expresses the fear that love will not continue after sexual surrender.

The final "bliss" poem to be discussed attains a height of metaphysical passion unfelt in any poetry save Herbert's. It is, as Herbert's often is, a fusion of the secular-sacred, so that in the final effusion the "bliss" of love is elevated beyond this finite world and "nicknamed by God--eternity." The poem is addressed to a lover, and maintains a careful parallelism in the structure of the opening lines of each of the three stanzas:

453

Love--thou art high--
I cannot climb thee--
. . .

Love--thou art deep--
I cannot cross thee--
. . .

Love--thou art Vailed--
A few--behold thee--

Each couplet is succeeded by a wistful variant plea of: "But were there Two--," ending with a definition of Bliss, which would be an oddity without the "twoness" of the lovers. The poem is an elevated reproduction of Bradstreet's charming paean to her husband which begins: "If ever two were one, then surely we," but it soars far above Bradstreet's essential hominess by virtue of the characteristic exclusivity and regality of Dickinson's privileged lovers' preferential position. Her lovers sail in yachts over the deep waters of love during a sovereign summer of passion. Like Herbert's states of ecstasy, reserved in his case for love of God, her blisses are

fathomless, heights impossible to scale, and veiled and obscured beyond mortal penetration. Still, in her complexity, she is not content to soar infinitely in Herbert's empyrean realm. Like her Yankee cousin Henry Thoreau, she will drop her plumb line, measure the depth, estimate the height, and rend the veil to reveal the bliss. In the matter of love, she may indeed be a metaphysical, but never a mystic.

The Poetry of Re-evaluation-Renunciation

To the nagging Calvinist conscience, every bliss carries with it its compensatory balancing anguish:

125

For each estatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the extasy.

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittances of years--
Bitter contested farthings--
And Coffers heaped with Tears!

The burden of guilt for irresponsible rapture is reflected even in the harsh consonants of the vocabulary. Here there is no "sipping of jessamine" in "moats of pearl." The mellifluous vowels and liquid consonants of the bliss poems give way to appropriately harsh and strident sounds. Joan Bennett observes in her essay on John Donne in Four Metaphysical Poets that Donne's technical genius rests on his ability to achieve effects new to English poetry and unprecedented in a poetic tradition that had always concentrated its efforts on the achievement of harmony, of sound, and grace of style, without regard to its relevance to content. In the poem, "The Apparition,"

for instance, the vituperation of the faithless mistress is reflected in "the narrow vowels, like dagger thrusts--sicke, pinch, winke, think, shrink--and the snarling rhymes at the end--spent, repent, innocent. Control of the sound pattern is no less potent in producing the total effect than in the vividness of the picture presented to the mind's eye. . . . The facts with which they deal are ugly; but they are faced and handled with unsparing realism."²⁵ Dickinson shows the same ability to match her effects to her subject. In #125 reproduced above, there is a clear distinction between the very sound of the "quivering" ecstasy of the first verse and the "sharp pittance" and the "bitter farthings" of renunciation. As she expands her raptures in her bliss poems, so does she contract her disappointment into tense clipped utterances:

#1368

Love's stricken "why"
Is all that love can speak--
Built of but just a syllable
The hugest hearts that break.

Grief is telescoped and squeezed into one barely uttered syllable: "Why?" The largeness of the heart is implicitly contrasted with its fragility and inability to withstand the lightest blow. The sensibility of the disappointed lover is appropriately compressed into one single inarticulate outcry of pain.

In other expressions of disappointment in love, the poet resorts, as she often does, to cloaking the pain of rejection in an image drawn from the world of nature or the animal world:

186

What shall I do--it whimpers so--
This little Hound within the Heart
All day and night with bark and start--

And yet, it will not go--
 Would you untie it, were you me--
 Would it stop whining--if to Thee--
 I sent it even now?

Beneath the seeming ingenuousness of the plaint lies a rather more complicated dilemma. There is really no alternative to the pain of the broken heart, in spite of the seeming solution suggested by the underlined verb. The disciplined New England householder knows that the dog must not be untied and gratified. It would lead to spoiling the dog, something the Puritan would not abide. The only recourse then is the stoicism of denial.

The poem which best enunciates the underlying reasons for the denial of life's urges adheres to an inner logic which does not originate in seeming outer reality. The poem is probably the most metaphysical in nature in that it chooses an inviolable interior life over the fluctuating and changing life of the external world. I shall quote from it piecemeal as it is necessary to illustrate its central ideas.

640

I cannot live with You--
 It would be Life--
 And Life is over there--
 Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the Key to--
 Putting up
 Our Life--His Porcelain--
 Like a Cup--

Discarded of the Housewife--
 Quaint--or Broke--
 A newer Sevres pleases--
 Old ones crack

The renunciation of the life offered to the poet by her lover is based on a variation of the Platonic ideal so favored by nineteenth-century

Transcendentalists. Authentic life, hidden from public scrutiny, is locked away. The superiority of the unchanging life over the mutating life of empiricism had already been enunciated by Emerson in slightly different symbolic form in a poem which might be regarded as a central statement of philosophy. The poem, "Brahma," presents a view of the universality of the spirit as against the inferior force of "Maya," the world of change and illusion. "Find me," says Brahma, "and turn thy back on heaven." Dickinson also turns her back on the "sordid excellence of Paradise" in the poem, for the preferred inner perfection of the eternal and immortal soul, as well as for the sanctity of privacy. There is, however, a more profoundly personal and characteristic reason for her renunciation. For the conscientious New England spirit, renunciation is the highest expression of devotion, firmly implanted within the Calvinist heart. Hawthorne knew it and incorporated it into the characters of his heroines, Hester and Miriam. James knew it and fashioned Isobel Archer into the last great Puritan heroine, her life a series of renunciatory gestures, her very world turning dark with her first--and last--kiss of passion. Dickinson's self-denial is of that nature:

I could not die--with You--
 For One must wait
 To shut the Other's Gaze down--
 You--could not--

And I--Could I stand by
 And see You--freeze--
 Without my Right of Frost--
 Death's privilege?

Her renunciation--which has been forced on her--has a tinge of selfishness which she is honest enough to permit to shine through the seeming selflessness. She will have all or nothing. If she cannot be guaranteed

togetherness from first to last, from now to eternity, she will not make the commitment. Her renunciation is the more poignant by virtue of the depth of her passion, her plaint that her lover so filled her world that he "saturated Sight" to the extent that she "had no more Eyes/ for sordid excellence/ as Paradise." The particular tool of wit which serves the poet for the extremism of her emotion is the device of hyperbole: Her lover's face is so refulgent that its light "would put out Jesus'--," and so sacred that he challenges God Himself, except--again hyperbolically--that "You [the lover] than He shone closer by."

The last stanza of the poem serves as a natural link between the themes of renunciation and resignation. The vehicle which carries the poet from the one state of being to the next is an inevitable, though temporary, despair:

So We must meet apart--
 You there--I--here--
 With just the Door ajar
 That Oceans are--and Prayer--
 And that White Sustenance--
 Despair--

Poems of Despair-Resignation

Cleanth Brooks has said that "apparently the truth the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox."²⁶ As an illustration of the ultimate paradox, which extends beyond mere language to the underlying central theme of a work of art, Brooks cites the central intention of Donne, who dares to write an entire poem, "The Canonization" as a daring treatment of profane love as if it were sacred subject matter. The resultant verbal paradoxes, the renunciation of

the world for each other--not each other's souls but each other's fleshly bodies, the reverence for each other's bodies as religious "hermitages," are merely logical verbal documentations of the great central paradoxical theme. Thus the paradox pursues and develops an off-beat logic of its own. Dickinson's final stunning paradox at the end of #640, quoted as a connecting link between the two last subdivisions of this chapter, places the inevitable seal of logic on the original premise of the poem. "That White Sustenance--Despair--" so seemingly self-canceling on its surface, yet so accurate in its analysis of a state of being. If one accepts the basic high-mindedness and self-denial which is inherent in the Puritan character, then despair is indeed the ultimate white sustenance, the most rarefied state of being to which a man can aspire.

Renunciation engendered by high-mindedness is an expression of stoicism which enables the disappointed lover to transmute despair into spiritual sustenance. Here too, the soul pursues an impeccable interior logic which refutes the seeming paradox of rejection and its consequent serenity. But the alchemy which changes despair into sustenance requires enormous self-control:

293

I got so I could hear his name--
 Without--Tremendous gain--
 That Stop-sensation--on my Soul--
 And Thunder--in the Room--

I got so I could walk across
 That Angle in the floor,
 Where he turned so, and I turned--how--
 And all our Sinew tore--

It got so I could stir the Box--
 In which his letters grew
 Without that forcing, in my breath--
 As Staples--driven through--

. . .

Only the final simile, which suggests the sigmata of the crucifixion rendered blasphemously commonplace in the metaphysical fashion through its association with the common staple, even hints at the agony implicit in the process of resignation to an infinity of despair. The poet does succeed, by enormous effort of will, in becoming "remote" from her situation in the final stanza, and in attaining to an emotional removal from "so minute affair/ as Misery." How is this trick accomplished? Simply by redefining commonplace terms in order to bring them closer to one's experience. Despair, for instance, is distinguished from other "unpleasant" states and emerges as a stable condition which one can live with:

305

The difference between Despair
 And Fear--is like the One
 Between the instant of a Wreck--
 And when the Wreck has been--

. . .

Despair, then, according to this definition, succeeds the violence of trauma, and by its very hopelessness leads to the "sustenance" of resignation, as one breathes a sigh of relief that the agony is over. As bliss is a temporary state, (the poet says elsewhere that "Bliss is sold just once," #340) so despair is permanent. In its permanence it is comforting, or at least reliable.

The ultimate in self-denial is accompanied by a tone of exaltation that derives from the act of purgation. In these cases the imagery is not telescoped but rather expanded as if to match the freeing of the spirit which succeeds the catharsis. "Heart! We will forget him!/ You and I--tonight!" (#47) begins with an urgency which mounts in succeeding "heart" poems:

1736

Proud of my broken heart, since thou didst break it,
Proud of the pain I did not feel till thee,

Proud of my night, since thou with moons dost slake it,
Not to partake thy passion, my humility.

The poet's vocabulary, it is obvious from the last line, is tinged with the terminology of religion, in a familiar fusion of the secular and sacred. The imagery shifts sharply from the homely figures which we associate with the metaphysical to the pulsing highly charged imagery of the mystics, from Herbert to Gerard Manley Hopkins:

587

Empty my Heart, of Thee--
It's [sic] single Artery--
Begin, and leave Thee out--
Simply Extinction's Date--

. . .

Erase the Root--no Tree--
Thee--then--no me--

The purging of love is depleting but unavoidable. The emptying of the heart marks a new beginning, originating with the date of renunciation. This is the most final and violent of all the "renunciation" poems. The lovers are literally extinguished along with their love.

The last of the "heart" poems is remarkable only because its rather conventional posture of meaningful renunciation is developed solely through a heaping on of paradoxes, which technique saves the rather simple theme from a fate which Cleanth Brooks calls enfeeblement and distortion.²⁷

1754

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.

In this poem, as in so many of the others quoted in this paper, she works in direct inverse fashion to more traditional poets, who begin with images, analogies, illustrations, and other figurative devices, ending with a summary statement of theme. Dickinson reverses this procedure, making her thematic statement at the outset and leaving the reader with the undefined metaphor at the end. The last poem to be discussed in this chapter proceeds in just such a fashion, and is worth explicating fully for a variety of reasons: First, because it is the fullest statement of the Dickinson philosophy of love; second, because it has an enigmatic quality typical of an art form which is so compressed by virtue of its telescoped imagery; and third, because it offers the very heart of metaphysical wit in its single image, which is homely and well suited to the poet's rural life and as stimulating to the intellect as a puzzle in which only the barest clues are given:

1765

That Love is all there is,
 Is all we know of Love;
 It is enough, the freight should be
 Proportioned to the groove.

The thesis statement has that impeccable logic which comes from total honesty, a truth-telling which begins with the premise that love is both total and inexplicable and, at bottom, unknowable. From the basic premise of love's mysteriousness springs a submerged metaphor, or more properly, an analogy, which clarifies love's obligations and benefits. It is important, says the poet, if I read her agrarian

image correctly, that the plough, which has been weighted on top by a stone of sufficient bulk, be properly freighted to force the plough-share into a depth sufficient for the specific planting. The plough will then move with ease and efficiency into the groove which it creates. There is a leap of logic between the thesis of the poem and the image which succeeds it. The reader must provide the transition through his own intellection, because the analogy is not a direct parallel to the abstract; it merely clarifies it and establishes its limits. Although the central word of the first couplet is know, the analogy disclaims knowing as the key to love, and substitutes being or unself-conscious interacting as a truer guide. Note that the poem is little more than an epigram, that it accomplishes its complex and provocative purpose with tight economy, and derives its single image, which is the source of its wit, from the poet's own homely experience, delivered in a language entirely colloquial. It is a tremendous tour de force of technical virtuosity, but more important, it is an entirely coherent and reasonable definition of that human commodity--love.

Notes

¹See particularly Robert Louis Stevenson's recantation of an earlier damaging essay which he wrote, entitled "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions," in Cornhill Magazine, XLI (June, 1880), 665-82. The recantation appeared in Familiar Studies of Men and Books (London: Chatto and Windus, 1886), and was as exaggerated about Thoreau's love life as the earlier essay was in a negative way. Stevenson says in the Recantation that "Thoreau was once fairly and manfully in love, and, with perhaps too much aping of the angel, relinquished the woman to his brother." Another highly romantic and speculative treatment is Henry Seidel Canby's Thoreau (1939).

²Perry Miller, Consciousness in Concord (Boston, 1958), p. 88.

³The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, 2 Vols. (New York, 1962), Vol. I, p. 45.

⁴George Williamson, Seventeenth Century Contexts (Chicago, 1969), Ch. 1, pp. 9-41.

⁵Robert Louis Stevenson, "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions," Cornhill Magazine, XLI (June, 1880), p. 675.

⁶Ibid.

⁷The Editors of The Seven Arts, II (July, 1917), pp. 383-85.

⁸C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1968), pp. 142-146.

⁹Henry Wells, "An Evaluation of Thoreau's Poetry," American Literature, XVI (May, 1944), pp. 99-109.

¹⁰He accomplishes this evaluation in a roundabout way in a homage to Mary Emerson, the only woman in his experience who is not too dim-witted and frivolous to engage in a profitable discussion of substantive ideas. Journal, Vol. III, Nov. 13, 1851, p. 113.

¹¹Earl Miner, The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley (Princeton, 1969), pp. 3-45.

¹²Miller, Consciousness in Concord, p. 207.

¹³T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays (New York, 1932), p. 247.

¹⁴Theodore Redpath, The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne (New York, 1956), pp. xv-xvi.

¹⁵Joseph Wood Krutch, Thoreau (New York, 1948), p. 34.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁷On pages 206-207 of Thoreau, Krutch discusses a letter from Thoreau to Harrison Blake, in which he indulges in a lengthy disquisition about the distinction between love and lust, including the following idealistic observation: "Men commonly couple with their idea of marriage a slight degree at least of sensuality; but every lover, the world over, believes in its inconceivable purity."

¹⁸This particular form occurs in poems such as John Cleveland's "An Elegy on Ben Jonson," Herbert's "The Church Floor," and Herrick's many epigrammatic poems as well as longer poems such as "The Star Song."

¹⁹Miner, p. 118.

²⁰Charles R. Anderson, Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York, 1960), pp. 169-170.

²¹American Poetry and Prose, ed. Norman Foerster, 4th Ed. (Boston, 1957), p. 1177.

²²Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle: "Studies of the Effect of the 'New Science' on Seventeenth Century Poetry" (New York, 1962), p. 6.

²³T. S. Eliot, p. 242.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Joan Bennett, "John Donne," Four Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1953), pp. 22-23.

²⁶Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox," The Well-Wrought Urn (New York, 1947), p. 3.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 8-10.

Chapter IV

"The Seeing of God": Religion (John Donne, from Sermon XXIII)

Is it possible to take seriously the religious utterances of a poet who apostrophizes God as "papa above"? (#61) Or a coy spinster who refers to God as the "Gentleman in the 'White Robe'"? (#248) And how then reconcile the child-woman with the self-styled "cynic" who sets about to discover "whether Deity's guiltless" in the matter of immortality? (#178)

The facts of Emily Dickinson's religious history are few but amply documented in her various biographies. It is her religious state of mind--or soul--that is ambiguous and confusingly shifting. Her religious roots were in Trinitarian Congregationalism, her spiritual climate Calvinist Puritanism. Each of her many and reliable biographers--Whicher, Johnson, Leyda, Chase, Taggard, and Anderson--all agree about the documented sparse facts. Briefly, when she was a student in the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, which she attended for one year, the young ladies were divided into three groups: those who were declared Christians, those who had "hope," and those "without hope." Emily was placed in the latter category. This in itself would not be considered significant, for she was still a very young girl, and she was the product of seven generations of New England Calvinists in the Connecticut Valley town of Amherst, close by Northampton, where the ghost of Jonathan Edwards still held sway and where

as late as 1850 a powerful spirit of revivalism was sweeping through the Congregational churches. It is, however, the final fact of her spiritual life which is significant in the face of the powerful influences of her formative years. Although her mother, her sister Lavinia, and ultimately her father, were all members of the Amherst Congregational Church, Emily remained throughout her life the sole holdout. She never accepted formal membership. Perhaps her strong-willed father set her an unwitting example by his dilatory behavior. Although there were morning devotions at the Dickinson home, and regular Sunday attendance at church, Edward Dickinson did not join his wife and younger daughter in membership until the age of forty-seven in the year 1850, the very year which marked the beginning of the period of religious revivalism in Amherst. On the third of April of that year, Emily, obviously very troubled about the religious pressures she was feeling, wrote to her friend Jane Humphrey:

Christ is calling everyone here, all my companions have answered, even my darling Vinnie believes she loves and trusts him, and I am standing alone in rebellion, and growing very careless. Abby, Mary, Jane, and farthest of all my Vinnie have been seeking, and they all believe they have found; I can't tell you what they have found, but they think it is something precious. I wonder if it is? How strange is this sanctification, that works such a marvelous change, that sows in such corruption, and rises in golden glory, that brings Christ down, and shews him, and lets him select his friends! In the day time, it seems like Sundays, and I wait for the bell to ring, and at the evening a great deal stranger, the "still small voice" grows earnest and rings, and returns, and lingers, and the faces of good men shine, and bright halos come around them; and the eyes of the disobedient look down, and become ashamed. It certainly comes from God--and I think to receive it is blessed--not that I know it from me, but from those on whom change has passed. They seem so very tranquil, and their voices are kind, and gentle, and the tears fill their eyes so often, I really think I

envy them. . . . You must pray when the rest are sleeping, that the hand may be held to me, and I may be led away.

Letter #35

I have included a substantial portion of a very lengthy letter because it provides one of the most complete insights into a mind which was to remain troubled and ambivalent about religion for the duration of the poet's life. Thomas Johnson has commented in his introduction to the Letters that the "fascination of genius is in its paradox." In this intimate letter of a twenty-year-old girl are all the paradoxical elements of her spiritual sensibility. First there is the awareness of her isolation in a group that has been swept by a communal enthusiasm. Then there is the pride of maintaining her intellectual conviction, her scorn of the "corruption" in which the religious force originates. There is the powerful element of the rationality which caused her all her life to be a "hold-out" from emotional commitment, and the wistful wish that she too could be swept up into the passion she felt all around her in spite of her reservations. Above all, in spite of her protestations, the passage provides strong evidence of her deeply ingrained Calvinism, her helpless belief in the "selectivity" involved in grace and salvation. All these elements will be seen in her poetry, from the earliest verses of the green girl to the controlled ecstasies of the middle-aged woman. And although such biographers as William Sherwood attempt to trace change and growth in the religion of Emily Dickinson--from callousness to compassion; from rebellion to conventional attitudes¹--I believe that a careful reading of the spirit of the poems as well as the letters, reveals that all the conflicting elements present at the

beginning were also perceptible at the end. Like all metaphysical poets, she was endlessly engaged in struggle, and the elements of that struggle were manifold: between the rational and the emotional; between the spirit and the flesh; between God and the Devil. Because it is the nineteenth century, the Devil appears frequently disguised as pain and punishment, whereas God's presence is manifest by his grace and her reward. Nonetheless, the Calvinist hell-fire and damnation die hard, and they are felt as fearful forces in Dickinson's poetry, just as redemption and salvation are seen to be supernal goals.

Emily Dickinson may not have been a practicing member of the Christian church, but during the entire course of her life she may be described as God-obsessed. The church did indeed repel her with its formalism and routine--certainly the notion of organized religion was as repugnant to her as it was to her fellow New Englander, Robert Frost²--but the person and personality of God were as fascinating to her as they were to Milton in Paradise Lost. God appears in her poetry humanized in every facet of his being. In some poems, he is human but larger than life, much like the boasting description Deity offers of himself to the presumptuous Job:

. . .

His fingers are the size of fists--
His fists, the size of men--

And whom he foundeth, with his Arm
As Himmaleh, shall stand--
Gibraltar's Everlasting Shoe
Poised lightly on his Hand, . . .

Sometimes the Scriptural frame of reference changes from the Old to the New Testament interpretation of God's personage:

God is distant--stately Lover--
 Woos, as He states us--by His Son--
 Verily, a Vicarious Courtship--
 "Miles", and "Priscilla", were such an One--

But, lest the Soul--like fair "Priscilla"
 Choose the Envoy--and spurn the Groom--
 Vouches, with hyperbolic archness--
 "Miles", and "John Alden" were Synonyme--

Here Dickinson creates the dualistic God with whom Milton familiarized us in Book III of Paradise Lost. God the Father is a Hebraist conception, so fundamental to Puritan theology. He is austere and awesome as the God of the Old Testament should properly be. Christ the Son, commissioned to "woo" the soul of man for salvation, is the "envoy." Thus one aspect of Dickinson's God is an Old Testament God of impersonal dignity and power, while the other is the New Testament God of personal sacrifice and love, whose "meek aspect . . . breathed immortal love to mortal men." (P.L., III, 266-271) The conception is neither original nor heretical. It is a standard interpretation of God's being, incorporating two figures of the Trinity, as conventional in Dickinson's Puritan framework as it was in Milton. Where the poem departs from the merely conventional is not in its content but in its audacious coupling of the sacred with the secular, making the holy take its example from the profane. Here she is as bold and daring as Donne in his most dazzling conceptions. To warn the Christian soul that God and Christ are one and therefore Christ is not to be embraced to the exclusion of the Old Testament ethic, and present the analogy of the fictional and rather trivial wooing of Priscilla by the surrogate Miles Standish, would smack of blasphemy except that one never doubts the sincerety of the writer. It is in a direct continuation of the

spirit of Donne's Holy Sonnets. In many of the exercises, the lesson of salvation is taught through an unlikely secular analogy. In one, in particular, the poet reaches out to the world of sexual degeneracy to teach his most powerful lesson, the need for the opening and the democratization of the church. The metaphor is derived from the non-discriminating activities of the whore, who "is most true and pleasing to Thee then/ When she is embraced and open to most men." The poem is the celebrated Sonnet XVIII, and it too is saved from a blasphemy infinitely more outrageous than Dickinson's by an obvious passionate sincerity.

The metaphysical poet writing as religious poet is man embattled. Probably the most outstanding illustration of the striving between man and God for man's soul, that reluctant prize, is Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV. In that poem even the imagery is the language of violent engagement. "Batter my heart," the poet challenges the "three-personed God," following with appropriate trinitities of action verbs: "knock, breathe, shine;" "break, blow, burn." Because, in typical metaphysical fashion, the soul yearns for commitment while the mind remains unengaged, a struggle must ensue before there is a harmonious yielding of the whole man. Much has been written about the multiple paradoxes of the final couplet, the achievement of freedom only through enslavement by God, as well as the attainment of sanctity through ravishment. More significant, however, than the sheer virtuosity of the imagery, is the paradigmatic anguish conveyed in the two lines. The couplet provides a cameo portrait of the quintessential skeptic at the moment when he is confronted with his spiritual destiny. He wishes to yield to grace, but he must be taken by force.

The doubting mind is not free to fly up of its own volition. It must be taken by main force. It wishes to be taken. Vaughan's Silex Scintillans also opens on a note of ambivalence. The poet begins with "The Author's Emblem (of Himself)":

Often enough have you attempted, I confess, to capture me without wounding me. Your speechless voice has tried unceasingly to bring me to my senses. Your divine breath has striven to win me over by its gentle motion, warning me in vain with sacred murmuring. I was deaf and dumb: a flint. So you consent (how great is your care for your dear ones!) to reform me in another way: You plan to conquer force by force. You launch your attack and shatter that boulder, my stony heart.

The matter of the Emblem is the identical matter of Sonnet XIV: The storming of the skeptic's fortress. It reflects the central conflict of Herbert's "The Collar" and "The Pulley" as well. The metaphysical poet is powerfully drawn to the secular life by his mind and his senses, while all the time his spirit calls out to God to be conquered by the divine will.

Much of Dickinson's poetry reflects the classic metaphysical ambivalence toward voluntary spiritual commitment. One poem in particular reflects the need for conquest which is so overt in Sonnet XIV. Poem #279 begins: "Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord," and ends on a familiar note of yielding:

Goodbye to the Life I used to live--
And the World I used to know--
And kiss the Hills, for me, just once--
Then--I am ready to go!

The tyranny of God which Herbert felt so poignantly in "The Collar" is the subject of poem #728, which ends with the following quatrain:

God of the Manacle
As of the Free--
Take not my Liberty
Away from Me--

Poem #1594, discussed more fully in the chapter which deals with death, utilizes the identical imagery that Donne does in Sonnet XVIII. The poet visualizes her physical "ravishment" by God, her "bondage" to Him, and her being "immured" or walled up in heaven. The imagery of rapine, or attack by force, arises from a deep-seated skepticism which must be vanquished before the spiritual life may begin. To her friend Abiah Root Emily Dickinson wrote during the wave of revivalism which swept through Amherst in late 1850: "The shore is safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea--I can count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh, I love the danger! You are learning control and firmness. Christ Jesus will love you more. I'm afraid he don't love me any." (Letter #39)

One must not assume, because of her ambivalence toward commitment, that Dickinson is ever free of her overwhelming preoccupation with God. Much of the language of everyday experience is drawn from scripture, with heavy emphasis on the events of Christ's life. A pleasant day will draw from her a rapture of sanctification very like those of Crashaw and Vaughan. The subject is nature, but the imagery is religious:

Oh Sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion in the Haze--
Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake--
Thy consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!

(#130, last two verses)

Louis Martz has suggested that the texture of Vaughan's religious poetry derives from an interweaving of the Bible, Nature, and the Self.³ He cites as an example of this "coming together in a living

harmony" the poem "Religion," which begins with the following quatrain:

My God, when I walke in those groves,
And leaves thy spirit doth still fan,
I see in each shade that there growes
An Angell talking with a man.

The poem continues with the appearance of Biblical figures, reenacting their Biblical roles in the setting of the wooded groves, the very "leaves" of the trees a pun for the leaves of the Bible, "where the self can live intimately with God." The most passionate of Dickinson's religious poems represent just that same fusion which Martz sees in Vaughan, the interweaving of the Scripture, Nature, and the Self. There are literally dozens of poems whose spiritual meaning derives from this amalgam of sources. One, quoted in its entirety, will suffice as a perfectly analogous counterpart to that particular genre of religious poetry of which Vaughan was the chief exponent. A prime example of the metaphysical fusion of the secular and the sacred, its subject is love, but its metaphor is an interweaving of Scripture, Nature, and the Self. Consequently, the tone of the poem is entirely Spiritual:

322

There came a Day at Summer's full,
Entirely for me--
I thought that such were for the Saints,
Where Resurrections-be-

The Sun, as common, went abroad,
The flowers, accustomed, blew,
As if no soul the solstice passed
That maketh all things new--

The time was scarce profaned by speech--
The symbol of a word
Was needless, as at Sacrament,
The Wardrobe--of our Lord--

Each was to each The Sealed Church,
 Permitted to commune this--time--
 Lest we too awkward show
 At Supper of the Lamb.

The Hours slid fast--as Hours will,
 Clutched tight, by greedy hands--
 So faces on two Decks, look back
 Bound to opposing lands--

And so when all the time had leaked,
 Without external sound
 Each bound the Other's Crucifix--
 We gave no other Bond--

Sufficient troth, that we shall rise--
 Deposed--at length, the Grave--
 To that new Marriage,
 Justified--through Calvaries of Love--

The poet's secular life is thus described in Scriptural terms. Christ's agony becomes the metaphor for her own. She sees herself in her bereavement as "Queen of Calvary." (348) On a morning after "Wo," she hears the birds singing their sympathetic grief in the forest, like "litanies of lead." Occasionally "they'd modify the Glee/ To fit some Crucifixal Clef--/ Some Key of Calvary--" (#364). The poem is not merely a fireworks display of consonance, but a genuine example of that trinity of Scripture, Self, and Nature.

Martz has observed that "the fact that Vaughan so often, in his best poems, seeks out these individual ways of communion with God does not mean that he chooses to neglect or ignore traditional devotions to the Eucharist." The same may be said of Dickinson. Although she says, "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church--/ I keep it staying at Home--" (#324), she make frequent allusions to the sacrament of communion. The soul's need for fulfillment is achieved through the Sacrament of communion, she says in #383, although the "Outer Wine" is unnecessary if a man has an "Ample Rhine/ Within his Closet," her

metaphor for the soul.

Dickinson's religious fantasies, products of an imagination of spiritual disaster, take her deep within the imagery of stigmata, crucifixion, agony, and death. Her poems bristle with Calvaries, Gethsemanes, and Sepulchres. Her own personal pains are transformed into crucifixion agonies. In #313, she adapts Christ's very lament of abandonment--"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" (which she misspells as "Sabacthini, a grammatical barbarism in Hebrew)--to her own spiritual state of crisis. These are the poems which most closely resemble Crashaw's baroque agonies and ecstasies. They are full of the imagery of blood and tears, the effusions of pain. In much of the content of Volume II of the poems, all experience, whether sacred or secular, is translated into the vocabulary of Christ's suffering in the graphic description of His agony. Even the blackberry (#554) "wears a Thorn in his side." In another poem, her despair affords "a piercing Comfort . . . in passing Calvary." She notes with fascination "the fashions of the Cross," comparing them with her own. (#561) Entire poems, often ambiguous in meaning, are fashioned exclusively of iconography and Christian emblems. Poem #527 is an evaluation of renunciation, of putting the world down, "like a Bundle," and the energy and the "agony" involved. The images which the poet employs to make concrete and vivid the pallid concept of renunciation are the events of Christ's trial and agony. The way of renunciation is the "Scarlet way/ Trodden with straight renunciation/ by the Son of God--." The poet recalls the very "taste" of Christ's trial, the "Flavors of that old Crucifixion--" as well as the visible flowering of the consequences of the dreadful act: "Filaments of Bloom, Pontius

Pilate sowed--/ Strong Clusters, from Barrabas' Tomb--"

In this particular species of religious poetry, to be found primarily in Volume II in the 500-800 enumeration, her style and content most closely resemble Crashaw's. Crashaw's poetry is highly emblematic. It makes full use of iconography, with particular stress upon "darts," "wounds," "blood," and "death." His "Mother of Sorrows" is an especially graphic example of the "pains," the "pangs" the "throes" of Christ's agony and the bleeding tears of the Virgin's sorrowing eyes. Then too, Crashaw, like Edward Taylor, uses the imagery of precious gems to symbolize God's love. While rubies and gold are the favored images of the two seventeenth-century poets-- first, because of the heavy indebtedness to the Canticles for their allegorical value, and for the ruby's color as evocative of Christ's blood--Dickinson ranges rather further afield. In #659, she sees eternity as a non-specific "jewel between Diverging Golds" of the two worlds. However, she leans heavily to amethysts for their smoky hazy purple of eternity, emeralds for their brilliant connection with the colors of nature, and topaz for their suggestion of the exotic. When the poet drops into the "ether acre" in her "sod gown," she finds she rides a "coach of Silver" and flicks a "diamond Whip." (#665) Certainly her evocation of Heaven's splendor as visible concrete emblem of God's precious love matches Crashaw's own splendid evocation in the ode, "Hymn to the Name above Every Name":

What did their Weapons but sett wide the Doores
 For thee: Fair, purple Doores of love's devising;
 The Ruby windowes which enrich't the East
 Of Thy so oft repeated rising.

(I., 216-219)

Austin Warren makes the point that the embellishment, the drawing upon medieval emblems, the baroque ornamentation which characterized much of seventeenth century religious expression should not be thought of as being confined only to "Latin" Catholic or even Anglo-Catholic effusions. It was simply "in the air," popularized in various countries on the continent whose origins were Catholic, finally making its way even into Puritan literature, as evidence of their eagerness to "embody spiritual truths in icons, although . . . they had to confine their icon-making to the verbal and mental spheres, to literature and the mental prayers."⁴ Dickinson's icon-making as well as the extreme sensuality of her religious poetry, fit into this general definition of the baroque in metaphysical poetry, designed toward achieving what Mario Praz has aptly named the "spiritualization of the senses."

Having discussed the linguistic tools of the poems in Volume II, it remains for me to define the tone of this particular set of poems. The tone, or the spirit, of these poems is very like the spiritual point of departure in Crashaw's meditative exercises. Marc Bertolaso has contributed a perceptive observation about Crashaw's religious posture, which he claims separates him from the others of the metaphysical school.⁵ Although all metaphysical poets write meditations which follow a prescribed sequence of attitudes to achieve the desired spiritual end, Crashaw's influence is rather more Salesian than Ignatian. In highly simplified terms, this means that St. Francis de Sales made a number of departures in his works from the accepted rules of meditation laid down by St. Ignatius Loyola. Without going into the details of the roots of the two divergent religious philosophies, since this is not the province nor the purpose of this study,

I shall merely cite one relevant contribution which influenced Crashaw's religious attitudes, and which will be seen in Dickinson's two hundred years later:

The last rule in Loyola's Spiritual Exercises asserts that it is praiseworthy to serve God out of pure love, but that we ought to prize the fear of God too and not only filial fear but even servile fear. But St. Francis, while he recognizes that fear might be the motive which first impels the sinner toward God, insists that little spiritual progress is made until this fear is entirely converted to love. Love, not fear of God's wrath, is what must prompt all human actions. . . . But to regard the Salesian way as thorn-free and smooth is to misunderstand it utterly--and with it Crashaw. . . . What he requires is a frightening mortification of the will, an unequivocal surrender of self. . . . It is precisely this self-surrender to God, with the excruciating mortification of the individual will which it involves, that Crashaw celebrates in "The Weeper" and in the St. Theresa Poems.⁶

And it is precisely this self-mortification which constitutes the prevailing tone of the religious poems of Volume II. Although the note of self-abnegation is not consistent throughout all the religious poetry, it is remarkable to note how closely the following poem follows St. Francis'--and Crashaw's--strictures. The tone of pervasive humility is also reminiscent of the Spirit of Herbert's poems in The Church:

751

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

Lest I should insufficient prove
For His beloved Need--
The Chiefest Apprehension
Upon my thronging Mind--

'Tis true--that Deity to stoop
 Inherently incline--
 For nothing higher than Itself
 Itself can rest upon--

So I--the undivine abode
 Of His Elect Content--
 Conform my Soul--as twere a Church,
 Unto Her Sacrament--

The "self-mortification" of this poem and a number of others written during the years 1861 to 1863, coincide with the so-called Wadsworth "affair," and appear along with the many "bridal" and renunciation poems of that period. There is no doubt that her feelings were engaged, but probably not beyond what Johnson, in his introduction to the poems, describes rationally and sensibly as "her lifelong need for a shepherd, a muse whom she could adore with physical passion in her imagination." The vitality of her religious poetry at this period, the plentiful and rather morbid iconography in these poems, the appeal to the senses in the realizing of God's being, and the profound humility of her spiritual state, might all be compensations or metaphors for disappointment in love, the substitution of the sacred for the secular, the quest for the comfort of God's grace in a time of personal trouble. At any rate, all her biographers agree that there was a "crisis" in her life, that it was caused by Wadsworth's accepting a parish post in San Francisco in 1861. From that moment one can mark a proliferation of "election" poems, a great many references to Calvary, her self designation as "Queen of Calvary" and "Empress of Calvary," her frequent fusing of the two regnant emotions of the human condition, the holy and the profane, and the application of the figurative language of sacrament to both. Her religious life takes on the coloration of fantasy. White becomes the dominant color.

It is the white of communion, wedding, and death. She literally thrives on that "white sustenance--Despair." She is possessive about her right to the "white election," her term for the attainment of salvation through grace. A non-communicant, a hold-out through her entire life, she is possessed by the need to gain Heaven.

In an attempt to match individual poems of Dickinson's with those of the metaphysical poets, Joan Banzer has found some interesting parallels in poems of a religious nature. She finds clear similarities between Herbert's "The Collar" and "Love" and Dickinson's #964, which is a peculiar piece of broken dialogue, stressing Christ's irresistible love. She also finds resemblance between Donne's "Broken Heart" and Dickinson's #754, which begins "My life had stood --a Broken Gun," but in that pair she sees similarity in language more than in theme. She compares the arrow image in Cowley's "Upon the Shortness of Man's Life" and Dickinson's #42, which ends with an arrow image also. She makes an interesting comparison of Cowley's "Description of Heaven" with its many "now" phrases and Dickinson's #624, entitled "Forever is composed of Nows."⁷ The game could be continued indefinitely and yield rich pickings. There are thematic similarities among Herbert's "The Windows," in which he describes himself as "a brittle crazy glasse" unfit to preach God's word, and Dickinson's #338, in which she describes God's ear. However, this is not the intention of this chapter, which is to portray various aspects of Dickinson's religious personality. She has been presented as embattled skeptic, in the manner of Donne, as a traditionalist in Scriptural sources of the spiritual life in the manner of Vaughan, and as a God-obsessed votary of Christ in the manner of Crashaw.

How then may we integrate this fragmented picture of a multiple and paradoxical religious personality into one harmonious portrait? Biography does not help us, for aside from the flimsy evidence of the one period of crisis, there is no comforting sequence of girlhood skepticism ripening slowly into mature faith. In the final poems one is as likely to see rebellion or even cynicism as in the earliest poems. The wisest course is to turn to the only reliable documentation, the poet's writing. Again and again there appears an effort to come to terms with her doubt on the one hand and passion for salvation on the other. These are the extremes or the see-saw of Dickinson's religious life. Occasionally, however, there appears a poem which tells the truth, not about what she feels as much as what she thinks about religion, and it is when she is rational rather than emotional that her opinion is most reliable:

1551

(Second Stanza)

The abdication of Belief
 Makes the Behavior small--
 Better an ignis fatuus
 Than no illume at all--

In this poem Dickinson reconciles the conflict between the spontaneity of intuitive faith and the darkness of disbelief. It is better to kindle the "ignis fatuus" of enthusiasm, so named and scorned by Locke and the rationalists, than to live in the petty and unilluminated world of skepticism, which diminishes the character. Given the religious context of the entire poem, belief is translated into the spontaneity which characterizes enthusiasm as a religious mode of expression. The poem is a resolution of the Dickinson religious paradox, stressing the indispensability of some manner of

faith for meaningful existence.

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In the complicated matter of Thoreau's spiritual state of being, the most reliable evidence is probably the testimony of his intimates, taken in conjunction with his own informal observations and confessions as noted in his writings. While William Ellery Channing's affectionate memoir, Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist, is sentimentally selective in some areas, it does offer valuable insights into Thoreau's religious attitudes for a variety of reasons. First, Channing (the younger) was Thoreau's most intimate friend, his walking and canoeing companion, and his fellow sojourner to the Maine woods and Cape Cod.⁸ Second, in temperament he was much like Henry, a keen naturalist whose hermitage in a log hut at Woodstock in Northern Illinois in the year 1839 was influential on the Walden excursion.⁹ Third, and most importantly, Channing was himself a collateral descendant of William Ellery Channing the first, the liberal theologian who in 1819 wrote the definitive statement of Unitarian Christianity in America. From his father, William H. Channing, a poet and Transcendentalist and intimate of Emerson, he inherited a tradition steeped in religion and reform. Fourth and finally, after Thoreau's death, Channing had access to a great many of Thoreau's manuscript materials, most notably "The Maine Woods," which he edited with Thoreau's sister Sophia, and large sections of the Journals. His recollections, then, as well as the recorded conversations which he reproduced in his biography, have the indisputable

virtue of authenticity, a valuable quality when one deals with a subject as insubstantial--at least, in Thoreau's case--as religion.

The first important contribution which Channing makes to our understanding of Thoreau's personality and predilections is the enumeration of the books which Thoreau read in the chapter entitled "Reading." He names those poets whose works are cited as favorites in A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers, which Channing declares is a "mine of quotations from good authors, the proof of careful reading and right selections. Such knotty writers as Quarles and Donne here find a place in lines as fresh and sententious as the fleetest wits."¹⁰ Here let me note parenthetically that the word "sententious" does not have the pejorative connotation of later criticism, but is used with approval by Channing and other nineteenth century writers of its Latinate meaning of moral rectitude. Among the writers whose works were frequently quoted in the Week and the Journals, Channing lists Milton, whose "Lycidas" was a favorite, and a host of minor seventeenth century poets, among them Giles and Phineas Fletcher and William Drummond of Hawthornden. But always it was the "astonishing Dean of St. Paul's, the learned Dr. Donne," and Francis Quarles, whom he calls a "cabalistic" poet, whose work afforded him the greatest relish and was most frequently quoted. Of particular interest to Thoreau, both in content and in style, were Quarles' five books of "Emblems" and his "Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man." Quarles' preference for the explicit image to represent the abstract, as well as his terse epigrammatic style mirrored Thoreau's own fashion of thinking and writing. The quaint morality of the "Emblems" and the moral epigrams of the "Divine Fancies" were

held by Channing to be great favorites of Thoreau's because of their simplicity, humor, piety, and sprightliness.

One of the excerpts which Channing quotes from Quarles' Divine Fancies was particularly admired by Thoreau, and, because it deals with the subject of spiritual faith, offers some clue to his religious attitudes. The selection betrays that variety of verbal wit and epigrammatic telescoping of ideas which prevail in the religious poetry of Dickinson as well as in Thoreau's writing. It is also marked with a skepticism and ambiguity which we recognize from poems such as "The abdication of belief" and "Faith is a fine invention," those religious utterances of Dickinson's which depend for their meaning on an understanding of the play on words, such as the play on the word "want" in the following selection:

He that wants faith, and apprehends a grief,
Because he wants it, hath a true belief;
And he that grieves because his grief's so small,
Has a true grief, and the best Faith of all.

.. Thoreau's own judgment of Quarles' "delivery" does much to explain his absorption with the seventeenth-century poet: "Quarles is never weak or shallow, though coarse and untasteful. He presses able-bodied and strong-backed words into his service, which have a certain rustic fragrance and force, as if now first devoted to literature after having served sincere and stern uses. He has the pronunciation of a poet though he stutters. He certainly speaks the English tongue with a right manly accent." (1837-47; J, I, 460-461) It is natural that Thoreau should have responded to the "strong-backed" words and the "rustic fragrance and force" or Quarles' poetry, for his own prose, most especially when he is writing about God and faith, has the same plain, forthright and

unadorned quality. He is much more likely to grow mystical and poetic about nature than he is about religion, which, like Quarles, he frequently links to everyday morality.

As a young man, he seemed also to be excited by Biblical texts similar to the ones favored by Quarles. At about the same time when he was appraising Quarles' style in his Journal, he wrote an entry which drew its theme from one of Quarles' favorite Biblical sources for his Hieroglyphics and his Emblems--the book of Job.¹¹ It is one of the most specific references to God's power and man's fallibility which Thoreau was to write:

In God's hall hang cables of infinite length, and in His entries stand bars of infinite strength; but those cables were never bent, nor those bars ever poised, for all things have been subdued to the divinity from the first, and these are the seals of His power. The guilty never escape, for a steed stands ever ready saddled and bridled at God's door, and the sinner surrenders at last.

(Jan. 30, 1841; J, I, 188)

The passage comes as close as possible to the hieroglyph without assuming the conventional shape of the image, a practice which is considered legitimate in certain poems, such as Herbert's "The Bunch of Grapes," which does not assume the form of the central emblem but instead uses it as the binding image in a meditation on a personal spiritual vision.¹² Since the identification of such a poem as a hieroglyph depends on the pictorial vividness of the image, the passage cited above qualifies as a hieroglyph entirely on the basis of the graphic details in the depiction of heaven. Thoreau's cables fall into the category of Herbert's pulley hieroglyph,

sharing with it its mechanical origin as well as its vigor and plainness of language. In this context, it is amusing to note that Margaret Fuller once rejected a manuscript of Thoreau's called "The Service," which he had submitted to the Transcendentalist publication, The Dial. Her grounds for rejecting the manuscript are identical to the critical comments which Thoreau had made in his Journal about Quarles' diction. She found his prose too rugged, rich in thought, but lacking in mellifluousness. "Yours is so rugged," she wrote, "that it ought to be commanding."¹³ I assume she meant that his prose should not be commanding but discursive and harmonious. It is apparent, however, that like the hieroglyphists Quarles and Herbert, Thoreau was too impassioned with respect to the subject of religion--unconventional though he was--to subscribe to Margaret Fuller's dictum to be "unassuming in [his] tone, and have an air of quiet good breeding, which induces [her] to permit [his] presence."

Like Dickinson, Thoreau much preferred keeping the Sabbath by staying at home. Emerson remarked that the only time he saw Henry in church, he looked "droll." Perry Miller states that there is evidence of only two occasions on which Thoreau attended divine service, one of them to hear the celebrated Unitarian minister, Dr. Henry Ware. By no means is this to be taken as a mark of atheism. Although Thoreau was not given to the agonies of Calvinist self-examination--happily this does not appear to be an inherited burden as it was to Dickinson --he is still very much exercised by the nature of God's divinity, and still more, by the condition of man's soul. Like Dickinson, he would prefer an "ignis fatuus" to "no illume at all": "Men of little faith stand only by their feet--or recline on the ground, having lost

their reliance on the soul." (Tuesday, Dec. 15, 1840; J, III, 191).

He is much concerned with the soul's journey as is Donne:

A part of me which has reposed in silence
all day, goes abroad at night, like the
owl, and has its day. At night we recline
and nestle, and infold ourselves in our
being. Each night I go home to rest.
Each night I am gathered to my fathers.
The soul departs out of the body, and
sleeps in God, a divine slumber. As
she withdraws herself, the limbs droop
and the eyelids fall, and nature reclaims
her clay again.

(Oct. 5, 1840; J, III, 167)

The entry, with its dependence upon God's haven for the sheltering of the soul which "flies up" every night when it is released from the physical bonds of the body and the secular activities of the day, is like the soul described by Donne in a great religious meditation, "Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward." Although the soul in the Donne meditation is in more conscious control of its destiny than the soul in Thoreau's prose poem, which experiences a species of natural levitation, still the essential meaning of the two is the same. The soul, when freed from its pull of the material affairs of this world, is freed and permitted, in Donne's words, to follow the natural spiritual inclination of the soul, whose "forme bends towards the East," or towards God. The Thoreau entry also suggests the metaphor of the nest as symbol of God's warmth and protection, a favorite Christian emblem of Crashaw's. It is the natural impulse of the soul to God which is the subject of a great many of the Journal entries, this, in spite of the fact that again and again Thoreau disclaims any preference for any denominational religion: "Man flows at once to God as soon as the channel of purity, physical,

intellectual, and moral, is open. . . . I do not prefer one religion or philosophy to another." (1850; J, II, 4) It would seem from these private musings that Thoreau shared with Herbert--much more than did Emerson--the belief in the close subordination of man to God as expressed in the last verse of Herbert's poem, "Man." This is a surprising conclusion to arrive at with respect to Thoreau, whose life and utterances have been interpreted as far more unconventional than those of his contemporaries Emerson, Alcott, and the Channings. Still, Matthiessen points out that in spite of the fact that Thoreau's life style and pronouncements were considered to be eccentric, still it was Emerson's vision which was freer of traditional influences and in consequence more "expansive."¹⁴ Thoreau's vision of the soul's "sphericity" owes much to Donne's theory of the soul's spheres, as we have seen in the discussion of "Good Friday,"¹⁵ and he is more clearly indebted to the conventional Christian duality of good and evil than is Emerson, who denied both sin and duality, translating the matter of the world into one monistic vision. For Thoreau was not gifted with a "transparent eyeball." He saw evil and immorality and he named them as such, using the familiar language of seventeenth century religious poetry. Commenting on an epigram of Ben Johnson's, "He makes himself a thorough-fare of Vice," Thoreau is much struck by the metaphor and continues in the same vein:

This is true, for by vice the substance of man is not changed, but all his pores, and cavities, and avenues are prophaned by being made the thoroughfares of vice. He is the highway of his vice. The searching devil courses through and through him. His flesh and blood and bones are cheapened. He is all trivial, a place where three highways of sin meet. So is another the thoroughfare of virtue, and virtue circulates through all

the aisles like a wind, and he is hallowed.

(March 4, 1841; J, I, 227-228)

The passage is noteworthy for two reasons. First, Thoreau takes an epigram dealing with secular life and expands it into a conceit in which the "thoroughfare" image is extended, not according to its secular nature, but rather into a religious sermon of allegorical proportions. He accomplishes this transformation through the use of a vocabulary deriving from the sacred, words such as "hallowed" and "prophaned," references to the devil and sin rather than vice only, and finally, the construction of trinities, much in the manner of Donne in Holy Sonnet XIV, in the grouping of the "flesh, blood and bones" and the three highways of sin. Second, Thoreau turns his disquisition on the nature of vice into an exercise of "anatomizing," causing the very components of the body, blood, arteries, bones, to be the channels and highways of corruption and moral putrefaction, a species of quasi-scientific writing borrowed from the medieval "humor" theories and much favored by Thomas Browne and by Robert Burton in The Anatomy of Melancholy.¹⁶ The piece has a pronounced seventeenth century flavor. One will not find this dark quality in the writing of bona fide nineteenth century Transcendentalism. It is a throwback to the poetry of meditation, so well typified by Donne's Holy Sonnets V, with its purging of "black Sin" and IV, with its excoriation of the poet's "black soul." Most of all, it shares with the earlier writing a note of brooding and inwardness, a review of man's inward self with an eye toward purgation and correction. The passage ends characteristically in the manner of all meditations with the following curative resolution: "An infusion of love from a great

soul gives a color to our faults, which will discover them, as lunar caustics detect impurities in water." The final simile is very much in the manner of Jonathan Edwards, who had more than a little of the metaphysical in his writing, in its striving to offer the evidences of scientific observations of nature as valid analogies of the inner life for the purpose of authenticity. For instance, in Edwards' great theological treatise, Images or Shadows of Divine Things, he was obviously influenced by a philosophical work by a scholar named A. M. Ramsay. Ramsay claimed that in Greek antiquity, hieroglyphics --symbolic characters drawn from nature--were used as "sensible signs to represent intellectual and spiritual truths." The hieroglyph is a primitive and pictorial language which communicates to the reader that "the visible world is representative of the invisible, that the properties, forms, and motions of the one were copies, images, and shadows or the attributes, qualities, and laws of the other."¹⁷ The statement is a direct foreshadowing of the message in Emerson's Nature, a likelier and more contemporary source of Thoreau's philosophy of nature.

A passage chosen from Images or Shadows of Divine Things will illustrate Edwards' metaphysical bent, his utilization of nature as hieroglyph, and the neat analogy between the world of nature and the spiritual state of man. It will also cast some light on the foregoing quotation from Thoreau's Journal, which derives from the same tendency toward the concrete or pictorial analogy:

So a shower of rain is like an outpouring of the spirit: it makes water flow abundantly in the streets and greatly raises streams from living fountains; and when the shower is over, the streams in the streets are dried up and the streams from the living fountains are diminished. So a shower

causes mushrooms suddenly to spring up, as well as good plants to grow, and blasts many fruits as well as brings others to perfection. (In the spring of the year when the birds sing, the frogs and the toads also croak. So at the same time as the saints sing God's praises, hypocrites sing also, but the voice is as different in God's ear as the sweet singing of birds and the croaking of toads and frogs.

Thoreau, who declares that his "profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature, to know all his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas in nature," (Sept. 7, 1851; J, II, 472) understood the metaphysical ways of seeing God. The vivid analogies which Edwards draws between God and nature in the foregoing paragraph serve to point out the profoundly metaphysical quality of Thoreau's analogy between God's love and lunar caustics as purification devices. Then, when he brings into his analogy the tools of science, no matter how rudimentary, he adds still another dimension to his analysis. In the introduction of the lunar caustics for detection of impurities, he becomes the poet-scientist, the highest form of metaphysical mind. Sonia Raiziss, in The Metaphysical Passion, expends much effort in the analysis of this ultimate seventeenth-century phenomenon, stating that the poet-scientist is the perfect product as well as exemplar of the duality of seventeenth century life--"at once abstract and concrete in its thought and literature." She calls Donne a "geometer of the imagination," and cites mathematical inventories in the religious poems of Herbert and Marvell as well. "This mathematical sense was poetically extended to the geometry of the skies and the geography of the earth. . . . If Donne's astronomy is uncertain, his mathematical attitudes essentially religious, . . . he is not alone. The scientists themselves were

essentially pious and probing." Her conclusion is as applicable to Thoreau's religious nature as it was to Donne's and Sir Thomas Browne's: "The scientist and the poet have struggled individually and together toward the same end: Penetration of the mysteries. They have been driven by a common curiosity about universal phenomena and human experience, and by a common hope to establish relations and relevancies."¹⁸ Thoreau, the serious naturalist and plant physiologist, is the seventeenth-century poet-scientist translated into the nineteenth century. Only the period of time is different; the passionate personal appeal to authentic religious experience which is not at variance with authentic scientific measurement is the same. As in the seventeenth century, the litigation between science and religion occurs only in the absence of spiritual content in the scientific probings:

The mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives, and the physiologist must not presume to explain their growth according to mechanical laws, or as he might explain some machinery of his own making. We must not expect to probe with our fingers the sanctuary of any life, whether animal or vegetable. If we do, we shall discover nothing but surface still. The ultimate expression or fruit of any created thing is a fine effluence which only the most ingenuous worshipper perceives at a reverent distance from its surface even. The cause and effect are equally evanescent and intangible, and the former must be investigated with the same reverence with which the latter is perceived. Science is often like the grub which, though it may have nestled in the germ of the fruit, has merely blighted or consumed it and never truly tasted it. Only that intellect makes any progress toward conceiving of the essence which at the same time perceives the effluence. The rude and ignorant finger is probing in the rind still, for in this case, too, the angles of incidence and excidence [sic] are equal, and the essence is as far on the other side of

the surface, or matter, as reverence detains the worshipper on this, and only reverence can find out this angle instinctively, Shall we presume to alter the angle at which God chooses to be worshipped?

(March 7, 1859; J, XII, 24)

The passage is offered in its entirety to demonstrate the fact that to Thoreau's way of thinking the empirical need not be divorced from nor supplant the metaphysical any more than it did to Thomas Browne's. Although Browne was Baconian in his inductive methods, he would have agreed with Thoreau that the scientist would find his probings fruitful only when they were accompanied by a reverent attitude. In this passage there is no more conflict between God and science than in the Religio Medici. It is attitude which is the deciding factor. If the probing finger is not "rude or ignorant," it may probe deeply and dispassionately, and the angle of investigation will be the right one, and the instinctive one. The key word is "reverence."

The inevitable conclusion about Thoreau and religion is that, while, like Dickinson, he was unconventional with respect to organized religion, he was, also like Dickinson, conventional in his reverent recognition of God's presence in the universe and his own subservience to that presence. The reader ought not to be fooled into thinking him a radical because of the eccentric and cerebral evocations of quasi-Platonic "essence" and "effluence." It is the language only which is a departure from the familiar theological terminology, something no more radical than Haeckel's novel dubbing of God as the "gaseous vertebrate."

At times Thoreau engages in the litanies to God made familiar in the prayerful petitions of Herbert and Quarles. Here too, the

depth of emotional dependence on God's omnipotence and beneficence are rather startling in an independent thinker whom we have been used to think of as thorny and tough-minded. The litany, a repetitive prayer consisting of a series of invocations and supplications, is the most humble and emotional form of worship. Donne's "Litanie," divided into petitions to the members of the Trinity, the Virgin, the Angels, and a host of minor divinities and Scriptural figures, is a series of pleas for deliverance. The speaker is both abject and agonized, entirely dependent on God's grace. There is at least one entry in Thoreau's Journal which proceeds from a philosophical posture of humility and passivity, and then engages in a litany very like Quarles' Prayers for Judgement and Mercy for Afflicted Souls. On March 11, 1842, he had written in his Journal: "If Nature is our mother, is not God much more? God should come into our thoughts with no more parade than the zephyr into our ears. Only strangers approach him with ceremony. How rarely in our English tongue do we find expressed any affection for God! No sentiment is so rare as love of God,-- universal love. Herbert is almost the only exception. 'Ah, my dear God,' etc." (March 11, 1842; J, I, 327) The mood is thus set for the next step, the establishment of an attitude of suppliance preparatory to the litany itself. The posture is so uncharacteristic of the fixed impression which most readers have of an abrasive iconoclast that it warrants reproduction here: "We can only live healthily the life the gods assign us. I must receive my life as passively as the willow leaf that flutters over the brook. I must not be for myself, but God's work, and that is always good. I will wait the breezes patiently, and grow as Nature shall determine. . . . This constant and

universal content comes of resting quietly in God's palm. I feel as if I could at any time resign my life, and the responsibility of living into God's hands, and become as innocent, free from care, as a plant or stone." (March 12, 1842; J, I, 328)

There are, of course, recognizable elements of a passive nature which are obviously borrowed from the Hindoo philosophy, of which the Transcendentalists were so fond. The spare symbolism of the willow leaf suggests an Oriental painting, with all the serene and tranquil overtones of Eastern mysticism. However, the passage acts as a direct introduction to the litany, which has all the sensibility and abasement of self that mark Herbert's litany, "Longing," its palpable agony entirely uncharacteristic of the Hindoo scriptures:

My life, my life! why will you linger?
 Are the years short and the months of
 no account? How often has long delay
 quenched my aspirations! Can God afford
 that I should forget him? Is he so indif-
 ferent to my career? Can heaven be post-
 poned with no more ado? Why were my ears
 given to hear those everlasting strains
 which haunt my life, and yet to be prophaned
 much more by those perpetual dull sounds? . . .
 Why, God, did you include me in your great
 scheme? Will you not make me a partner at
 last? Did it need there should be a conscious
 material?

(Mar. 12, 1842; J, I, 328)

If it is possible to achieve a fusion of self and selflessness in prayer, the metaphysical poet is the agent of that fusion. The litany quoted above is an illustration of the soul at "white heat," its sensibilities acutely aroused by its needs for recognition and fulfillment, its spirit aching to lose its particularity and be absorbed into the larger encompassing soul of God. It is another evidence of the

essential conflict in the metaphysical mind, expressed as the pull between the self and the cosmos in this context, and leading to a paradoxical, or at the very least, ambiguous reading of the passage and of the mind which fashioned it.

It would be an oversimplification to describe Thoreau as a poet of meditation in the same way that it would be an oversimplification to label him pantheist or Puritan. Krutch, whose instinct about Thoreau is always entirely sound, does head one chapter in his biography, "Pantheist and Puritan." But Krutch leaves the chapter open-ended--wisely, I think--and nowhere attempts to define Thoreau's spiritual nature in absolute terms. Rather, he avoids any particular assessment of Thoreau's specifically religious nature, and admits that "to the tidy mind of a technical philosopher, Thoreau's thought must seem hopelessly confused."¹⁹ Once he assures the reader that Thoreau, like many of his contemporaries, had cast off the institutions of Christianity and its doctrines as well, Krutch no longer troubles himself with Thoreau's religion, except as it reveals itself in his pantheism or his ethical attitudes. However, as Alfred Kazin pointed out in his cursory review of Thoreau's Journals when they were reissued in 1951, the Journals were the storehouse for all Thoreau's ideas and influences, and examination reveals, not only the materials of his mystical, Puritan and Transcendental writings but of his metaphysical approach to God.

Notes

¹William Sherwood, Circumference and Circumstance: Stages in the Mind and Art of Emily Dickinson (New York, 1968), pp. 3-21.

²In A Masque of Reason, Robert Frost has God sneer at organized religion, calling the members of the church "that committee," and dismissing them as impotent to realize any of God's grand designs on earth.

³Louis Martz, "Henry Vaughan: The Man Within," PMLA, LXXVII (1963), p. 44.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Marc F. Bertolaso, Crashaw and the Baroque (Alabama, 1971), pp. 60-77.

⁶Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁷Judith Banzer, "'Compound Manner': Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical Poets," American Literature, XXXII (January, 1961), pp. 427-429.

⁸William Ellery Channing, Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist (New York, 1902), p. ix. The biographical material in the introduction to Channing's biography is particularly valuable and bears quoting because it was written by the schoolmaster, F. B. Sanborn, who came to Concord in 1855, and boarded for a while with the Thoreau family. For a period of three years he saw Henry daily, and later became one of his editors.

⁹The Literature of the American People, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn and others (New York, 1951), p. 274.

¹⁰Channing, pp. 49-62.

¹¹Poetry of the English Renaissance, ed. Hebel and Hudson (New York, 1929), pp. 755-66, 751-52.

¹²Joseph H. Summers, George Herbert: His Religion and Art (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 126-28.

¹³Perry Miller, Consciousness in Concord (Boston, 1958), p. 137.

¹⁴F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1962), pp. 108-112.

¹⁵Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1954), pp. 54-56.

¹⁶Thoreau's Journal demonstrates some indebtedness to Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. One Journal entry in this chapter ends with the following observation: "I do not prefer one religion or philosophy to another." The sentiment is reminiscent of Burton's comment in Membrum I, Subsection 2: "One religion is as true as another."

¹⁷American Poetry and Prose, ed. Norman Foerster, 4th edition, I (Boston, 1957), p. 89. This quotation is an editor's note and does not identify the source other than to give the name of the author.

¹⁸Sona Raiziss, The Metaphysical Passion (Philadelphia, 1952), pp. 93-95.

¹⁹Joseph Wood Krutch, Thoreau (New York, 1948), p. 214.

Chapter V

"Of Living Death and Dying Life": Death and Immortality

(Richard Crashaw, from "A Song")

Both Dickinson and her contemporary, Walt Whitman, have been called "death enchanted" poets, a sobriquet frequently applied to the poets of the nineteenth century, who dwelt upon death inordinately and idealized it as a supernal event in the flow of man's life, from the state of pre-existence--a Wordsworthian fantasy--to immortality. Death - enchantment is so prevalent among Romantic poets that Shelley, in his preface to "Adonais," goes into raptures over the ancient cemetery in Rome, among whose romantic ruins Keats was buried, and concludes that "it might make one in love with death." In love with death Whitman certainly was, as he was in love with all other human processes. A mystic about death, as he was about love and nature and humanity, his poetry reflected his profound intuitive absorption in all its mysteries. In the refrain of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," the poet, as both boy and man, is drawn irresistibly by the seductive and soothing voice of the sea, which "lisp'd to [him] the low and delicious word death."

Emily Dickinson was equally fascinated by the thought and the phenomenon of death, although the label "death-enchanted" does not apply to her as it does to Whitman. Although the event of death absorbed and preoccupied her from girlhood on--there is an early letter in which she says "I think of the grave very often"¹--only in a very early poem

does she make use of the conventional trappings of the romantic's transfiguration of death, nautical in imagery and culminating with the weighing of anchor on the shores of eternity.² For the rest, she is curious about all the dimensions of dying: the hereafter; the moment of fading consciousness; the game of eluding death; the yielding to the irresistible and magnetic force of death; the world as it would be without her; and the adjustment of the living to the absence of those who have died. The restless quicksilver curiosity which informs the host of these poems about death engenders an intense awareness and a spirit of scientific inquiry which lead her to dissect rather than embellish. She pries, not only into the receding consciousness of the dying but into the coffin itself. Her curiosity is perhaps not as morbid as Donne's, which caused him to conjure the gruesome image of the "bracelet of bright hair about the bone" in "The Relic," his ghastly fantasy of the skull which has been dug up after burial. Nonetheless, she is as much interested as he is in the contents of coffins: "Some in the busy tomb/ find quaint employ." (#10) Although the fate of the dead is problematic, the poet's intuition and imagination are always engaged in dramatizing its possibilities.

Dickinson's analytic turn of mind caused her to construct and live by what one writer calls "compound vision," a kind of double consciousness by which one phenomenon is explained by another, "the eternal is argued from the transient, the foreign is explained by the familiar, and fact illuminated by mystery."³ Because of this tendency she sees at least two aspects of every issue or phenomenon, from the vantage point of her own incorruptible self planted firmly between both visions or perspectives. Her natural forms of expression for the

accommodation of this double vision are paradox and analogy:

816

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

Although the poem may be read as a heralding of authentic life after the disappointment or the "death-blow" of a loss, William Sherwood interprets it as an example of the Christian paradox that "he who loses his life shall save it."⁴ As such, each of the four lines contains a variation of the same central paradox of death-in-life or life-in-death found in a host of Dickinson poems. One such example is #1017, in which the poet says: "To die--without the Dying/ And live--without the Life/ This is the hardest Miracle/ Propounded to Belief." These utterances are frequently ambiguous and may be read as either literal death-and-immortality poems or poems of personal loss which are so profound that they must be articulated in terms of death of the body as well as the soul. In #816, cited above, the benefits of immortality are limited only to some selected candidates, without regard to their qualifications for salvation. Perhaps the random selection of candidates for salvation is the concession of the lifelong skeptic to the doctrine of limited atonement, with its implication that Christ died for the redemption of only a selected number of sinners. The Calvinist buried within the non-Communicant intends that the word "vitality"--the key to the poem's meaning--be read in the most literal manner, with its Latin root given full value. The philosophical ambiguity of the poet's attitude toward death and immortality is contained within the multiple antitheses and paradoxes in the poems.

The life-in-death paradox was a linguistic conundrum worked

tirelessly and from endless angles of approach by the metaphysical poets before her. One suspects that Vaughan's Silex Scintillans, a collection of Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations, published in 1650, might have served as a particularly rich source for her poems which dealt with religious subjects, primarily immortality. It is common knowledge that Samuel Bowles, a close friend of her family and a recipient of many of Emily Dickinson's letters, published a great many of the metaphysical poets in his newspaper, The Springfield Republican, credited by George Whicher to be "next in importance to the Bible in determining the mental climate of Emily Dickinson's formative years."⁵ On February 14, 1863, the newspaper ran an article entitled "Henry Vaughan and his Poems," discussing his contribution to the nineteenth century, quoting excerpts from Silex Scintillans, and quoting from Vaughan himself on the necessary behavior for earning the kingdom of Heaven: "He . . . must strive by all means for perfection and true holiness; that a door may be opened to him in heaven, and then he will be able to write with . . . holy Herbert, 'a true hymn.'"⁶ That Emily read The Springfield Republican is indisputable. In the autumn of 1853, she wrote to her friends Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland that she read the Republican every night (Letter #133). Further, in Letter #653, she misquoted a line from "They are all gone into the world of light" by Vaughan (whose name she misspelled as "Vaughn") from Silex Scintillans. The misquoted line,---"My days, which are at best both dull and hoary,"⁷ ---points the contrast between meaningless aging life and the eternal agelessness and glory of "dear, beautiful death! the Jewel of the Just/Shining no where, but in the dark." The poem is a prime example of the "death-in-life in contrast to life-after death" poems which undoubtedly

served as thematic models for Dickinson's #816 quoted on page 106.

In the same vein as the Vaughan poem is Donne's frequently quoted Holy Sonnet 10, which ends with a life-in-death paradox:

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally.
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

Granted that the treatment of immortality in all these illustrations is nothing more revolutionary than standard exegetical expansion of conventional Christian doctrine, still the verbal wit which plays with the finite reality of life as we know it and the mystery and infinity of death as we imagine it lends to all these poems of life here on earth and life hereafter a special turn or twist of conceptualization. Thus Vaughan, who "felt through all this fleshly dresse/ bright shootes of everlastingnesse" in the poem "The Retreat" can create an unprecedented analogy between the spirit pushing up through the dense flesh on its way to life eternal and the plant shoot forcing its way up through the dense earth in its quest for the sun. Or in the poem, "Come, come, what do I here?" which negates the tomb as the vehicle of death and presents it instead as the womb of life eternal. The poem bears partial quoting because its colloquial diction and rough erratic line presage the language and meter of so many of Dickinson's death poems:

Perhaps some think a tombe
No house of store,
But a dark, and seal'd up wombe,
Which ne'er breeds more.
Come, come!
Such thoughts benum;
But I would be
With him I weep
Abed, and sleep
To wake in thee.

The theme of the poem, which presents the grave as a secure and serene

house of love and a gateway to eternal bliss with God, is reflected in Dickinson's #216, as uneven in metric line as Vaughan's:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers--
 Untouched by Morning
 And untouched by Noon--
 Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection--
 Rafter of satin,
 And Roof of stone.

Anderson reads this stanza as profoundly religious in tone, expressing confidence in personal immortality.⁸ The house of death is quite splendid, described in many poems in imperial terms, constructed of marble and embellished in fine fabrics. The attendants are regal: "Coach it insures and footmen--/ Chamber and state and throng--" (#98), and the event of death itself is climactic and aristocratic: "Wait till the Majesty of Death/ Invests so mean a brow!/ Almost a powdered Footman/ Might dare to touch it now!" (#171) In some extreme instances of fantasizing about the event, the courier of death is transmogrified into a lover, who with patience and courtliness seduces the beloved and willing victim into her grave. In these excursions, which are legion in Dickinson's poetry, the familiar sacred-secular imagery takes hold. The dying person is garbed in the white of the grave-marriage bed, the shroud is fashioned of bride's tulle, the hearse becomes a Cinderella's coach, carrying the lovers to their rendezvous, accompanied only by the discreet coachman, Immortality. The grave itself appears as a "cornice in the ground," suggesting a cozy underground honeymoon hideaway for the lovers. The most famous of these "dying-wedding" poems, roughly paraphrased in this paragraph, is #712, which begins with the lines: "Because I could not stop for death/ He kindly stopped for me," but there are others which are rarely reproduced that make use of the nuptial imagery for death:

(last stanza)

Sufficient troth, that we shall rise--
 Deposed--at length, the Grave--
 To that new Marriage,
 Justified--through Calvaries of Love--

The language has an exaltation and the powerful eroticism of Crashaw's sacred poetry:

Delicious deaths, soft exhalations
 Of soule; deare, and divine annihilations.
 A thousand unknown rites
 Of joyes, and rarefied delights.

(From "Ode on a Prayer Book")

She is not often given to the baroque excesses of Crashaw in her poetry, but when she does indulge in fulsomeness, it is generally called forth by beauties of nature--flowers and birds in particular--or the enigma of death. The migration of an "inland soul to sea," her fanciful euphemism for dying, calls forth a "divine intoxication." (#76) In #165, she notes the "Extasy of death" in the leaping of the wounded deer. But she can be brilliant in the manner of Herbert when he creates through his genius the single most telling emblem which links man to God. Dickinson creates a metaphor to symbolize the link between man and God which is as remarkable as Herbert's "collar" and "pulley." The poem, as so many of her death poems do, deals with that tenuous tie between life and death:

A single Screw of Flesh
 Is all that pins the Soul
 That stands for Deity, to Mine,
 Upon my side the Vail--

Once witnessed of the Gauze--
 It's name is put away
 As far from mine, as if no plight
 Had printed yesterday,

In tender--solemn Alphabet,
 My eyes just turned to see,
 When it was smuggled by my sight
 Into Eternity.

It is a very difficult and rather obscure poem, which gains even further complexity in the two verses at the end which I have not transcribed. To my knowledge it has not been explicated, as many others of her poems that I have dealt with have not been. However, a careful syntactical reading reveals the "single screw of flesh" to be the subject for the first three stanzas. It is as powerful an image of God's power as the pulley, except that in this poem the screw of flesh divides man from God rather than joins them. When that screw is gone, the soul of man will find itself in eternity, his soul linked with God's.

However, it is not the meaning of the image which is under scrutiny here, but the structure of the image itself, the absolute rightness of its evocation in spite of the barbaric disharmony of its components. The living flesh equated in terms of mechanical devices is as outlandish as the imagery the poet uses to describe the fading away of life in a death watch:

88

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

The mathematical imagery Dickinson employs for death is as sound as the figurative language which she draws from farming and ornithology.

Anderson has stated that her elaborate rhetorical devices give her poems such a logical structure as to make them more like a Euclidian theorem than poetry.⁹ The "fading ratio" is in fact a legitimate mathematical term, describing the ratio of asymptotic function to the value it approaches. The asymptote is a line that is the limiting position of a tangent to a curve as its point of contact recedes indefinitely along an infinite branch of a curve. It is a term which describes with aptness the infinite fading of the living into death under the impoverished eyes of the watchers, who see the fading ratio of life to death as the dying slip away from their vision. The precedent for this extreme imagery can be found in the elaborate geometrical conceit developed by Crashaw in the poem "Death's Lecture":

Hyperbolized Nothing! know thy span!
 Take thine own measure here; down, down, and bow
 Before thyself in thine idea; thou
 Huge emptyness! Contract thyself; and shrink
 All thy wild circle to a point.

Both poems treat the dwindling of the flesh in the death process through analogies implicit in the mathematical and geometrical disciplines, with careful regard for accuracy, although their purpose is to dramatize the conditions of life, not as logicians but as poets. As Earl Miner suggests, "What is witty about such ends is, in Dr. Johnson's terms, 'violence,' or surprise, brilliance, and a rigor of thought unusual in lyric poetry."¹⁰ Our response to that screw made of human flesh which pins the mortal veil to God's gauzy being transcends comprehension of the surrealistic image and apprehends it on a higher level of awareness.

The death images in Dickinson's poetry are the spin-off of the "soul at white heat." "I felt a funeral in my brain," says the poet in

#280 in another leap beyond the realm of possibility in her attempt to record the dwindling moments of consciousness at that juncture which Anderson calls the "hyphen" between mortality and immortality.¹¹ She is present at her own funeral, accompanying the cortege and recording her impressions:

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

As all the heavens were a Bell,
 And Being, but an Ear,
 And I, and Silence, some strange Race
 Wrecked, solitary, here--

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

This less publicized poem is as vivid and descriptive of the process of extinction as the more frequently exploited "I Heard a Fly Buzz when I Died," and has the added dimension of awareness through the mind, whereas the other poem simply records the fading of the senses in the dimming of the light through the window, until she "could not see to see." The breaking of the plank of reason, plunging the corpse down through a series of worlds is reminiscent of Raphael's descent through the sphere of the fixed stars and then through those spheres of the "planets seven"--sailing between the "worlds and worlds" in Book V of Paradise Lost. Her modified Ptolemaic universe approximates Milton's fanciful cosmos for the same reason Milton chose his galactic blueprint: to make the reader visualize more graphically the drama of the plunge. There, however, the resemblance ends. While Raphael's mission is to bring knowledge to man, Dickinson's plunge is of another nature entirely--it brings an end to knowing. The immortal soul

remains above, and it is this narrator who records the events of dying and the onset of immortality in an exultant outburst which reflects the celebration of the heavens themselves in one exultant peal of the bell of eternity. In this context, Joan Bennett has said of Vaughan that "few poets have phrased more beautifully the experience of time-bound man striving to apprehend eternity."¹² Most certainly she had his poem "The World" in mind, that remarkable projection of the dead soul looking down upon the world which he has left and seeing the corruption, confusion, and venality below. The poem ends in a great affirmation of Christian faith, with particular emphasis upon eternal life for the faithful. Like Dickinson, his vantage point is always of man poised at the brink of the grave, or, having passed beyond the grave, calling from the eternal silence. In "The Evening Watch," his last verse is a paradox drawn from a death watch: "The last gasp of time/ is thy first breath, and man's eternall Prime." Dickinson's #280, quoted in part on the preceding page, captures Vaughan's and Herbert's exaltation of spirit in the lines: "The Space began to toll/ As all the Heavens were a Bell/ and Being, but an Ear." She captures the infinity of space and compresses it so the senses can deal with it--in this case, the sense of hearing--in an unlikely but telling metaphor. Vaughan makes the same appeal to the senses in "They are all gone into the world of light":

It glows and glitters in my cloudy brest
 Like stars upon some gloomy grove,
 Or those faint beams is which the hill is drest,
 After the Sun's remove.

Eternity is transmuted into the pure and endless light of the emblematic ring of "The World," to be absorbed through the eye. But sometimes the soul becomes a "living endless eye" as Dickinson's

"being" becomes an ear in order to hear the chiming bell of eternity. In Thomas Traherne's poem, "The Preparative," the transmogrification of the entire being into a sense organ occurs in a manner familiar to Dickinson readers two hundred years later at the moment of death, when the body releases the soul into eternity:

The Preparative

My Body being Dead, my Limbs unknown. . . .
 Then was my Soul my only All to me,
 A Living Endless Ey,
 Far wider than the Skie
 Whose Power, whose Act, whose Essence was to see,
 I was an Inward Sphere of Light,
 Or an Interminable Orb of Sight,
 An Endless and a Living Day,
 A vital Sun that round about did ray
 All Life and Sense,
 A Naked Simple Pure Intelligence.

This minor metaphysical poet, Thomas Traherne, might have served as a model, not only for Dickinson's ecstatic expansion of the senses at the moment of release from life, but for Emerson's "transparent eyeball," that all-seeing symbol of his transcendent absorption into the divinity of nature.

In the latter portion of Emily Dickinson's life, death had become a familiar and frequent companion. The death of her father and her much loved nephew, her mother's invalidism, which made the possibility of death a constant in the household, as well as the gradual depletion in the ranks of her parents' generation--upon whom she was always emotionally dependent--inured her to the omnipresence of death. A more profound reason, however, for the change from the early fear her poetry betrayed to the more receptive attitude of her later years is described in the following manner: "When Emily Dickinson shifted the

area of ambiguity from the fact of immortality to the possibility of achieving it, she reduced death from a fate to the instrument that prepared her for a fate still undisclosed, and thus made death at least potentially benevolent in character and beneficent in effect."¹³ The young girl had played at the game of eluding death. In #46 she says with relief: "Death did not notice me." In subsequent poems, she retains the uneasy suspicion that the game of life must end with an inevitable and dangerous confrontation with God, or worse, with the realization that there is no God to see, and thus, no immortality:

338

But--should the play
 Prove piercing earnest--
 Should the glee--glaze--
 In Death's--stiff--stare--

Would not the fun
 Look too expensive!
 Would not the jest--
 Have crawled too far!

The terrifying tactile and visual imagery of this metaphysical vision of death must be judged according to the criteria set down by T. S. Eliot for the metaphysical effects produced by Donne's figures of speech: "the rapid association of thought which requires considerable agility on the part of the reader . . . , brief words and sudden contrasts." The rapid association of play with penalty, of games and consequences, require the reader to make a spasmodic leap from fun to fear. The hardness of the onomatopoeic consonants in "glee glaze," the threatening sibilance of "stiff stare," satisfy the criteria of "brief words and sudden contrasts" and prepare the reader for the serpentine ominous crawling of the jest, which term the poet uses in its archaic sense of "game" or "exploit." The mood generated by the

imagery is terror. It is a far cry from the later death poems, which have a matter of factness, or even the coziness, which comes from dealing with a familiar presence. This attitude, which is maintained from the mid-point of the poet's life to the very end, is anticipated very early in a poem written during the poet's twenty-eighth year. The poem, #79, begins with the simple, artless line: "Going to Heaven!", which is repeated as a refrain. The second stanza in which the poet asks her friend to seal a child's pact with her and save her some small place should she "get there first," ends on a homey note of compliance and informality:

The smallest "Robe" will fit me
 And just a bit of "Crown"--
 For you know we do not mind our dress
 When we are going home--

The sentiment follows in the linguistic tradition which Eliot finds in the death poems of Lord Herbert of Cherbury's "Ode" and Bishop King's "Exequy," in which the language is "as a rule simple and pure."¹⁴ A brief excerpt from the "Exequy" will illustrate Eliot's judgment and will provide a model for the second stanza of Dickinson's #79. The King excerpt is as follows:

Stay for me there; I will not faile
 To meet thee in that hollow Vale.
 And think not much of my delay;
 I am already on the way, . . .

The Dickinson verse maintains the same simplicity and colloquial language:

Perhaps you're going too!
 Who knows?
 If you sh'd get there first
 Save just a little place for me . . .

Perhaps Frank Warnke is correct in his judgment that the metaphysical

poets' claim of simplicity is "really nothing more than a rejection of extrinsic ornament,"¹⁵ but I suspect that in the death poems, particularly in many of Dickinson's later poems about death, the simplicity of the diction is more than merely a rejection. Her choice of language, as her choice of symbols, derives from a wholehearted acceptance of a process which she has finally, through great spiritual effort, come to accept as a natural event in the flow of rural living. People died in the home as they were born in it. The closing of the eyes and the domestic "business" which death generated in the home is reflected with integrity in the natural unromanticized language appropriate to a natural event. Dying without fuss is to be expected:

146

On such a night, or such a night
 Would anybody care
 If such a little figure
 Slipped quiet from it's chair--

So quiet--Oh how quiet,
 That nobody might know
 But that the little figure
 Rocked softer--to and fro--

Simplicity, however, does not preclude the element of surprise. There is one moment in each of the death poems in which the poet makes the leap from the commonplace to the rare. Death, which takes place within the context of everyday living, is, after all, a significant and exceptional event. The poet indicates the extraordinary quality of the death experience through an unprecedented excursion into particularly sensuous or vividly evocative imagery, all within the framework of informal narration:

She died--this was the way she died.
 And when her breath was done
 Took up her simple wardrobe
 And started for the sun. . . .

The last line is one of those breathtaking throwaways, as startling in its final vault to grandeur as is the casual but significant reference to the regality death confers upon the dying in the previously quoted #79, in which the poet asks that a robe and crown be reserved for her in heaven, although she pretends a self-deprecating modesty by stipulating that she requires only a "bit" of crown and the "smallest" robe.

Sometimes the image inspired by the final shock of death borders on the grotesque. In #510, the imagery called forth by the unexpected oncoming of death borders on the bizarre:

It was not Night, for all the Bells
 Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
 I felt Siroccos--Crawl--
 Nor Fire--for just my Marble feet
 Could keep a Chancel, cool--

Or in another death poem, little short of an epigram, in which the poet indulges in a linguistic excess which A. D. Nuttall characterizes as "category crossing," when he discovers it in the poems of Donne.¹⁶ The purpose of this device is "to stretch the imagination until it surprises itself," as in the following lines from Donne's Satires:

words, words which would teare
 The tender labyrinth of a soft maids eare.

In Dickinson, the category crossing occasionally produces an image as excessive as Crashaw's, if not as gory. Poem #1489 is an example of such grotesquerie:

A Dimple in the Tomb
 Makes that ferocious Room
 A Home--

Although Nuttall defends this stretching of credibility when it appears in Crashaw as functioning "to stretch the imagination until it surprises itself," one would have to admit that in this case the effect is not shocking but foolish, if not downright precious. It is as "indigestible (to use Nuttall's term) as the occasional amalgam of blood and tears which serve Crashaw as macabre metaphor for the trauma of sanctified dying in sacred poems such as "The Mother of Sorrows": "Her eyes bleed Teares, his wounds weep Blood." The components of the image are similar to those which combine to produce the brilliant and fitting opening to "The Weeper":

Loe where a Wounded Heart with Bleeding Eyes conspire.
 Is she a Flaming Fountain, or a Weeping Fire?

It is a lack of taste or control which causes the first to be a disaster, whereas the second is absolutely appropriate in its evocation, not only by virtue of its double oxymoron but by its instinctive taste. Only rarely does Dickinson violate the canons of taste, and then it is almost always the subject of death which calls forth the excess, as in #1757, in which she describes a violent death by hanging, and ends with the mother's sorrow:

"'Twas all I had," she stricken gasped--
 Oh, what a livid boon!

The surrealism of the last phrase does not work. The image is barbaric because it indulges in category crossing beyond the limits of decorum. Such excesses are rare, however. For the most part, the poet treats death with naturalness, wit, and even playfulness. There is a charming mock elegy which is worth noting because of its light-heartedness:

1539

Now I lay thee down to Sleep--
 I pray the Lord thy Dust to keep--
 And if thou live before thou wake--
 I pray the Lord thy Soul to make--

In another playful poem she warns that "We do not play on Graves--/
 Because there is'nt Room--/ Beside--it is'nt even--it slants." Her
 death poems are sometimes philosophical statements which extend beyond
 the subject matter. In one poem she offers a variant reading of the
 last two lines of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and then gives the
 truism a final witty turn. In poem #449 she says:

I died for Beauty--but was scarce
 Adjusted in the Tomb
 When One who died for Truth, was lain
 In an adjoining Room--

She and her companion talk through the night, united in their mutual
 regard for each other's philosophical bias. In the end, in a fine
 fillip of disregard for the sanctities of personal philosophy, the
 grass, growing over the grave, reaches their lips and obliterates
 their very identities, let alone their ideologies. It is a fine
 ironic twist, the death poet's ultimate death poem. She goes Emerson
 one better in her image of the finality of death. In her grave it is
 not only avarice which cools like lust. It is human personality it-
 self.

There is no variety of death experience which escapes her
 witty appraisal. "A bayonet's contrition/ is nothing to the Dead,"
 she notes with wry disapproval of war in #1227. Death as thief of
 life provides the imagery for two thievery conceits in #1296 and #1445.
 In the first, the silence which accompanies death is seen as a maraud-
 ing "Robber." In the second, death masquerades as a "supple suitor,"

conducting his "stealthy wooing" by "pallid innuendoes and dim approach." The two poems, however, which are most typically metaphysical, particularly in the manner of Donne and Herbert, are the two with which this discussion will close. The first is #1100, which emphasizes both the "ordinariness" of dying and the "italicizing" of experience, a particularly Dickinsonian antithesis. It is a poem which utilizes language in the most eccentric yet in the most poignant and accurate fashion. The opening verse is conversational, marked by an informal, rather prosy flow:

The last Night that She lived
 It was a Common Night
 Except the Dying--this to Us
 Made Nature different

We noticed smallest things--
 Things overlooked before
 By this great light upon our Minds
 Italicized--as 'twere.

The great light which flashes in the dark night of death is a typically Dickinsonian contrariness. Death illuminates the dark night rather than plunging it into conventional obscurity. Experience is underlined rather than obliterated. Inanimate objects take on other values: the chamber where she lies becomes a "final room"; time becomes "narrow"; souls are too "jostled" for speech. Those who attend her are distraught in the manner of Donne's mistress on the eve of his departure from her in his many separation poems. But the dying woman herself sets the example for the others by her behavior:

Then lightly as a Reed
 Bent to the Water, struggled scarce--
 Consented, and was dead--

Her death is reminiscent of the dying of those "virtuous men" whose "mild" passing and whispering "to their souls to go" Donne presents to

his grieving mistress in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning." But it is not upon her that the focus of the poem rests, but upon the adjustment of the living to the gap which her passing leaves in their lives. In another poem Dickinson once made the observation that "you cannot sodder an abyss with air." It is a brilliant apothegm about a subject which troubled her deeply: the filling of the gap caused by the loss of a loved one. The conclusion to the poem under observation is an equally dazzling linguistic display:

And then an awful leisure was
Belief to regulate--

The antithesis of the first line combines with the perverse linking of the abstract value of faith with a mechanical control. It is an open-ended poem in that the emotional climate is just established through the bereavement which begins in the last two lines.

The last poem to be discussed is brief. Its tone is reminiscent of Donne's Holy Sonnets, which will be discussed more fully in another chapter. In a note beneath the poem, Johnson says that it was probably written upon the occasion of her nephew Gilbert's death, which affected Emily profoundly:

1594

Immured in Heaven!
What a Cell!
Let every Bondage be,
Thou sweetest of the Universe,
Like that which ravished thee!

The tone of exaltation in the face of the bondage of the dying is similar to Herbert's at his sweetest yielding to the pull of his obligation, whether that obligation be symbolized by clerical collar or by the "infinite sweetness" of "heaven's ledger," the Holy Scriptures.

The startling figures of speech, which depict heaven as a sublime jail cell, the suggestive verb "ravished," all bring to mind Donne's ecstatic wrestling with God in Sonnets 14 and 18. It is a particularly metaphysical expression of death in its joyous and unafraid acceptance, very much in the spirit which Louis Martz ascribes to Herbert in particular, with full self-knowledge, with the recognition that death is a part of life, and without a trace of fear or horror.¹⁷ It is an attitude which impelled Emily Dickinson to reproduce the famous and triumphant ending to Sonnet 10, "Death, thou shalt die!" with her own nearly verbatim approximation of the victorious sentiment--quite possibly without ever having read the Donne sonnet--in #432, which ends with the line: "He [God] told me, Death was dead."

* * * * *

In direct contrast to Dickinson's total involvement with the thought and event of death, Henry Thoreau's detachment and stoicism are remarkable in the face of the "knowledge of death" and the "thought of death" which flanked him at all times in the manner of Whitman's constant spiritual companions.¹⁸ In frail health during the latter portion of his life, and deeply affected by the untimely death of John Thoreau, his brother and close companion, he yet concentrated his thoughts on the flow of life rather than the ebb of death. An early Journal entry, written at the age of twenty-four, best demonstrates his account of what Krutch calls his "stewardship, the chief record of the fact that Henry Thoreau was granted a certain number of years on this earth."¹⁹

My life will wait for nobody, but is being matured
 still irresistibly while I go about the streets
 and chaffer with this man and that to secure it a
 living. It will cut its own channel, like the
 mountain stream, which by the longest ridges and
 by level prairies is not kept from the sea finally.
 So flows a man's life, and will reach the sea water,
 if not by an earthy channel, yet in dew and rain,
 overleaping all barriers, with rainbows to announce
 its victory. It can wind as cunningly and unerringly
 as water that seeks its level; and shall I complain
 if the gods make it meander?

(April 4, 1841; J, 1, 244-245)

The organic flow of the "river" conceit is so natural to the rhythm of Thoreau's thought that it brings to mind the judgment which Eliot made about Donne in "The Metaphysical Poets." Other poets, he said, "do not feel (the italics are mine) their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility." Everything which Thoreau observed in nature and thought about his fellow man modified his sensibility in a way that was immediately reflected in his writing. His awareness of the decay in nature in the cycle of life in the woods made him acutely conscious of the parallel cycle in man's life. Observing some spotted maple leaves, he asks: "What mean their bright colors? . . . Yellow, with a greenish centre and a crimson border on the green leaves, as if the Great Chemist had dropped some strong acid by chance from a phial designed for autumnal use! Very handsome. Decay and disease are often beautiful, like the pearly tear of the shellfish and the hectic glow of consumption." (June 12, 1852; J, IV, 92)

The final stunning simile is a perfect example of discordia concors, but even the disapproving Dr. Johnson could find no gratuitous violence in the yoking. From every angle, in its reliance upon first-

The overt analogy between the decay of the flowers and the death of man is as organic as the implicit analogy between the aquatic and the human remains of the life process in "the shells of fledge souls left behind."

The organic principle, converted by the artist into the organic metaphor, is the element which links the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century with the Transcendentalists of the nineteenth. According to Matthiessen, one of the reasons why Emerson and the others liked Herbert and the other metaphysical poets so much was their elimination of irrelevant ornament for the sake of the articulation of their meaning. Adhering to the organic principle of composition precluded the sentimentality which is the consequence of inflated idealism and mere virtuosity. Emerson agreed with Coleridge that "such as the life is, such is the form." In "The Poet" he argues: "The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form."²¹ So Thoreau, commenting on the scene of autumnal decay in the woods one October afternoon, hears a funeral bell tolling in the distance and observes that "its serious sound is more in harmony with this scenery than any ordinary bustle could be. It suggests that a man must die to his present life before he can appreciate his opportunities and the beauty of the abode that is appointed him. . . . It was strange that only the funeral bell was in harmony with that scene, while other sounds were too frivolous and trivial, as if only through the gate of death would man come to appreciate his opportunities and the beauty of the world he had abused. In proportion as death is more earnest than life, it is better than life." (Oct. 7, 1857; J, X, 74-6) The organic link

between man and nature is manifest in the lengthy passage, which describes in poetic detail the brilliant tint of ripe fruits and the dazzling colors of the young deciduous trees. Nowhere, however, is there any evidence that the poet is in danger of romanticizing death in the manner of Wordsworth or of the "death-enchanted" Whitman. The rational naturalist at all times, he maintains a detachment even at the point in which he judges death to be better than life. Nature has given him the message in her organic cycle of life and death. In man's violation of that sacred rhythm resides the harsh unsentimental morality of the observation.

"Eventually," notes Perry Miller, "death becomes as much a character in the Journal as in the poems of Emily Dickinson. . . . What . . . reminds us of Emily, Henry had learned to treat the enemy with insolent familiarity."²² Miller appropriates the following excerpt to illustrate his thesis: "To the eyes of men there is something tragic in death. We hear of the death of any member of the human family with more than regret,--not without a slight shudder and a feeling of commiseration. The churchyard is a grave place." (Aug. 6, 1856; J, VIII, 457) It is a poor pun, the irony is somewhat labored, and I should not have chosen it. It is a poor documentation for a valid point. Indeed, Thoreau does betray a familiarity with death--with what degree of insolence I am not prepared to say. "Insouciance" would be a better word. The origin of the observation is Thoreau's constant exposure to and acceptance of the phases of the life cycle from the point of view of the working naturalist: "We are cheered when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us and deriving health and strength from

the repast," he comments at the end of the chapter "Spring" in Walden. He continues with the sanguine air of those who are entirely familiar with the minutiae of death in the natural world: "There was a dead horse in the hollow by the path to my house, which compelled me sometimes to go out of my way, especially in the night when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another" His composure is not shattered as he goes on to describe in terms as macabre as those found in the most grisly of Crashaw's vivid death poems the havoc wrought by death in nature, until sometimes it would seem as if "it has rained flesh and blood."

Long before death had ever touched Thoreau personally, he sought to anatomize death so that he would be able to deal with it. Sometimes his intellectual researches yielded up an epigram: "Death is the expressive pause in the music of the blast." (Dec. 9, 1841; J, I, 302) It is a cryptic sentiment with a generally optimistic cast. The mood arises from a comfortable familiarity with the comings and goings in nature: "If we were to see a man die naturally and greatly, we should learn that the sunset is but a reflection of his withdrawing aspect." (Tuesday, Oct. 6, 1840; J, III) The reflections on other men's deaths naturally lead to the inevitable reflection on one's own death, helping one to cope with one's inescapable destiny in a philosophical manner. We shall see that the processes involved, both spiritual and rational, are not very different from the meditations on death of Donne and Herbert. Even the imagery is palpably similar, with startling emphasis on the skeletal and corporeal remains to provide

a telling contrast to the deathless soul. If Thoreau's evocation of "soul" lacks the doctrinaire apparatus of conventional Christian eschatology, still it is immortal as it survives in the natural world and continues in a species of metempsychotic revival: "I anticipate a more thorough sympathy with nature when my thigh-bones shall strew the ground like the boughs which the wind has scattered.--Thus troublesome humors will flower into early anemones, and perhaps in the very lachrymal sinus, nourished by its juices, some young pine or oak will strike root." (Tuesday, Jan. 19, 1841; J, III) This entry is a striking approximation of the *Meditations upon Death*, which were recommended to all devout Christians by the Church Fathers. Louis Martz notes that "with such incentives the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proceeded to develop the meditation on death into a brilliantly imaginative exercise," . . . bringing "their intensifying beams to bear upon the death-bed scenes and wormy circumstances" of dying.²³ He goes on to quote from Luis De Granada's Of Prayer and Meditation on the spiritual need to prepare oneself for death, "for the blow that can be struck but once should be well-rehearsed."²⁴ Thus it is essential that the *Meditation* reflect a total familiarity with the details of moribundity and decomposition: "The most striking aspect of all such meditations, . . . is the full self-awareness of the vision: the eye of truth that cuts aside all cant, looking with a grim, satiric humor upon all the follies of the world, seeing the worst of life and death with the poise of a detached judicious intellect."²⁵ Although Martz is writing of Donne and Herbert, he could very well have included Thoreau. If he did not bring his "intensifying beams to bear upon the death bed scenes" as did Dickinson in her many "moment-of-extinction" poems, certainly his

was the "eye of truth" and the "detached judicious intellect." He has the precedent of Donne, examining the internal and external experience of death in the "Second Anniversary":

Thinke thyself laboring now with broken breath.
 Thinke thee laid on thy death-bed, loose and slacke.
 Think thyselfe parch'd with fevers violence.
 Think that they shroud thee up.
 Think that thy body rots.
 Thinke thee a Price, who of themselves create
 Worms which insensibly devoure their State.

Compare this series of excerpts from the Donne poem, offering ample evidence of Martz's analysis of the essence of meditation on death with this entry in the "Lost Journal": "How may a man most cleanly and gracefully depart out of nature? At present his birth and death are offensive and unclean things. Disease kills him, and his carcass smells to heaven. It offends the bodily sense, only so much as his life offended the moral sense. It is the odor of sin." (Dec. 14, 1840; J, III) Perry Miller reads this entry, of which the paragraph above is the first portion, as a "defiance of extinction."²⁶ I see it rather as a fairly close paraphrase of the seventeenth century meditation of Fray Luis de Granada, which Martz maintains was influential to the English metaphysical poets' meditations, as were the sacred meditations of Lope de Vega, Luis de Leon, and others. The passage which would seem to be a precursor to the Thoreau entry is from Granada's Prayers and Meditations: "And that sweete mynion gentleman also that was wont forsooth to goe perfumed with Amber, and other odoriferous smelles, must be contented here to lye covered all over with earthe, and fowle crawlinge wormes, and maggottes. This is the end of all gaye braveries, and all the pompes, and glorie of the world."

The passage accepts the dissolution of that corporeality which Shakespeare calls the "sinful earth" in much the same manner that Thoreau's does. The morality of the passage presages the sternness of the Thoreau entry, which continues in a prose that is bristling with images, drawn both from nature and from the customs of civilized life --a common mating of figurative language by the metaphysical poets for the purpose of elaborating a lesson in morality:

His carcass invites sun and moisture, and makes haste to burst forth into new and disgusting forms of life with which it already teemed. It was no better than carrion before but just animated to keep off the crows. The birds of prey which hover in the rear of an army are an intolerable satire on mankind, and may well make the soldier shudder. The mosquito sings our dirge--he is Charon come to ferry us over the Styx--He preaches a biting homily to us. He says put away beef and pork--small beer and ale, and my trump shall die away and be no more heard. The intemperate cannot go nigh to any wood or marsh but he hears his requiem sung--all nature is up in arms against him. He who will dance must pay the fiddler. Gnats and mosquitoes are the original imps and demons.

The entry has all of Donne's intense nervous energy, the alternation of the long and short lines which produce the erratic rhythms of Herbert and Taylor. But even more to the point, the morality is drawn from the lesson of nature herself, borne by her various creatures and the phases of her cycle. "The house of earth (which is our grave)," wrote Fray Luis de Granada, "is the schoole of true wisdom, where almighty God is wont to teach those that be his. There he sheweth unto them the misery of our flesh, and the shortnes of this life. And above all, there he teacheth them to know themselves, which is one of the most highest points of Philosophy that may be learned." While the skeptic Thoreau's God is not as easily placed in

the Christian heavens as is Fray Luis' or Donne's deity, still the Journal entry of December 14, quoted above, preaches the same morality, with only the reassigning of God's role to the minor deities of the woods, where they dispense their "biting homilies." In the assigning to the role of Satan's minions the gnats and mosquitoes, Thoreau has an excellent precedent in the poetry of Edward Taylor, who teaches the lessons of frailty in the poem "Upon a Spider Catching a Fly," whose first line is, "Thou sorrow, venom Elf." The spider, the fly, the gnat, the wasp (the subject of another of Taylor's meditations) are traditional symbols of human sin, whose predatory natures lend authenticity to the parable of man's corruption, and whose nervous darting motions determine the very shapes of the written lines themselves.

The Thoreau entry, which I shall reproduce in its entirety section by section with alternating comment, continues in the following manner:

Man lays down his body in the field and thinks from it as a stepping stone to vault at once into heaven, as if he could establish a better claim there when he had left such a witness behind him on the plain.--Our true epitaphs are those which the sun and the wind write upon the atmosphere around our graves so conclusively that the traveler does not draw near to read the lie on our tombstones. Shall we not be judged rather by what we leave behind us, than what we bring into the world? The guest is known by his leavings. When we become intolerable to ourselves shall we be intolerable to heaven?--Will our spirits ascend pure and fragrant from our tainted carcasses?

It will become manifest as I proceed that the entire entry must be considered for discussion as well as explication, because its structure and content provide one more tight link between Thoreau and the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. The meditative process,

as it is revealed in the poetry of Donne and Herbert and Crashaw, has been judged to adhere very strictly to the rules laid down by St. Francois de Sales in Treatise on the Love of God in 1616, and enunciated and expanded further by the Spanish metaphysicians, Fray Luis de Granada, and Luis de la Puente. Briefly, the discipline of meditation may be divided into three steps: (1) An evaluation or assessment of man's spiritual state which is characterized by corruption; (2) An examination of conscience and a consideration of the direction to take in order to improve man's moral condition and bring him closer to God; and (3) A freeing of the spirit and a yielding of the will to bring man's soul to God.²⁷ Briefly, the first step is intellectual, the second skeptical or judgmental, the third effective or mystical. Fray Luis has summed up the steps as "Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive."²⁸ Meditation, then, is not a random ruminative indulgence but a rigorously fixed and progressive discipline for a spiritual end. The poems of Donne and Herbert, particularly Donne's Holy Sonnets and Herbert's The Temple and The Church are mindful of the art and purpose of meditation and adhere to it. If we would look back at the first segment of Thoreau's Dec. 14 entry, quoted in this chapter, we would recognize the first step of the meditative process. The emphasis on the rotting carcass, the metaphor of the "odor of sin," are indices of a brooding about man's corrupt spiritual state. The tone is harsh and Jesuitical like Donne's. Even the prevalent image of rot and decay are reminiscent of the preoccupation with decay in Donne's "Anniversaries." The second part of the entry, however, reveals a marked change in mood. The tone changes from one of intellection to inquiry. It is working its way toward the freeing of the spirit.

Two central questions are posed: one about judgment and the other about acceptability to God. The last sentence of the paragraph is especially meditative in texture. The tainted carcass is accepted as man's lot, but the emphasis is no longer focused on it. The central thrust is toward a spiritual integrity in the face of our imperfect lives on earth: "Will our spirits ascend pure and fragrant from our tainted carcasses?" That crucial midpoint question, reflecting the agony of the soul in crisis, may be seen in each of Taylor's Meditations. In Meditation 8, for example, the poet asks in the third verse: "Alas! alas! Poore Bird, what wilt thou doe?" the bird standing emblematically for the imprisoned soul in its "wicker cage (my Corps.)" In Meditation 39, the poet asks more directly: "What shall I doe, my Lord? what do, that I/ May have Thee plead my Case?" In each case, the question marks the turning point between the former life and the future. The same turning point may be seen in Donne's Holy Sonnets 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9 as the poet's mid-point question turns him away from the examination of his former limitations and toward the life of salvation.

The third and final step in the discipline of meditation brings the reader closer to Herbert's gentle and restrained mood of reconciliation, as the extravagances of Donne's rehearsals of sin recede into the past. The "purgative" and "illuminative" stages are done with, and the approach to the "unitive" begins. The best description of this spiritual event is found in Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism: "The subject of meditation begins to take on a new significance; to glow with life and light. The contemplative suddenly feels that he knows it, in the complete, vital, but indescribable way in which one

knows a friend. More, that through it hints are coming to him of mightier, nameless things. He becomes a symbol through which he receives a distinct message from a transcendental world."²⁹ The last section of the December 14 Journal entry reveals this ultimate flowering of the spirit into the finest fruit of the devotional procedure:

May we not suffer our impurities gradually to evaporate in sun and wind, with the superfluous juices of the body, and so wither and dry up at last like a tree in the woods, which possesses a sort of embalmed life after death, and is as clean as the sapling or fresh buds of spring. Let us die by dry rot at least. The dead tree still stands erect without shame or offence amidst its green brethren, the most picturesque object in the wood. The painter puts it into the foreground of his picture, for in death it is still remembered. . . .

May not man cast his shell with as little offence as the muscle (mussel), and it perchance be a precious relic to be kept in the cabinets of the curious? May we not amuse ourselves with it, as when we count the layers of a shell, and apply it to our ear, to hear the history of its inhabitant in the swell of the sea--the pulsation of life which once passed therein still faintly echoed? When nature finds man returned on her hands, he is not simply those pure elements she has contributed to his growth, but with her floods she must wash away and with her fires burn up the filth that has accumulated, before she can receive her own again. . . . We confess that it was well done in nature thus to let out her particles of lime to the muscle (mussel) and the coral, to receive them back again with such interest.

If one substitutes nature for God, one may see the final "unitive" consequence of serious meditation. Nature, like God, claims her own, when the outer shell of the body is disclaimed or discarded. At this point, the Jesuitical tone of Donne gives way to the gentler, more conciliatory tone of Herbert. Whereas the first part of the entry is analytical, drawing its metaphors from the decay of the world in the manner of Donne, the last section is marked by lustration and

in nature. Once, seeing life delivered from the jaws of death by sheer accident, he records the incident with a balance of tragic and comic that matches nature's acceptance of it as part of the scheme of things."³⁰ The entry he is referring to is J. II, 423, and the life delivered from the jaws of death is a toad, which was in the process of being engorged by a snake, when Thoreau's nudging foot engineered his release. The language of the entry is fascinating in the light of the foregoing discussion of meditation as preparation for salvation or deliverance: . . . The toad jumped leisurely away . . . as if I, his deliverer, wished to interrupt his meditations."

After reading through the Journals with an eye toward understanding the basis of Thoreau's total and rather detached acceptance of death, so different from Dickinson's ambivalence--her alternating ecstasies and terrors--one sees that it clearly originates in his observations as naturalist first and foremost. In the very first page of the "Lost Journal" he notes: "We can understand the phenomenon of death in the animal better, if we first consider it in the order next below us--the vegetable." The very source of this wit in the matter of death originates in his beloved woods. In the ferns he sees the best "argument for immortality" because of their "greenness at the end of the year, after the fall of the leaf." With tongue in cheek, he offers a fine high-flown poetic tribute to the lowly skunk cabbage, whose life cycle may be seen as a very paradigm of the perpetual renewal of nature's energy. The author is not above the playful use of hyperbole to produce his mock-heroic effects:

If you are afflicted with melancholy at this season, go to the swamp and see the brave spears of a skunk-cabbage's buds already advanced toward a new year. Their gravestones are not bespoken yet. Who shall be

sexton to them? Is it the winter of their discontent? Do they seem to have lain down to die, despairing of skunk-cabbagedom? "Up and at'em," "Give it to 'em," "Excelsior," "Put it through,"--these are their mottoes. Mortal human creatures must take a little respite in this fall of the year; their spirits do flag a little. There is a little questioning of destiny, and thinking to go like cowards to where the "weary shall be at rest." But not so with the skunk-cabbage. Its withered leaves fall and are transfixed by a rising bud. Winter and death are ignored; the circle of life is complete. Are these false prophets? Is it a lie or vain boast underneath the skunk-cabbage bud, pushing it upward and lifting the dead leaves with it? They rest with spears advanced; they rest to shoot!

(Oct. 30, 1857; J. X, 150)

The double pun at the end of the entry is in spirit and in metaphoric source very like the puns employed by Vaughan in his death and immortality images, such as the previously quoted "bright shooters of everlastingness" and metaphors such as "My wither'd leafs again look green and flourish" from "Mount of Olives."

Only occasionally do Thoreau's reflections about death take on a purely social and corrective tone, and here his wit bears a strong resemblance to the tone of that other moralist-aphorist of Western civilization, George Bernard Shaw. The sentence structure, however, is pure seventeenth century in its colloquial rhythm, as is its reiteration of absolute confidence in the impeccable morality of nature. Sir Thomas Browne lays down the ground rules for nature's absolute authority in Section 16 of Religio Medici. "The ordinary effects of nature," he says, "wrought more admiration" in the children of Israel than all of God's miracles. "Thus," he declares, "there are two books from which I collect my Divinity: besides that written one of God, another of his servant Nature, that universal

and public Manuscript, that lie expans'd unto the eyes of all." When one begins with that premise, as Thoreau always does, then he is enabled to take a man's measure and judge the worth of his living as well as the meaningfulness of his dying. The events of the bloody John Brown uprising called forth some of Thoreau's bitterest philosophical evaluations of life and death. Of John Brown he wrote: "Talk of failure and throwing his life away! he is not dead yet in any sense, and if he were dead he would live." (Oct. 22, 1859; J, XII, 425) The paradox of life-in-death is expanded further in another entry reflecting on the same subject:

It seems as if no man had ever died in America;
for in order to die you must first have lived.
I don't believe in the hearses and palls and
funerals that they have had. There was no death
in the case, because there had been no life;
they merely rotted or sloughed off, pretty much as
they had rotted or sloughed along. No temple's
veil was rent, only a hole dug somewhere. . . .
They'll deliquesce like fungi, and keep a hundred
eulogists mopping the spot where they left off.
Only half a dozen or so have died since the world
began. Memento mori! They don't understand that
sublime sentence which some worthy got sculptured
on his gravestone once. They've understood it in
a grovelling snivelling sense. They've wholly
forgotten how to die! Be sure you die. Finish
your work. Know when to leave off. . . . These
men, in teaching us how to die, have at the same
time taught us how to live. . . .

(Oct. 22, 1859; J, XII, 437)

The sentiments in the last two entries bear a striking resemblance to Emily Dickinson's most enigmatic death poem:

1030

That Such have die enable Us
The tranquiller to die--
That Such have lived,
Certificate for Immortality

The enigma, of course, resides, not in the sentiment but in the identification of those unidentified "Suches." To whom was she referring? Possibly to those Americans whose lives Thoreau would agree offered "certificates of immortality," men like "Franklin,--Washington,--they were let off without dying; these were merely missing one day."

(J, XII, 437) Perhaps these unnamed men are none other than ordinary friends, whose "death . . . should inspire us as much as their lives. . . . How can any good depart? It does not come and go, but we."

(Feb. 19, 1842; J, I, 321) Whoever the referents are, and in the Journals they are various, the mood of all the death entries is unvarying in its optimism, its faith in man's goodness when he lives his life close to nature and free from the corruption of civilization, so that his death is not final but a "transient phenomenon," since "nature presents nothing in a state of death." (March 12, 1842; J, I, 328) In all his pronouncements about death, he uses nature as model for man with the same sanguine confidence expressed throughout Religio Medici by his metaphysical--and entirely doctrinaire--predecessor.

Since Anderson has already done the service of identifying Walden as a long poem and Thoreau as a lyric poet, I conclude this chapter with a remarkably lyrical passage whose subject is death. The entry was inspired by a trip which Thoreau had made to Fire Island with other friends of Margaret Fuller to search for her remains after her drowning. It has the brooding quality of the seventeenth-century poetry of meditation, along with its controlled and highly disciplined imagery. Most of all it maintains its intrinsic connection with the powerful world of natural phenomena, a link

which imbues the piece with unsullied integrity:

Whatever actually happens to a man is wonderfully trivial and insignificant,--even to death itself, I imagine. He complains of the fates who drown him, that they do not touch him. . . . This stream of events which we consent to call actual, and that other mightier stream which alone carries us with it,--what makes the difference? On the one our bodies float, and we have sympathy with it through them; on the other, our spirits. We are ever dying into one world and being born into another, and possibly no man knows whether he is at any time dead in the sense in which he affirms that phenomenon or another, or not. Our thoughts are the epochs of our life: all else is but as a journal of the winds that blew while we were born.

(Aug., 1850; J, II, 43)

The piece is at once mystical and transcendental, but even more perceptibly, it is morally secure, serene in its rectitude and confidence in nature's generosity toward the dying. The winds that carry us out of this world are as hospitable to us as the winds that blew us into this world. "Impunity in respect to all forms of death and disease, whether sickness or casualty, is only to be attained by moral integrity." (June 27, 1852; J, IV, 157) All through the Journals this prevailing note of moral optimism betrays the influence of the man who Matthiessen considers to be Thoreau's most profound influence, Sir Thomas Browne.³¹ "Happy are they," says Browne in Chapter V of Hydriotaphia, . . . "who deal so with men of this world that they are not afraid to meet them in the next, who when they die, make no commotion among the dead . . ." To Thoreau, dying is not only an occasion unfit for commotion if one has lived his life properly. It does not even exist as a discrete or finite phenomenon when one has lived close to the bone. He offers a nutshell aphorism of life and death on March 1, 1842; J, I, 324, which will provide the final word:

"I live in the perpetual verdure of the globe. I die in the annual decay of nature."

Notes

¹The letter, #386 in Volume I of The Letters, was prompted by an invitation to visit with her friend, Jane Humphrey, eliciting from her the following morbid response: "I look at my father and mother and Vinnie, and all my friends, and I say no--no, can't leave them, what if they die when I am gone."

²This particular poem, #4, ends with the lines: "Land Ho! Eternity! Ashore at last!"

³Judith Banzer, "'Compound Manner': Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical Poets," American Literature, XXXII (January, 1961), 417-18.

⁴William R. Sherwood, Circumstance and Circumference: Stages in the Mind and Art of Emily Dickinson (New York, 1968), p. 166.

⁵George Whicher, This Was a Poet (Ann Arbor, 1957), p. 170.

⁶Banzer, 426-27.

⁷The line as it is misquoted in the letter is: "My days that are at best both dim and hoary."

⁸Charles Anderson, Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York, 1960), p. 278.

⁹Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁰Earl Miner, The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley (Princeton, 1969), p. 147.

¹¹Anderson, p. 238.

¹²Joan Bennett, Four Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1952), p. 102.

¹³Sherwood, p. 183.

¹⁴T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays (New York, 1964), pp. 243-44.

¹⁵Frank Warnke, European Metaphysical Poetry (New Haven, 1961), p. 14.

¹⁶A. D. Nuttall, Two Concepts of Allegory, (New York, 1967), p. 83.

¹⁷Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1954), pp. 142-44.

¹⁸The lines in which this "trinity" appears are from "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed":

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side
of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side
of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding
the hands of companions, . . .

¹⁹Joseph Wood Krutch, Thoreau (New York, 1948), p. 145.

²⁰Arnold Stein, George Herbert's Lyrics (Baltimore, 1968), p. 17.

²¹F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (Oxford, 1941), p. 136.

²²Perry Miller, Consciousness in Concord (Boston, 1958), p. 67.

²³Martz, p. 136.

²⁴Ibid., p. 137.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Miller, p. 66.

²⁷Martz, pp. 1-40.

²⁸Ibid., p. 136.

²⁹Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London, 1916), pp. 376-77.

³⁰Charles R. Anderson, The Magic Circle of Walden (New York, 1968), p. 254.

³¹Matthiessen, pp. 100-130.

Chapter VI

"This Delicious Solitude" and "The Busie Company of Men":
The Conflict between the Inner Life and the Outer World

(Andrew Marvell, from "The Garden")

"'Says I to myself,' should be the motto of my journal," wrote Henry Thoreau in the year 1851. (Nov. 11, 1851; J, III, 107) Like John Donne before him, he is engaged in a "dialogue of one." ("The Ecstasy") The habit of solitude appears to be inherent in the metaphysical mind, seeking expression in an approach which Earl Miner calls the "private mode." In Miner's opinion, it is the "most distinctive and distinguishing feature of metaphysical poetry," marked by a "polarity with its opposite, the public mode, as practiced normatively from Dryden to Dr. Johnson." The distinction between the two modes rests on the "integration of private personality" in the one, and the identification of values which all men share in the other.¹ In this context, the metaphysical poet is more a celebrant of the introspective way of life than an agent for the reinforcement of community values.

In her book, The Metaphysical Passion, Sona Raiziss labels the poets of the seventeenth century "introversive," because "from the lonely investigation into the mind, into religion, and eventually into social ways, the psychological and the metaphysical comprehension developed side by side."² It is apparent, for instance, that Donne's "The First Anniversary: The Anatomy of the World" is an anatomy of the self as well as of the world. In "The Second Anniversary: The

Progress of the Soul" the speaker addresses his soul as his audience. In both poems the poet alternates between rejection of the social and the public world and celebration of the interior self. This is not to deny that Donne placed a high value on "outward things in the religious service of God,"³ or that he supported the religious and political institutions of his time, but to emphasize that his voice frequently turned inward as an expression of his "introversive" tendency. The tension between the private self and the public world with which he is identified is suggested throughout his writing. It inheres as a tone in the "Songs" and "Sonnets," and is articulated even more specifically in the "Elegies" and "Satires." As Helen Gardner notes in her introduction to the anthology, The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets, "the values of love are set over against the values of the court and the world."⁴ The early poems present a clear contrast between the integrity of the private individual and the worldly values of the audience whom the poet is addressing:

My constancy I to the planets give,
My truth to them, who at the court do live.

("The Will")

Even more explicit is the voice of "The Canonization," which urges a meddlesome public to "butt out" of the poet's private life and pursue the conventional trivial course of public or court activity:

With wealth your state, your mind with arts
improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or his stamped face.

Although the poet's irritation is directed more against the trivializers or corrupters of institutions than the institutions themselves,

the tone may be attributed to the quixotic revulsion from the world which alternately fascinated and repelled him. It is an ambivalence which is to appear in Thoreau's Journals with great frequency as an expression of recoil from the false values of the institutions of his day. Most particularly Thoreau is mistrustful of the "ultra-reformers" and the collective undifferentiated beneficence of their spurious social reformings:

. . . You would have thought them old and familiar cronies. (They happened here together by accident.) They addressed each other constantly by their Christian names, and rubbed you continually with the greasy cheeks of their kindness. They would not keep their distance, but cuddle up and lie spoon-fashion with you, no matter how hot the weather nor how narrow the bed.

(June 17, 1853; J, V, 264)

He goes on to particularize his grievances in the offensive person of one H. C. Wright, a reformer who wrote a book called A Kiss for a Blow. "I would have preferred the blow," writes Thoreau in the same entry, "but he was bent on giving me the kiss." In a fury of revulsion he goes on to describe the "benignity" of the reformers as "slimy," "greasy," and "ogling." Then, in the rage of his disgust, his imagery takes on the scatological tone of Donne at his earthiest. He complains that the reformer swallows his prey and takes him "fairly into his bowels." Lamenting that it is far worse than the fate of Jonah, he declares: "I do not wish to get any nearer to a man's bowels than usual. They lick you as a cow her calf. They would fain wrap you about with their bowels.--addressed me as 'Henry' within one minute from the time I first laid eyes on him, and when I spoke, he said with drawling, sultry sympathy, . . . 'I am going to

dive into Henry's inmost depths.' I said, 'I trust you will not strike your head against the bottom.' . . . I do not like men who come so near me with their bowels. It is the most disagreeable kind of snare to be caught in. Men's bowels are far more slimy than their brains. . . . They lay their sweaty hand on your shoulder, or your knee, to magnetize you."

The overt anger directed against humanity at large is comparable to Donne's anger against the court in his Satires to the influential community of a more democratic society. Donne's Satire V, raging against the officers and suitors of this world, calls the officers the "devouring stomacke" and the suiters "the excrements, which they voyd." Satire II, a more generalized jeremiad, is directed against "all this towne," whereas Satire I aims its harangue against "superstitious puritan" and "brisk perfumed piert Courtier" alike. All creatures of "institution" are held up for ridicule, "God's conduits, grave Divines" as well as the corrupt "velvet Justice" and the "Giddie fantastique Poets of each land." Thoreau echoes Donne's sentiment in his Journal: "The creature of institutions, bigoted and a conservative, can say nothing hearty. He cannot meet life with life, but only with words." (Sep. 7, 1851; J, II, 468) The sin of greed inspires a protracted image based on the most disagreeable sensuous experience imaginable, equal to the repugnant imagery of Satire II, drawn from the life of indiscriminate and brutish sensual indulgence. That Donne's imagery is libidinous and excrementitious, and Thoreau's brutish and sub-human does not matter. Both are indulging in the strongest imagery they can conjure for the purpose of moral outrage. In the Satire, Donne describes the basest form of cupidity as a

"ravenous maw" which "rankly digests the meat of others and spews it out as 'excrement.'" In the Journal, Thoreau sees the greedy man as possessed of a reptile in his throat, "always thirsting and famishing." Just as Donne's rapacious creature feasts off the inspiration of others' labors, whose appetites are so gross that they "out-drinke the sea," the greedy men in Thoreau's world are not engaged in satisfying their own "natural hunger and thirst." The conceit which Thoreau develops to pictorialize the crime of cupidity derives its motif from the sub-human world of the mastiff and the moose, the brutal guard dog and the undomesticated forest creature:

Old Cato says well, "Patremfamilias vendacem, non emacem, esse oportet." These Latin terminations express better than any English I know the greediness, as it were, and tenacity of purpose with which the husbandman and householder is required to be a seller and not a buyer,-- with mastiff-like tenacity,--these lipped words, which, like the lips of moose and browsing creatures, gather in the herbage and twigs with a certain greed. . . . The avaricious man not only desires and satisfies his desire, but he collects ever new browse in anticipation of his ever-springing desires. What is luscious is especially enjoyed by the lips. The mastiff-mouthed are tenacious. To be a seller with mastiff-mouthed tenacity of purpose, with moose-lipped greediness, --ability to browse! To be edacious and voracious is to be not nibbling and swallowing merely, but eating and swallowing while the lips are greedily collecting more food.

(Sep. 2, 1851; J, II, 443-444)

The image is as gross and long-drawn as any of the protracted images of bloated venality and steaming lechery in Satires I and II, with their piled-on metaphors of whoring, simony, sodomy, and defecation, as a sort of purgative for the release of the soul from its material and physical fetters.

Dickinson's preference for the private mode is as powerful as is Thoreau's, although her expression is more abstract and her metaphors a good deal more finicky. Although her approach is exclusionary and autocratic, her figures are seldom visceral:

303

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

The poem is too frequently explicated to bear further discussion, except for the observation that the last two lines are more severe than any of Thoreau's: "Then close the Valves of her attention/ Like Stone--" There is a finality to the image of the valves which bears out Miner's judgment about Donne's five satires: "In all five, the integrity of the individual provides the authority for satire of society."⁵ If satire of society is not the province of nineteenth century literature, high-minded corrective prose certainly is. Dickinson comes close to satire in a little known poem such as the following, which judges popular institutions and enthusiasms with great harshness:

1226

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

If indeed Donne is revolted by what he sees in the behavior at court, there is clear evidence that Dickinson is nauseated by the popular behavior of a democratic nation. The "popular heart" is not to be trusted: "One--is the Population--/ Numerous enough--/ This ecstatic Nation/ Seek--it is Yourself." (1354) Dickinson is the spokesman for the majority of one. Indeed, the word "majority" recurs with frequency

in her poetry, always in the context of superiority or attainment of maturity. The mass is implicitly excluded from her contained moral and esthetic cosmos. They simply do not exist. The cardinal sin is the "failure of irreverence" to the "single Human soul." (1451)

Miner has said of the metaphysical poet of the seventeenth century that "he repeatedly struggles to be alone, to scurry back to his private lodging, or to find his spiritual home."⁶ In a sense, Dickinson has never left home. For her, unlike Thoreau, the struggle has never existed, for she has never joined the battle. William Sherwood claims that the "reticence, the sense of isolation, the mistrust of the outer world, the feelings at once of exclusiveness and helplessness, of disdain and fear" are evident from the very outset in Dickinson's poetry. Further, that she had unconsciously made the decision very early in her life "to rely exclusively on her inner resources, to make perception rather than wealth or power or prestige or conformity, whether to the wishes of God or man, the standard by which she would measure her worth."⁷ He continues to speculate that Emily, if she read Emerson's "Self Reliance,"⁸ would agree with its basic premise that "society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." Dickinson's value system never even extended consciously into a measure of society's powers or goals. Having very early in life made her inner life the core of her spiritual, esthetic, and moral reality, she had little need to reject society, for she, unlike Thoreau, had never even considered it. "The Obloquies of Etiquette/ Are obsolete to Bliss--" (1611) is her general dismissal of conformity, propriety, and herd behavior. She has no need to write, as Emerson did, "I like man, but not men," because that would be an

admission of having considered men and come to a conclusion. There was no time in her life for this kind of measure-taking, because like her Puritan predecessors, the majority of her thoughts turned inward in a punctilious examination of conscience. She sees the mind of man as a fortress, "impregnable to inquest" by anyone, "however neighborly." (#1663) One may compare the absolute privacy of her #1695 with Vaughan's "The Retreat":

1695

There is a solitude of space
 A solitude of sea
 A solitude of death, but these
 Society shall be
 Compared with that profounder site
 That solar privacy
 A soul admitted to itself--
 Finite Infinity.

In this poem, her mature spiritual state is an ultimate achievement of rarefied being, a condition which Vaughan remembers with longing from his unspoiled infancy, a time before he "taught [his] soul to fancy ought/ But a white Celestiall thought." (1.4-6) In Dickinson's poem a strong meditational strain is suggested by the final paradox, "finite infinity," a description of a spiritual landscape of unlimited dimensions and protective enclosure. Louis Martz calls this spiritual state the "Garden of the Soul," a symbol of the "interior illumination" which is at the heart of Vaughan's poetry.⁷ The source of the image is the Song of Songs, a central allegorical Biblical source of imagery among the metaphysical poets, particularly Vaughan and Edward Taylor. Vaughan makes uses of a verse from the Canticles as an appendage to his poem "Regeneration": "Arise O North, and come thou South-wind, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." (Canticles, Ch. 5, Verse 17, l. 4) Very early in her

career Dickinson began to make use of the garden image for the sanctity and privacy of the spiritual life. In her second published poem, she has already begun her definition of the "garden of the soul," which she is to develop and refine throughout her life: "Here is a brighter garden,/ Where not a frost has been;/ In its unfading flowers/ I hear the bright bee hum." (#2) Later on, the image of the private life hardens into a more exclusionary domain, in which each individual "carries a circumference" to which others have no access. (#1663)

The walled garden is not so appropriate a symbol for Thoreau's private life as it is for Dickinson's. Like Donne and Crashaw, he was very much in this world. His utterances, therefore, are often more dramatic and indicative of a very real conflict between the self and the cosmos. Donne is always addressing someone, generally an adversary: "Busy old foole, unruly Sunne," or "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love." Even his mistresses are greeted with a conflicted address. "Nature's lay Idiot," he calls one, and "Fond woman," he scolds another. In the Satires, he addresses all members of erring society, singling out one to dramatize his inclusive scorn: "Sir; though (I thanke God for it) I do hate/ Perfectly all this towne, yet there's one state/ in all ill things so excellently best,/ That hate, toward them, breeds pity toward the rest." (Satire II) The manifest anger and contempt expressed toward the herd is felt in the same way in Thoreau's harangue to the religious hypocrites of his society:

Preaching? Lecturing? Who are ye that ask for these things? What do ye want to hear, ye puling infants? A trumpet-sound that would train you up to mankind, or a nurse's lullaby? The preachers and lecturers deal with men of straw, as they are men of straw. Why, a free-spoken man, of sound lungs,

cannot draw a long breath without causing your rotten institutions to come toppling down by the vacuum he makes. Your church is a baby-house made of blocks, and so of state. It would be a relief to breathe one's self occasionally among men. If there were any magnanimity in us, any grandeur of soul, anything but sects and parties undertaking to patronize God and keep the mind within bounds, how often we might encourage and provoke one another by a free expression! I will not consent to walk with my mouth muzzled, not till I am rabid, until there is danger that I shall bite the unoffending and that my bite will produce hydrophobia.

(Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 324)

The brutality of the final conceit mirrors the uncontrollable rage of the individualist who cannot abide the corruption of institutions. Thoreau's vilification of the preachers, agents of institutional corruption, is directly analogous to Donne's highly dramatic Satire III, in which he calls "some Preachers vile ambitious bauds," who have the vanity to believe that only their institution holds the truth for all mankind, that only "shee/ Which dwels with us, is onely perfect." These are dramatic monologues, Donne's "dialogues of one," but beamed at an unseen audience whose "factitious piety," in Thoreau's words, "is like stale gingerbread." (Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 324) The individual's determination is pitted against the flaccid institutions: "If I should draw a long breath in the neighborhood of these institutions, their weak and flabby sides would fall out, for my own inspiration would exhaust the air about them." (Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 325) It is in these vitriolic outbursts that Thoreau's imagery is at its most metaphysical, that is, most vividly concrete and evocative in its figurative treatment of abstract themes. Witness the ugly conceit he fashions for the "disease" of institutional

Christianity: "If they would let their sores alone they might heal, and they could to the wars again like men; but instead of that they get together in meeting-house cellars, rip off the bandages and poultice them with sermons." (Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 325) Or the more protracted and even more baroque conceit, whose negative appeal to the senses fixes firmly the moral nausea inspired by the hypocritical practices of an insular New England community:

One of our New England towns is sealed up hermetically like a molasses-hogshead,-- such is its sweet Christianity,--only a little of the sweet trickling out at the cracks enough to daub you. The few more liberal-minded or indifferent inhabitants are the flies that buzz about it. It is Christianity bunged up. I see awful eyes looking out through a bull's-eye at the bung-hole.

(Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 326)

After the elaborate intricacies of the "hogshead" conceit, the remainder of the passage is composed of a series of epigrams with a strong moral cast:

They do not think; they adhere like oysters
to what their fathers and grandfathers adhered to.

The best "preachers," so called, are an effeminate
class; their bravest thoughts wear petticoats.

They want a medicine that will not interfere with
their daily meals.

They want all of a man but his truth and independence
and manhood.

(Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 325-8)

The reader will note that the villainous "they" in all of the epigrams refers to the creatures of institutional organizations, either their leaders or their adherents, affirming the "private mode" of Thoreau's

reflections. A further underlying current intertwined with the "private mode" is the obsession with truth. In the final quoted epigram we notice that truth is inextricably interwoven with manhood and independence. In a more radical statement, Thoreau measures the church against the tavern and finds the house of God wanting: "On the one side you will find a barroom which holds the "scoffers, so called, on the other a vestry where there is a monthly concert of prayer. There is just as little to cheer you in one of these companies as the other. It may be often the truth and righteousness of the barroom that saves the town." (Nov. 16, 1858; J, XI, 326) The hyperbole of the last statement is the appropriate expression of the very angry, very highly principled young man, outraged by the compromises of his society. It is not far removed from Donne's excesses in the Satires, his lists of institutions and rituals which he "equally" hates in Satire II, his posture of "brave scorn" which forbids his weeping at social and religious hypocrisy in Satire III. In Donne's case, the traditional Jacobean melancholy is blamed for his scepticism and mistrust of institutions after the golden era of Elizabethan brightness, optimism and faith in institutions.⁹ In Thoreau's case, and in Dickinson's as well, the skepticism with respect to institutions and the obsession with truth as distinguished from sham or mere conventional conformism, springs from a variant of that early Jacobean melancholy. The Congregational Church was alternately too rigid and too evangelistic, and certainly too conventional and bound with proprieties for independents like Thoreau and Dickinson. Pulpit oratory, at a high pitch during that era, must have sounded pretentious as well as sententious to two such private and sensitive

individualists. Sanctimonious preachments in the face of the horrors of slavery and the growing abolitionist movement drew from Thoreau the most impassioned utterances of his Journal in the form of a lengthy tribute to John Brown. (J, XII, 400-457)

It took an issue as public as the John Brown affair to prompt some of the most passionate explosions of principle from the most private of men. The utterances, inflamed and vituperative, are in the most private of modes, ejaculations of rage from a man who scorned the tolerated corrupt institutions of his day. Like Donne before him, who addressed his tirades to the "foole and wretch" who is "bound to mans lawes," (Satire III, l. 93-4), Thoreau addressed his remarks to the "representatives of so-called Christians who pretend to be interested in the heathen" but "dare not so much as protest against the foreign slave-trade!" (Oct. 21, 1859; J, XII, 415-6)

Mistrust of institutions marks every volume of the Journal. Preoccupation with truth appears to prompt powerful suspicion of moral attitudes arrived at communally. Thoreau, the metaphysical mind, expresses confidence only in the integrity of the private mind and heart. Thus, not only are the representatives of organized religion "vile ambitious bauds" like Donne's preachers in Satire III, but representatives of government are equally untrustworthy: "We talk about representative government, but what a monster of a government is that where the noblest faculties of the mind and the whole heart are not represented. A semi-human tiger or ox stalking over the earth, with its heart taken out and the top of its brain shot away." (Oct. 21, 1859; J, XII, 415-6) The entry is noteworthy because, like Dickinson's poems--and Hawthorne's and Melville's novels as well--it

insists upon the full functioning and balance of heart and mind. "The Heart and the Mind together make/ A single Continent," claims Dickinson in #1354. Failing this harmony, a ruinous imbalance damages both human spirit and the institutions of man's making.

Of the root cause of Dickinson's widely acknowledged melancholy we have no firm authentication. Although Johnson's brief preface to the group of letters written between 1862 and 1865 states that this period represents the most "crucial and . . . historically eventful" time of her life, there is little evidence to lay the blame for her crisis at the feet of the Civil War or of an encroaching industrial revolution or even a major personal illness. With the exception however, of a minor eye affliction, there is no record of anything sufficiently traumatic to prompt the celebrated letter to Higginson, in which she wrote of that period seven years earlier, "You were not aware that you saved my life." There is one letter, #255, which records with compassion the death of a young Amherst boy in Newbern, North Carolina, as a soldier in the cause of the North. That letter and the one following dwell in great detail on the sorrow of the bereaved family and the entire community, including her brother Austin, who was the young man's friend. But there is no word of social or political significance, no reflection of a national crisis which touched her and contributed to the palpable melancholy of her letters and verse, her skepticism and the compulsive preoccupation with truth and truth telling which flows through all her poetry, early and late. In the letters which Higginson wrote to his wife after his historic meeting with the poet, he recorded some of her astonishing observations. One of the first was: "Truth is such a rare thing it is delightful to

tell it." (342b) The combination of truth and rarity is the cornerstone of many of her poems:

1455

Opinion is a flitting thing,
 But Truth, outlasts the Sun--
 If then we cannot own them both--
 Possess the oldest one--

The commitment to the "possession" of truth as a stable and valuable commodity echoes Donne's line 89 in Satire III: "Keepe the truth which thou hast found." In Donne's context, this particular truth is a reference to religious integrity and certainty. In Dickinson's world, the context of her particular brand of truth is a considerably broader one. In Satire III, in line 43, Donne adjures his private audience to "seeke true religion." In poem #1455, Dickinson extends the definition of truth to render it synonomous with supernal excellence on all levels:

Truth is good Health--and Safety, and the Sky.
 How meagre, what an Exile--is a Lie,
 And Vocal--when we die--

The lie is noisy while the truth is silent and private. Donne had judged that although "truth and falsehood bee neare twins, yet truth a little elder is." (Satire III, l. 72-3) The line could serve as a model for Dickinson's #1455 quoted above. Neither poet pretends that truth is easily achieved. "On a huge hill, cragged and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will reach her, about must, and about must goe," says Donne. (Satire III, l. 79-81) "The truth never flaunted a sign," says Dickinson in #1207. It is not visible nor entirely accessible. Sometimes truth may be apprehended only in a subtle or even gradual way. It is too precious a commodity to be made available all at once:

1129

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--
 Success in circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Children eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind--

Circuitness is to be expected in a poet who announced that her "business is circumference." (Letter #268) Thus, telling all the truth but telling it "slant" or obliquely is in keeping with the subtle ironic mind of the metaphysical poet. Thoreau views the rare commodity of truth in the same light. He uses for his text the definition of a seventeenth-century moralist-scientist, Francis Bacon, whose rich concrete metaphors for abstractions often glow with metaphysical luster:

"Truth," says Lord Bacon, "may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that sheweth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, which sheweth best in varied lights." Like the pearl, truth shines with a steady but pale light which invites to introspection; it is intrinsically bright, not accidentally as the diamond. We seem to behold its rear always, as though it were not coming toward us but retiring from us. Its light is not reflected this way, but we see the sombre and wrong side of its rays. As the dust in his beams makes known that the sun shines.

(Jan. 29, 1840; J, I, 117)

Falsehoods, in the other hand, says Thoreau, "glare and dazzle" and are "sloped toward us, reflecting full in our faces even the light of the sun. Wait till sunset, or go round them, and the falsity will be apparent." (Jan. 29, 1840; J, I, 117) His convictions that truth is a subtle and many-shaded and faceted elusive property is echoed in a stunning poem of Dickinson's, which seems on the surface to be a

nature poem, but is in reality a highly-charged metaphor for truth.

It may be read as a gloss on the Thoreau passage quoted above:

1609

Sunset that screens, reveals--
 Enhancing what we see
 By menaces of Amethyst
 And Moats of Mystery.

The dying light of sunset with its attendant cast shadows reveals more than it conceals, actually dramatizing the visible world by virtue of the depth, dimension and shading provided by the half light. So truth is made of layers of innate light and surfaces of obscuring shadows, forcing the truth-seeker to peer more closely at the value under examination. Truth is difficult and elusive, whereas fraud is "glaring and dazzling," diamond bright and non-dimensional. Dickinson, the truth-seeker, finds herself amazed at the slickness and glibness of cant and fraud. "He preached upon 'Breadth' till it argued him narrow--" she writes of an anonymous public personality, and "of 'Truth' until it proclaimed him a Liar--/ The Truth never flaunted a Sign." (#1207)

There is no forgiveness for mendacity, either of another or of oneself. The Puritan core of Dickinson's nature hardens her judgment of her fellow man. Truth is not easily arrived at, nor should it be. The "plain style" of her Puritan heritage prompts immediate suspicion of a tongue which is too articulate, a speech too ornate and skillful:

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

{#1207, 2nd stanza}

Here her irony would do justice to a Donne. She is as contemptuous of the fraudulent preacher as was Donne of the institutional clergy of his day, men who spoke all tongues, won widows, paid scores, spoke treason, out-flattered favorites and generally spoke as if they would sell their tongues. (Satire IV) The villain, a "huffing braggart," was the betrayer of Mistress Truth, much as pyrite displaced pure gold. Yet, like a mature Donne, and like Herbert and Crashaw throughout their lives, Dickinson is always engaged in self-examination, relentlessly exposing the flaws and fraudulences in her own character. "Oh my blacke Soule!" laments Donne in Holy Sonnet IV, and later, in "A Hymne to God the Father," "Wilt thou forgive that sinne through which I runne . . . though still I do deplore?" So Dickinson, a merciless self-critic, picks at the most minute sore of imperfection:

747

It dropped so low--in my Regard--
 I heard it hit the Ground--
 And go to pieces on the Stones
 At bottom of my Mind--

Yet blamed the Fate that fractured--less
 Than I reviled Myself,
 For entertaining Plated Wares
 Upon my Silver Shelf--

This poem reveals one of those fascinating paradoxes of the metaphysical character; the existence of humility and a heightened sense of self existing side by side. On the one hand, the poet "reviles herself" for having been morally lax enough to entertain, even briefly, a second-rate idea, the metaphoric "plated wares" of the poem. On the other hand, the poet sees her mind, and perhaps her character as well, as a "silver shelf," a sterling receptacle worthy of only first-rate merchandise. Truth is her natural and aristocratic and only permissible

companion, much as she is Donne's in the last line of Satire IV. Anything else is, in the words of both poets, betrayal.

"Severe truth is expressed with some bitterness," wrote Thoreau in his Journal in 1854. (VI, 169) A truth-telling man will find himself alone and pitted against the community. Tellers of truth have been judged insane by their peers and made to suffer for their intransigence. Dickinson goes beyond bitterness to agony in the experience of dealing with truth. "Men do not sham Convulsion/ nor simulate a Throe," she says in #241. Truth is not easily secured. There is a "sweet Skepticism of the Heart--/ that knows and does not know--/" a state of being which "invites and then retards the Truth" in a complicated and often dangerous process, a "transport filled with Fear." (#1413) And the price one pays for the pursuit of one's inner convictions as an expression of one's most profound inner life, is separation from one's fellow man. One is then drawn into an examination of the paradox of sanity-insanity. The "sane" conformists, mouthing corruption and hypocrisy, prosper; the non-conforming truth-tellers, maintaining their integrity and individuality, are judged "insane" by their fellows and isolated from the general community.

The case of John Brown draws from Thoreau a number of bitter evaluations of the states of sanity and derangement, all in the contexts of the inner life and the outer social pressures brought to bear on its integrity. Recalling the interrogations that Brown often underwent at the hands of the community of politicians and preachers, he writes:

No wonder it struck the politicians and preachers generally very forcefully that either he was insane or they, and they, being the painters, or judges, this time, decided, naturally enough, that it must be he. . . . The slaveholders and the slaves who have

really dealt with him are not likely sincerely to question his sanity, but rather political or religious parties, who stand further off from a living man.

(Oct. 22, 1859; J, XII, 429)

Later, in the same entry, his writing takes on a more ironic tone as he pursues the question of "sane" and "insane" behavior:

One writer says, I know not with what motive, that it is a fact "illustrative of Brown's insanity, that he has charts of nearly all the great battle-fields of Europe." I fear that his collection is not to be compared for completeness with that which this government possesses, however his sanity may be compared to its. . . . Newspaper-editors talk as if it were impossible that a man could be "divinely appointed" in these days to do any work whatever, as if vows and religion were out of date as connected with any man's daily work, and as if a man's death were a failure and his continued life, be it of whatever character, were a success. They argue that it is a proof of his insanity that he thought he was appointed to do this work which he did,-- that he did not suspect himself for a moment!

(Oct. 22, 1859; J, XII, 431-433)

The passage goes on at great length with that blend of mordancy and mission which is so much the tone of all of Donne's Satires. At one point, Thoreau goes so far as to define the "insanity" of Brown's mission as a brand of exalted monomania: "Sure enough, a hero in the midst of us cowards is always so dreaded. He is just that thing. He shows himself superior to nature. He has a spark of divinity in him."

(Oct. 22, 1859; J, XII, 436)

It is difficult to know to whom Dickinson is specifically referring in her sanity-insanity poems. Her most celebrated poem on the subject, written in 1862, shares Thoreau's conviction that the eccentric has a "divine" spark within him, a sense of mission which is the province

of a chosen, and therefore persecuted, few.¹⁰ The poem itself is a showcase for those two most powerful weapons of the metaphysical wit-- paradox and irony. It is fascinating to observe, from a purely mechanical approach, the smoothness with which the poet segues into the final irony of the last three lines from the bold paradox of the first four:

435

Much Madness is divinest Sense--
 To a discerning Eye--
 Much Sense--the starkest Madness--
 'Tis the Majority
 In this, as All, prevail--
 Assent--and you are sane--
 Demur--you're straightway dangerous--
 And handled with a Chain--

Again and again she forges the link between divinity and insanity, as if eccentricity or individuality of inspiration were a direct mandate from God, a prophetic mission. "'Twas a Divine Insanity," she says of a conversion of a conversion of her mind in #593. "Like Sanctifying in the Soul," this independent turn of mind which is singularly hers, may not be explained, only "witnessed." One is reminded of Vaughan's "Rules and Lessons," a series of poetic adjurations stressing the hard road of individual duty and conviction in the face of the herd:

When the world's up, and ev'ry swarm abroad,
 Keep thou thy temper, mix not with each Clay; . . .
 If truth be thine, what needs a brutish force?

The sentiment is often mirrored in Thoreau's Journal: "It is for you to make up your mind,--to form any resolution whatever, and not accept the convictions that are forced upon you, and which even pass your understanding." (Oct. 22, 1859; J, XII, 432) The only road for the metaphysical poet is the private road; even the titles and central

images of the poems provide evidence of the poet's wrestling with the public world. Poems such as Donne's "The Legacie" and "The Will," as well as Vaughan's "The World" take their metaphors from social institutions and conceptions, attesting to the awareness of and struggle with the outer world and its popular institutions, but the final choice must be the private mode, as it is expressed in Vaughan's "Rules and Lessons":

Seek not the same steps with the Crowd; stick thou
To thy sure trot; a Constant, humble mind
Is both his own Joy, and his Makers too;
Let folly dust it on, or lag behind.

A sweet self-privacy in a right soul
Out-runs the Earth, and lines the utmost pole.

Dickinson's poetry shows the struggle as does Donne's. The "sweet self-privacy" which Vaughan sees as the proper climate for the "right" soul is as hard won for Dickinson as for the embattled Donne who is forever fleeing to the jetty walls of the cloister from the encroaching tempting world. Only rarely does Dickinson envision herself as the retiring "nobody" of the much-quoted #288, which is atypical in the sense that she extends an unprecedented invitation to an unseen audience to join her in her hideout. More often, the soul's solitude is painful, "one Anguish--in a Crowd." She conjures up a dangerous seclusion, with herself as trapped doe, "attempted of the hounds." The atmosphere is tense with terror as "Legions of Alarm" leap upon the beleaguered doe. (#565) On other occasions there is a gentler withdrawal. Self-realization comes as a supernal achievement of the solitary state:

306

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

The private mode in this poem is entirely voluntary, but its price is implicit in the word "withdrawn." The spiritual climate of this particular poem is closest to Marvell's in its recognition of the conflict which exists between the inner and the outer world, between the world of men and the world of the soul. Earl Miner explains the Marvellian mode very neatly, taking care to distinguish it from the complicated interweaving of Donne's two worlds:

Donne's followers . . . simplify his complex Metaphysical interweaving, either by untangling it into the separate public and private poems of King, Cowley, Cleveland, Marvell, and Vaughan, or by accommodating Cavalier and other traditional elements, as in Carew or Godolphin, as again in Cowley and Marvel. . . . More significantly, in the first stanza of "The Garden," Marvell glances at the public life only to reject it; in An Horatian Ode on Cromwell, he glances at the private life only to reject it. Although similar rejections are found aplenty in Donne, they do not entail a glance and then a veering away, but a use of public experience to convey a superior private world. . . . After Donne, Marvell is obviously the most complex of the Metaphysical race. . . . Marvell's complexities are of other kinds [than Donne's] of ideas and apprehensions, of expressive glances and deflections, rather than modes.¹¹

George De F. Lord cites Marvell for his "incomparable lyric exploration of the inner life," emphasizing in particular "Upon Appleton House" for the depth of personal insight and the search for individual serenity apart from worldly involvement.¹² Upon reading the poem, one is made aware of a passion for contemplative solitude which will surface almost two hundred years later in Thoreau's Journal. There is a suggestion of this process even in Dickinson's #306, quoted above, but the element missing in Dickinson and present in Thoreau is contemplation, and it is that which links Thoreau most strongly to Marvell. In Dickinson's most internalized realizations, her responses are

reflexive. She intuits the "soul's superior instants" in a spontaneous effusion. Or she herself "ascends" to a height too remote for "lower recognition," (#306) thus achieving an instinctive supernal moment of elevation as well as of privacy of living. The experience is marked by a total lack of contemplation, or the thoughtful taking of the measure of a situation which marks much of Marvell's poetry of the inner life as well as Thoreau's Journal.

In the earliest pages of the Journal, Thoreau gives evidence of the contemplative cast of mind. When he was but twenty-one years of age, the verb "contemplate" was already intrinsic to his philosophical approach to life: "As a child looks forward to the coming of the summer, so could we contemplate with quiet joy the circle of the seasons returning without fail eternally." (Jan. 6, 1838; J, I, 24) One entry, written at about the same period, reads so much like a close paraphrase of selected lines from Marvell's "The Garden" that one wonders whether Thoreau had freshly read Marvell at just this time. The Marvell lines are: "Society is all but rude,/ to this delicious Solitude." The Thoreau notation is: "As the truest society approaches always nearer to solitude, so the most excellent speech finally falls into silence." (Dec. 15, 1838; J, I, 64) Even the disquisition on silence takes as its model Marvell's line, "Fair Quiet, have I found thee here." In his customary contemplative mode, Thoreau takes the concept and expands it through detailed reflective examination: "Silence is the communing of a conscious soul with itself. If the soul attend for a moment to its own infinity, then and there is silence. She is audible to all men at all times, in all places, and if we will we may always hearken

to her admonitions." (Dec. 15, 1838; J, I, 64) Dickinson leaps beyond analysis, beyond Marvell's and Thoreau's attempt to understand the beneficent workings of silence, and formulates her definition which is based on pure intuition: "Silence is Infinity." (#1251)

Like Marvell, Thoreau was ambivalent about the society of men. This chapter has explored the fine distinction which Earl Miner makes between Marvell and Donne. Donne often uses the metaphor of the public life, but only to establish the superiority of the private mode. Dickinson is as firm in her commitment to privacy as Donne. "How dreary to be somebody--/ How public like a Frog--/ To tell your name the livelong Day--/ To an admiring Bog." (#288) She says, "Suffice Us for a Crowd," and she means it. Thoreau, like Marvell, vacillates. At heart something of a reformer, just as at heart Marvell is something of a statesman, he finds himself deeply concerned with "this busie companie of men." It would seem that contemplative men do not have the necessary arrogance requisite for an entirely exclusionary point of view. The very act of contemplation is in a measure a weakening of that soaring leap of intuition which is characteristic of Donne and Dickinson. After all, much of Walden is hortatory and practical, consisting of sound advice to all men so that they may improve their lot and the condition of the earth through sensible practice. Thus, it is not surprising to find the following Journal entry: "It is wholesome advice,-- "to be a man amongst folks." Go into society if you will, or if you are unwilling, and take a human interest in its affairs." (Feb. 9, 1838; J, I, 28) In this passage, he urges his "active star" in much the same way that Cromwell did when he was made head of the Parliamentary

forces in 1650, an occasion celebrated by Marvell in "An Horatian Ode." Both Marvell and Thoreau are capable of panegyric to the active life, if the cause is moral, the motive high-minded. "'Tis time to leave the Books in dust,/ and oyl the unused Armour rust," says Marvell in the "Ode." Further, as George Lord observes, that poem which has been misinterpreted as a total statement of withdrawal, "Upon Appleton House," is in fact and finally a statement of commitment to the world after all the inspired reflection upon seclusion is done: "The final import of "Upon Appleton House" is not its ostensible theme of withdrawal from the world (however desirable under the right conditions) but rather the need for involvement at this critical time in England's history."¹³ Lamenting that "'tis not what once it was, the World;/ but a rude heap together hurled," (l.761-2) Marvell's paean to nature is seen for what it is, an ironic dream of unattainable withdrawal into nature in the face of reality. The virtues of secluded contemplation in a rural setting are set forth as a practically unrealistic goal, dramatized by the poet's wishful thinking. So too Thoreau dramatizes the highest goal of man, solitary contemplation, in one entry, while in the next, like Marvell, he recognizes that a man must be engaged in real life: "It is a luxury to muse by a wall-side in the sunshine of a September afternoon,--to cuddle down under a gray stone, and hearken to the siren song of the cricket. Day and night seem henceforth but accidents, and the time is always a still even-tide, and as the close of a happy day." (Sep. 20, 1838; J, I, 59)

It is a fair sentiment of man at his most passive, immured from time's depredations and the world's bruises. It serves as a fine paraphrase for stanza LXXVI of "Upon Appleton House":

How safe, methinks, and strong, behind
 These Trees have I encamp'd my Mind;
 Where beauty, aiming at the Heart,
 Bends in some Tree its useless Dart;
 And where the World no certain Shot
 Can make, or me it toucheth not.
 But I on it securely play,
 And gaul its Horsemen all the Day.

There is an irony in the Marvellian confession of "incamping" his mind behind the safe and strong trees. The reader senses that the sentiment is more a wishful thought than an accomplished fact, or, if indeed it is an accomplished fact, the phrasing indicates that it is a very temporary one, unthinkable as a permanent solution for the man of action. Thoreau expresses more directly the central dilemma posed by the life of contemplation in a safe haven for the man who is acutely aware of what the poet Richard Wilbur was to call the "things of this world.":

How can a man sit down and quietly pare his nails, while the earth goes gyrating ahead amid such a din of sphere music, whirling him along about her axis some twenty-four thousand miles between sun and sun, but mainly in a circle some two millions of miles actual progress? And then such a hurly-burly on the surface--winds always blowing--now a zephyr, now a hurricane--tides never idle, ever fluctuating-- . . . and above all the incessant tinkering named "hum of industry," the hurrying to and fro and confused jabbering of men. Can man do less than get up and shake himself?

(March 6, 1838; J, I, 35)

In a sense, both Marvell and Thoreau represent not only the polarity between the private and the public life with its attendant ambivalence, but a compromise between the two as well. The compromise extends to a softening of the hard crystalline conceptualizations of

Donne and of Dickinson. Again Lord offers a good capsule distinction between the styles of Donne and Marvell: "The strength of Marvell's poetry rests finally not only on its irony, subtlety, and complexity, but also on its appeal to the sensual ear. Although he is a highly intellectual poet like Donne, Marvell eschews Donne's atonalities for more harmonious numbers."¹⁴ He substitutes more flowing cadences for Donne's more erratic and abrupt and arhythmic lines, and richer textures for Donne's stark imagery and bald phrasing. The style appears to mirror the attitude. Consider for a moment Donne's harsh adjuration to his unwanted company: "For God's sake, hold your tongue and let me love!" Or his irritable "Away thou fondling motley humorist, Leave mee," in the introduction to Satire I. And then consider the gentler more accommodating and infinitely less abrasive account of the hermetic life as sketched by Marvell. Note that the subject is plural, indicating that like Donne, his seclusion is shared by the chosen few or even one, to the exclusion of all others:

Within this holy leisure we
 Live innocently as you see.
 These Walls restrain the World without,
 But hedge our Liberty about.
 These Bars inclose that wider Den
 Of those wild Creatures, called Men.
 The Cloyster outward shuts its Gates,
 And, from us, locks on them the Grates.

"Upon Appleton House," Stanza XIII

Whereas Donne, like Dickinson later on, chases the world away, Marvell, like Thoreau, closes the gates to enclose a limited contemplative society, selected on the basis of harmony with the values of the private mode. In 1840, Thoreau envisioned such an exclusive

and limited society and wrote about it in language which approximates very closely the verse quoted above, with special emphasis upon the holiness or sacramental quality of the sequestered life:

I would live henceforth with some gentle soul
 such a life as may be conceived, double for
 variety, single for harmony,--two, only that
 we might admire at our oneness,--one, because
 indivisible. Such community to be a pledge of
 holy living. How could ought unworthy be ad-
 mitted into our society? To listen with one
 ear to each summer sound, to behold with one
 eye each summer scene, our visual rays so to
 meet and mingle with the object as to be one
 bent and doubled; with two tongues to be wear-
 ied, and thought to spring ceaselessly from
 a double fountain.

(Jan. 10, 1840; J, I, 113-4)

Compare the entry, which is Marvellian in its fluidity, in its sinuous line and combined sensuous and spiritual appeal, with Dickinson's imperious and terse announcement of the role played by the selective and authoritarian heart in its social prerogative. When the soul selects its society, she shuts the door indiscriminately on emperors and gladiators. The key descriptive for the exclusive soul is "unmoved." Then, in an abrupt final act, she closes "the valves of her attention--like Stone." It is a brilliant dual conception, the heart as valved machine, further dehumanized by the simile of the stone. (#303) It is dazzlingly metaphysical in its outlandishness, the very hallmark of metaphysical style, and it bears the mark of Donne's acerbic wit, just as Thoreau's passage is imitative of Marvell's yielding and more accommodating temperament. Dickinson's stance against the world is characterized by pugnacity: "I took my Power in my Hand--/ And went against the World--" she declares in #540. Like the boy David, she aimed her pebble, but

found it too heavy and literally knocked herself out with her own weapon: "Was it Goliath--was too large--/ Or was myself--too small?" The acerbity of her wit is marked by a puckishness, and, as in the poem quoted above, an occasional self-deprecation, which paradoxically intensifies the awareness of self. "The soul has bandaged moments," she writes of her solitary suffering, (#512) and in a similar metaphoric vein, she laments: "Narcotics cannot still the Tooth/ that nibbles at the soul--" (#501) She is the only genuinely comic metaphysical poet. In her hands wit becomes humor. Perhaps it is because she reduces serious pain to minor undignified nuisances which nibble at the soul rather than rend it in great heroic attacks. Certainly a bandage is a familiar and homely curative for minor bruises and hurts. Placing it in juxtaposition to the lofty soul creates a paradox of an inspired lunacy equivalent to the tooth's nibbling at the soul, producing a ludicrous toothache of the soul. Reducing the trials of the spirit to human and familiar size oddly enough does not diminish the self, but rather heightens one's awareness of the doughty soul going it alone. One realizes that the self-deprecation is a pose taken to arouse empathy with the human condition, not to draw sympathy for the brutalized soul. The soul in question has no need of ministrations in a personal way. It is absolutely self-sufficient and content in its solitary and exemplary being. "How powerful the Stimulus/ of an Hermetic Mind--" she exults. (#711) She requires no other spur to self-fulfillment;

713

Fame of Myself, to justify,
 All other Plaudit be
 Superfluous--An Incense
 Beyond Necessity--[sic]

Only supreme self-confidence could impel her in the second stanza to waive worldly fame, declaring that "This were an Honor honorless--/ a futile diadem." This poem, and a host of others similar to it in conception and imagery, gives the lie to the commonly held impression of Dickinson's retreat from the world. If one reads her poems celebrating reclusiveness with care, one must be impressed with the iron in the will and intellect which conceived them. Here is no ruminative Vaughan looking back on a world from which he had retreated in order to perfect the spirit. Dickinson begins with the premise that her spirit is perfected, and that she is therefore in danger from worldly contamination. Her posture is to stand fast and hold the world at bay. There is no vestige of discernible humility in her exclusivity. In one of her many ambiguous poems, she describes a single "guest" whom she admits into her company. Whether or not that guest is man or God, the important fact to be noted is that the poet does her entertaining at home. Unlike the more humble metaphysical poets, she does not stir abroad to seek God or man:

674

The Soul that hath a Guest
 Doth seldom go abroad--
 Diviner Crowd at Home--
 Obliterate the need--

Her crowd is always singular, a majority of one. The poem virtually shouts inflexibility, the inflexibility of the elect. One knows that this poet is in full control when one reads the controlling verb of the poem: "Obliterate." There is no doubt that this person is in command of her spiritual and social destiny, armed with a sure and unwavering understanding of right and wrong, worthy and friivolous goals, and the handful of select and consequential companions to be

chosen from the aspiring but inconsequential many. Her judgments often remind us of Donne's harsh and flat-out opening lines of "Communities": "Good wee must love, and must hate ill,/ For ill is ill, and good good still." The lack of compromise in the ideal expressed is mirrored in the strident style, the lines "close-packed and strenuous," the entire presentation typical of the "strong-lined" style of the seventeenth century poets.¹⁵

That Dickinson is the supremely self-confident mistress of her spiritual and moral self, with absolute sovereignty in all matters is apparent in every line:

677

To be alive--is Power--
Existence--in itself--
Without a further function--
Omnipotence--Enough--

The sheer arrogance of the pronouncement is staggering. This is not the neurasthenic recluse the world has envisioned, but rather the embodiment of the self-contained private human being with an unassailable inner life. One of the best expressions of her autonomy appears in this poem, which she sent to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1862:

683

The Soul unto itself
Is an imperial friend--
Or the most agonizing Spy--
An Enemy--could send--

Secure against it's own--
No treason it can fear--
Itself--it's Sovereign--of itself
The Soul should stand in Awe--

No wonder Higginson later wrote to his wife after his meeting with the withdrawn poet: "I never was with any one who drained my nerve

power more."¹⁶ This indeed was the daughter of the Puritans, one of the elect, always conscious of the special privileges and obligations accruing to the chosen, and above all, operating on the premise of the certitude of the soul's existence. For hers is an entirely moral universe. Within that circumscribed world, the soul has a particular function: to root out the bad and maintain the sovereignty of the good. One cannot imagine Dickinson ever asking the question that frequently plagued Thoreau: "Why always insist that men incline to the moral side of their being? Our life is not all moral. Surely, its phenomena deserve to be studied impartially." (June 15, 1840; J, I, 140) Perhaps it was roaming the woods which gave to Thoreau his expanded sense of community. One remembers Dickinson's letter to Higginson, in which she confides to him, "I do not cross my Father's ground to any House or town." (Letter #330) The confession makes us see even more clearly why "her business is circumference," while Thoreau's vision is naturally open-ended. Whereas Dickinson's vision was progressively limited by her increasing reclusiveness, Thoreau wove his observations from the mingled strands of individual philosophy and community experience. He was forever holding up to scrutiny the consequences of his own interaction with the people he met:

I distinguish between my actual and my real communication with individuals. I really communicate with my friends and congratulate myself and them on our relation and rejoice in their presence and society oftenest when they are personally absent. . . . Every one experiences that, while his relation to another actually may be one of distrust and disappointment, he may still have relations to him ideally and so really, in spite of both. He is faintly conscious of a satisfaction and confidence

somewhere, and all further intercourse is based on this experience of success.

(April 29, 1851; J, II, 183-4)

Thoreau demonstrates an apparent willingness to mull, to ponder, to make distinctions between one kind of society and the next, and between society and solitude, which is totally missing in Dickinson's poetry. Over and over he weighs the merits of solitude against the merits of the community. "In society, in the best institutions of men, I remark a certain precocity," he observes, pointing to the immaturity of most men, and the premature fixedness of their values. (Feb. 14, 1851; J, II, 160) He recognizes that his friends "wonder that [he] loves to walk alone in solitary fields and woods at night." (Sep., 1850; J, II, 63) Note, however, that in the one sentence he refers to his friends and his solitary state. He is obviously dependent upon their conversation and opinion. Still, when these same friends cohere into societal units, he is less charitable: "Wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions." (June, 1850; J, II, 40) A variety of epigrams is devoted to the subject of solitude and society: "Woe to him who wants a companion, for he is unfit to be the companion even of himself." (June, 1850; J, II, 33) Whatever his comments with respect to the community and the individual, the tone is reflective and corrective. It is strongly reminiscent of Herbert's "The Temple," with its hortatory injunctions to strive for a balance of character through proper education, charitable behavior, profitable solitude, and industry. "Flie idlenesse"; enjoins Herbert, "By all means use sometimes to be alone." Like the nineteenth century Yankee at Walden, he warns, "Be thriftie," and he

further urges his reader to "scorn no man's love," and not eschew the community of men. The emphasis is on the attainment of virtue and the perfection of the soul, so that one may be worthy to enter into God's temple undefiled. Although Thoreau recognized no institutional temple for his devotions, his meditations on perfectibility, with their nicely divided balance between societal and personal emphasis, bear the same lofty and measuring quality as Herbert's "Temple":

What more glorious condition of being can we imagine than from impure to be becoming pure? It is almost desirable to be impure that we may be the subject of this improvement. That I am innocent to my self! That I love and reverence my life! That I am better fitted for a lofty society today than I was yesterday! To make a life a sacrament! . . . May I so live and refine my life as fitting myself for a society ever higher than I actually enjoy. . . . Let me forever go in search of myself. . . . What temple, what fane, what sacred place can there be but the innermost part of my own being? . . . O my dear friends, I have not forgotten you. I will know you to-morrow. I associate you with my ideal self.

(July 19, 1851; J, II, 316)

Thoreau wrote this remarkably emotional excerpted entry on his thirty-fourth birthday, a period in his life which he laments is almost wholly unexpanded. "There is the instinct for society," he admits, "but no society." He has conceived a vision of the ideal for his life, but is hopelessly far away from its achievement. The entry is notable for its balance between the desired goal of an enriched inner life and its recognition of societal imperatives and demands on his social instincts. Unlike Dickinson, he is a man who recognizes the role which one is required to, and wishes to, fulfill in the social framework. Like Herbert, he recognizes the temple, the church porch, the windows and the floor, although, unlike Herbert, his temple might

be the community of Concord, where men will act out the purity or the impurity of their souls.

There is yet another way in which the Concord naturalist resembled his seventeenth century predecessors, again with particular emphasis on Herbert and Quarles. Marjorie Nicolson has described the metaphysical poets as advocating either "aspiration" or "content" in the face of the shattering "new philosophy" which destroyed all the old comfortable familiar certitudes of an anthropocentric universe, made of a "nest of concentric boxes," and offering evidence of stability and immutability. Donne she classifies as a "modern," the first to recognize the decay of the world in his "Anniversary" poems, and to respond with alternations of despair and faith. His contemporaries she divides between those who, faced with the truths of the "breaking of the circle," advocate contentment and restraint, or a limitation on their expectations, and those who substitute aspiration for the old shattered beliefs. Of the latter group, Traherne was the leading exponent; of the former, Herbert, with Marvell and Quarles in general philosophical concurrence. Donne and others swung between the limits of both attitudes.¹⁷ Thoreau, the prudent Yankee, counseled the same variety of limitation on one's expectations that Herbert did, emphasizing the enrichment of the inner life as a response to the insecurity and instability of a rapidly changing and degenerating world. There is not much difference between the man who declared that it was not necessary to go round the world in order to count the cats in Zanzibar and the man who scorned the "philosophers" who have "measured mountains,/ fathome'd the depths of the seas, of states, and kings,/ walk'd with a staffe to heav'n," but neglected the

state of their inner life. (Herbert, "The Agonie") Thoreau, the poet who had "traveled a great deal in Concord," is as much an exponent of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy as his predecessors. In the pursuit of this philosophy of restraint or limitation, he is, oddly enough, a conservative, much as were Herbert and Marvell, in spite of the fact that we are wont to regard him as a radical.

There is a strong resemblance between the poem, "The Agonie," quoted above and the following entry in the Journal: "A man must generally get away some hundreds or thousands of miles from home before he can be said to begin his travels. Why not begin his travels at home? Would he have to go far or look very closely to discover novelties. . . . It takes a man of genius to travel in his own country, in his native village; to make any progress between his door and his gate. But such a traveller will make the distances which Hanno and Marco Polo and Cook and Ledyard went over ridiculous." (Aug. 6, 1851; J, II, 376) It is not mere provincialism or insularity which prompts the conviction. A day earlier he enters the following reflection: "As the twilight deepens and the moonlight is more and more bright, I begin to distinguish myself, who I am and where; as my walls contract, I become more collected and composed, and sensible of my own existence, as when a lamp is brought into a dark apartment and I see who the company are. With the coolness and the mild silvery light, I recover some sanity, my thoughts are more distinct, moderated and tempered." (Aug. 5, 1851; J, II, 376) The descriptives, "moderated" and "tempered" are clues to the attitude of restraint and limitation as the key to happiness. He is quick to disclaim novelty for its own sake: "A mere and utter novelty is a mere monstrosity to me."

(Aug. 6, 1851; J, II, 376) And he is not eager to applaud science for its innovativeness: "One sentence of perennial poetry would make me forget, would atone for, volumes of mere science. The astronomer is as blind to the significant phenomena, or the significance of phenomena, as the wood-sawyer who wears glasses to defend his eyes from sawdust. The question is not what you look at, but what you see."

(Aug. 5, 1851; J, II, 376) In the context of this personal philosophy, Thoreau may not be regarded either as a modern or as an aspiring spirit. Dickinson displays a greater adventurousness in her applause of the "microscope" which is "prudent in an emergency," and her sense of excitement at the coming of the railroad, which "neighs like Boanerges" as it gallops full-tilt through the peaceful Connecticut River valley. (#185, #447) Thoreau, however, in his dismissal of the "blind" astronomer, takes a leaf from Herbert's book, in particular that one on which the poem "Vanitie" is inscribed. Long before Thoreau's disaffection with the tools of science, Herbert dismissed the "fleet astronomer" as well as the "subtle chymic," and all those who sought to enlarge the universe through their scientific discoveries:

The fleet Astronomer can bore,
And thred the spheres with his quick-piercing minde,

With all his ingenuity and technical proficiency, at the end man will be capable only of finding his "deare God, who yet his glorious law embosoms in us . . . love and awe." Not expansionists but rather contractionists of human experience are they both. Their mutually shared goal is intensification of the inner life, arrived at through a turning inward and extracting the essence of all experience. Nicolson reminds us that Herbert had followed, as

did his brother and in fact every member of his family, all the varieties of the new science in progress: astronomy, old and new, physical science and the new technology involved in voyages, but his was not a restless or aspiring mind. His state of spiritual contentment may best be described in the poem "Content":

Give me the pliante minde, whose gentle measure
Complies and suits with all estates;
Which can let loose to a crown, and yet with pleasure
Take up within a cloister gate.

Thoreau is also a staunch advocate of the "pliant mind."

He deplores the men of science who refer to God in detached fashion as "the Almighty Designer." (Mar. 8, 1859; J, XII, 28) In this respect, he resembles Sir Thomas Browne as much as he does Herbert. Oddly enough, Browne, himself a physician and a man of science, may be regarded along with Herbert as a man of restraint and limitation, because of the deep primary reservoir of his faith, which always serves to temper his aspirations. One entry of Thoreau's is as reminiscent of Browne as it is of Herbert. A part of this entry has been cited elsewhere in this paper as evidence of Thoreau's religious commitment. That selection was also in the spirit of Browne in its stress upon the essence of universal knowledge, which is knowable only through reverence for the universe itself. In the excerpts quoted below one may detect the combined influence of Browne, the reverential scientist, and Herbert, the pliant mind:

The mystery of the life of plants is kindred with our own lives, and the physiologist must not presume to explain their growth according to mechanical laws, or as he might explain some machinery of his own making. We must not expect to probe with our fingers the sanctuary of any life, whether animal or vegetable. If we do, we shall discover nothing but surface still. . . . Science is often like the grub which, though it may have nestled in the germ of a fruit, has merely blighted or consumed it and never truly tasted it.

(Mar. 7, 1859; J, XII, 23)

For the men of aspiration, those men of science who sought to expand man's horizons of knowledge to the detriment of the soul's well being, Herbert has a word of caution: "Content thee, greedie heart, modest and moderate joyes to those that have title to more." ("The Size") Herbert is as much concerned with the greed to know as he is with the greed to own or acquire. Both dehumanize. So too does Thoreau deplore the "greed" of science:

Science is inhuman. Things seen with a microscope begin to be insignificant. So described, they are as monstrous as if they should be magnified a thousand diameters. Suppose I should see and describe men and houses and trees and birds as if they were a thousand times larger than they are! With our prying instruments we disturb the balance and harmony of nature.

(May 1, 1859; J, XIII, 172)

In his concern with the preservation of the balance and harmony of nature, Thoreau mirrors Herbert's concern with the modest and moderate joys of man. The one is the microcosm of the other just as both are expressions of the private mode, that approach to

existence which is in one form or another the prevalent mode of communication in the metaphysical community of both periods.

Notes

¹Earl Miner, The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley (Princeton, 1969), pp. 3-5.

²Sona Raiziss, The Metaphysical Passion (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 100.

³John Donne, Sermons (Berkeley, 1957), III, p. 368.

⁴John Donne: The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford, 1952), p. ix.

⁵Miner, p. 8.

⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁷William R. Sherwood, Circumference and Circumstance: Stages in the Mind and Art of Emily Dickinson (New York, 1968), pp. 65-66.

⁸It is known that she read Emerson's essay, "Poetry," but not that she read any of his others.

⁹The chapter entitled "The Death of the World" in Marjorie Nicolson's The Breaking of the Circle offers one of the most detailed explanations of Jacobean melancholy, its source, and its effect on seventeenth-century literature.

¹⁰I think, although I have no firm proof, that the poem refers to John Brown. Although she had no recourse to Thoreau's Journal, the reference to the "divine spark" and the treatment accorded Brown are uncannily like Thoreau's. She read The Springfield Daily Republican faithfully, and all the papers were filled with accounts of Brown's "insanity." A more concrete proof rests on the fact that the poem was written in 1862, the year in which the poet undertook her celebrated correspondence with Thomas Higginson. At that time Higginson was known as a good abolitionist, with particularly strong sympathy for John Brown and his cause. He had arranged to have some rifles transferred to Brown at Harper's Ferry, and had befriended runaway slaves and plotted the escape of many others. He was himself at that time a colonel in charge of a black regiment, and had personally taken John Brown's wife on a futile errand to see her husband before his execution. (The details of these events are given in Chapter XI of Genevieve Taggard's biography, The Heart and the Mind of Emily Dickinson, 160-167. The Springfield Republican, under the editorship of her good friend Samuel Bowles, carried all the news of Brown's exploits, and Emily carried on a heavy correspondence during

that entire year with Higginson. It is entirely possible that the subject of Brown's "insanity" and martyrdom should have appeared in the contents of those letters. In addition, she followed the events of the war assiduously, mainly out of concern for Austin's friends, George Gould and Frazar Stearns. The latter was killed in 1862, "his big heart shot away by a minie ball." (Letter #255)

¹¹Miner, pp. 43-45.

¹²Andrew Marvell Complete Poetry, ed. George DeF. Lord (New York, 1968), p. xxvi.

¹³Ibid., p. xxvi.

¹⁴Ibid., p. xxviii.

¹⁵J. B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne (London, 1951), p. 11.

¹⁶The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1958), Letter #342B, p. 476.

¹⁷Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (New York, 1960), pp. 166-204.

Chapter VII

"Nature's Mystick Book": The Natural Universe

(Andrew Marvell, from "Upon Appleton House")

Because the most prominent member of the seventeenth century school of metaphysical poets has been regarded traditionally as an urban poet, the entire movement is often considered to be urban in origin and in interest. While it is perfectly true that John Donne might be judged to be primarily urban in his attitudes, with the church and the court his major preoccupation, it is not equally true of other metaphysical poets, particularly Vaughan and Marvell, and in some measure, Herbert. Nature plays a large role in the poetry of Vaughan. A passionate devotee of Augustinian meditation, he enlarged nature's role in the attainment of grace, casting the natural universe as an analogue to man's state of grace or sin. Elsewhere in this paper, in the chapter on religion, I have pointed out Louis Martz's observation of Vaughan's linking of the triad of nature, the self, and scripture in a harmonious "reading" of the universe. This is a particularly Augustinian mode, consisting of three sequential steps, each interlocked spiritually with each other. In Augustinian terms then: "Man, enlightened by Biblical

revelation, can grasp the . . . traces of God in external nature; and from this knowledge he can turn inward to find the Image of God within himself."¹ Thus Vaughan, in a variety of religious poems, turns to nature for the authentic setting and experience and model which will lead him to grace. The poem "Mount of Olives" utilizes nature for just such a religious end, establishing a parity between the beauty of nature and the blossoming of the spirit. The first is not diminished by the second, but rather leads inexorably to the aggrandizement of the one to the other:

So have I known some beauteous Paisage rise
 In suddain flowres and arbours to my Eies,
 And in the depths and dead of winter bring
 To my Cold thoughts a lively sense of spring.

In the true metaphysical tradition, the metaphor is spun out and consistent. External nature, so productive and dynamic, provides the metaphor for the analogue and the abstract, describing the stirring of the spirit into life in terms of the burgeoning of nature. This is a direct application of the Augustinian mode of meditation, in which the penitent turns to nature for instruction in the perfection of the inner life. In the Confessions, St. Augustine frequently asks "the Sunne, and Moone, and Starres," as well as the "Sea and the deepes, and the creeping things" to guide him to a more authentic organic inner life. (Confessions, 10.6)

The Augustinian mode is often present in Dickinson's vast

body of nature poetry. Primarily a nature poet as is Thoreau, she does not limit her uses of nature to any one approach. Still, nature for her is often a mirror of the spirit, a vehicle for the inner life. She begins with the premise that nature is divine:

1183

Step lightly on this narrow spot--
 The broadest Land that grows
 Is not so ample as the Breast
 These Emerald Seams enclose.

The audience is enjoined to reverence nature because it is invested with a divine "anima." Thus the ground is laid for the poet to mine the associations between the power of nature and the aspirations of man. Sometimes nature herself provides the reminder of our life's sanctity by virtue of her accoutrements: "The Butterfly's Assumption Gown/ In Chrysophrase Apartments hung/ This afternoon put on--." (1244) This is imagery at its most flamboyant, incorporating the natural, the regal and the sacred into one sense impression. But it is a nature poem, with the understanding that in metaphysical poetry there is no such thing as a poem which is only a nature poem. It is also hortatory, religious, moralistic and mystical. Often, as it occurs in the Augustinian meditation and in Vaughan's poetry, nature and human nature are not merely analogous to one another but are fused into an indistinguishable whole:

1286

I thought that nature was enough
 Till Human nature came
 But that the other did absorb
 As Parallax a Flame--

This last is a particularly metaphysical approach to nature, marked by the extraordinary simile of a geometric phenomenon to describe the absorption of human nature by the larger mass of nature, with its added component of the Divine (stanza II). The term "parallax" would have enchanted Donne, with his geometer's angle of vision.

Nature is sentient as well as moral. Dickinson infuses it with intellect as well as anima. After all, intellect is the very source of wit, and in Dickinson's cosmos, nature is supremely witty in its many manifestations. The mushroom is the "Elf of Plants, . . . Vegetation's Juggler and Nature's Apostate." (#1298) Even the vast Sahara is capable of intellection: "Until the Desert knows/ that Water grows/ His Sands suffice/ But let him once suspect/ That Caspian Fact/ Sahara dies." (#1291) Hyperbole aside, the poem indicates a serious confidence in the wisdom of nature, a quality which arises from its absolute and unquestionable authenticity. This integrity inspires Dickinson to write still another panegyric to nature, this time aimed at the integrity of the heavens:

1299

(second stanza)

Enchantment's Perihelion
 Mistaken oft has been
 For the Authentic orbit
 Of it's Anterior Sun.

Here nature provides the analogue, as she often does, for the human condition. The lesser experience is weighed against the greater and found wanting, just as the point in the path of the planet or the celestial body in front of the sun is not in the "authentic" orbit of the sun but of a lesser astral body. Again the astronomical analogy would have delighted Donne and Browne. Nature, her rhythms and seasons, provides the richest source of materials for Dickinson's astonishing wit. In characterizing the essence of nature, she resorts to the extremes of linguistic possibility. She stretches the limits of language and sometimes even goes outside the conventions of language to achieve her metaphysical effects:

1316

Winter is good--his Hoar Delights
 Italic flavor yield--
 To Intellects inebriate
 With Summer, or the World--

Generic as a Quarry
 And hearty--as a Rose--
 Invited with Asperity
 But welcome as he goes.

The poem incorporates all the devices of metaphysical style. First,

nature is sentient and possessed of personality. It exercises power over the human heart and mind and provides an analogue to human behavior. Most important, however, is the wit with which winter is characterized. Its flavor or character is described as an italic, a punctuation device denoting emphasis. This particular kind of imagery, which rests on signals for structural clarification rather than conventional imagery, is a particularly Dickinsonian contribution to metaphysical wit, engendered by the felt need to go beyond conventional tools to intensify communication and pinpoint specific meaning. It is a device which occurs often in her poetry, producing the shock effect which is a prevalent element in metaphysical writing. In another poem, she uses another punctuation mark to produce a similar effect, this time with the additional incorporation of a pun into the metaphor. Again, the subject is nature, specifically astral: "For what are Stars but Asterisks/ To point a human Life?" (#1638)

A further intensification of the poem's impact on the senses resides in the state of "inebriation" which nature induces in her votaries. The hyperbole is not uncommon in Dickinson's nature poetry. If the state of the metaphysical soul is to be distinguished from others by its expansion of sensibility, then the exaggeration of response to nature may be appropriately expressed in terms of

inebriation. In another nature poem, she extends the metaphor of drunkenness to include debauchery: "Inebriate of Air am I/ And Debauchee of Dew," she exults in a long-drawn conceit based on the experience and language of a drunken spree. The image is drawn of the "tippler" "reeling" from "inns" of "molten blue," and in an alternate version to the published poem, "staggering toward the sun." Even the attendant seraphs are drawn into the bacchanal, "swinging their snowy Hats." (#214) One forgives the "pathetic fallacy" of the "drunken Bee" being turned out of the "Foxglove's door," because the poet has accomplished her intention--the heightening of experience through the most far-ranging techniques at her command. Further, one accepts the concept of the inebriation of the intellect with summer's delights in the previously quoted #1316, if one accepts Mario Praz's definition of metaphysical poetry as a "spiritualization of the senses," quoted in the chapter on religion. Further, there is metaphysical precedent for the state of "inebriation" as a figurative description for the heightening of the senses. Crashaw makes ample use of the figure. In "Ode on a Prayer Book" he writes of "pure inebriating pleasures," (L. 120) a paradoxical figure denoting the expansion of spiritual pleasure. In "The Tragedy of Christ's Suffering," the poet experiences a "sweet inebriated ecstasy": (L. 54) in his religious exaltation. Crashaw's

acute exhilaration originates in the headiness of religious inebriation; Dickinson's in the revelries of nature. (pp. 75 and 83 in The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw, ed. by G. W. Williams)

Finally, our conception of the magnitude of nature is forced in #1316 to extend beyond the conventional approach to its seasons by the poet's unexpected angle of vision. The poet's description of winter as "generic as a quarry" makes us see nature as the very source of our lives. The quarry is, after all, the natural source and storehouse of precious substances associated with underground storage, as indeed, is winter itself. The "hoar delights" of winter, if they are welcomed at all, are greeted with "asperity," an abrasive term appropriate to the season. Appropriateness in combination with unexpectedness form the keystone of the metaphysical poet's approach to nature. The approaches vary, but the intention is always the same: to modify the sensibility through the reorientation of the senses.

Dickinson's poetry stretches the senses through the fusion, and occasionally the controlled confusion, of the responses of the senses to the external stimuli in nature. In the month of March, in the year 1886, recovering from a lengthy illness, the poet wrote a letter to her "little cousins," Louise and Fanny Norcross, of her desire for recovery as a "pink and russet" hope. (Letter #1034)

She might have found some support for her emotional evaluation of the spectrum from a later American, blind from infancy, whose assigned values of colors were based upon the reaction, not of the eye, but of the mind. This instinct for color, probably inborn in man, is defined with provocative emphasis on its emotional significance in Helen Keller's autobiography of the senses, The World I Live In:

"I understand how scarlet can differ from crimson because I know that the smell of an orange is not the smell of the grapefruit.

. . . The force of association drives me to say that white is exalted and pure, green is exuberant, red suggests love or shame or strength. . . . I habitually think of things as colored and resonant." It is only the last sentence which is of interest in the present instance. The definition of things as both colored and resonant could easily have been written by Dickinson, whose poetry in particular eclipsed the conventional response of the senses to any given stimulus. She saw and heard with simultaneous impact the "resonance of emerald" and the "rush of cochineal" in the flight of the hummingbird, achieving a synaesthesia or fusion of the senses remarkable in an artist whose only tool was the written word. (#1463) This immediacy of sense impression and vitality of evocation, which do not appear again in American nature poetry until E. E. Cummings,² are the end products of willful blindness

to traditionally assigned sensual responses and a perverse realignment of unprecedented and totally private interpretations of the familiar colors of nature. For Dickinson's approach to nature is entirely in the private mode outlined by Earl Miner and discussed earlier in this essay as the mode which marks the metaphysical mind.

It appears that Emily Dickinson's feelings often exploded into unorthodox bursts of color entirely uncharacteristic of the tranquil, rural world she lived in. "Color's revelations" broke and blazed like the butterflies that populated her poems. (#496) The messages borne by the colors were bold and unconventional, often betokening extreme peril, much as Crashaw's visions of the natural universe often mirrored the soul in peril. To the hypersensitive spirit, color is not merely a clue to some private vision but a reflection of a crisis of the soul. The reds and whites of Crashaw's landscapes are seventeenth century cases in point as are the significant hues of Marvell's "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn." In Dickinson's poetry, the colors of nature subvert their traditional associations. The color of the grave is green, (#411), a color traditionally reserved for the burgeoning, not the decay, of nature. Like her contemporary, Whitman, she chooses to emphasize the cyclical rebirth in death rather than its finality. In her gardens, spiders spin during the long and lightless

white nights. (#1138) Shrouds and bridal gowns are first confused and then fused into simultaneous image of whiteness below the ground.

(#712) I think that Blake, whose gardens were planted with poison trees and sick roses and whose baby nurses wore green faces, would probably have understood the threatening aspects of Dickinson's landscapes, the macabre "purple moats" (#265) and "violet noons."

(#469) The "green chill" of the wind that blows in like an "emerald ghost" (#1593) bespeaks a view of nature which can be malevolent, or, which is even worse, accidental, and thus immoral:

1624

Apparently with no surprise
 To any happy Flower
 The Frost beheads it at it's play--
 In accidental power--
 The blonde Assassin passes on--
 The Sun proceeds unmoved
 To measure off another Day
 For an Approving God.

The profound skepticism at the center of this poem is equivalent to Donne's pessimism as it is expressed in "The Anniversaries" as the decay of nature. In R. G. Collingwood's phrase, "instead of being an organism, the natural world is a machine," without intelligence or conscience.³ This idea of the world as mechanism permeates Dickinson's #1624. Anderson proposes that the poet is occasionally "haunted by the suspicion that at its center nature is only automatic process, without any meaning of a sort that the conscious mind can recognize. . . . The parts of nature

seem to have some relation with one another--flowers succumb to frost and this in turn must go when the sun comes out again--but the relation is unmotivated and unconscious. It is simply the automatic function of frost to freeze, of flowers to die when cold, of the sun to measure time."⁴ Because Dickinson is not a didactic poet, she does not stress the human analogy to the "happy flower" and its untimely demise; the parallel is implicit because of the extensive personification in the poem. The flower is happy because it is "at its play" when the "blonde Assassin" strikes without warning and without conscience. The symbolic relationship between the death of Elizabeth Drury and the death of the world in Donne's "An Anatomie of the World" is reversed in Dickinson's universe. The absolute detachment of the agencies of nature, sun, and frost, who complete their work for an "approving God," is reflected in the tone of the poem, which is ironic on many levels. The sun "proceeds unmoved" is an obvious pun and paradox combination. Its manifold subtleties are developed by Anderson to bring out all the nuances of the "prime mover" in conflict with the unsympathetic or unmoved concept of the Deity.⁵ Further, frost as a blonde assassin is a subversion of the stereotype of the dark villain, adding to an ambiguity already present in consequence of its acting as independent power free of the jurisdiction of a God who approves of his haphazard villainy.

If there is a design in nature, the poet seems to be saying, it is an amoral pattern.

The paradoxes in nature intensify its ambiguity. It is not that nature is unpredictable, but rather that sometimes we experience something other than we confidently expect. The daily phenomenon of sunset, with its lengthening shadows and gradual obscurity, promotes visions and illusions denied to us in broad daylight:

1609

Sunset that screens, reveals--
 Enhancing what we see
 By menaces of Amethyst
 And Moats of Mystery.

The poem is a witty progression, proceeding with internal logic from paradox to revelation to terror to ultimate puzzlement. We see both more and less through the tricks played on our vision by the deepening shadows which separate us from the natural world all around us. The association of amethyst, a deep smoky purple, with menace, is not a synaesthetic ploy, but rather an expansion of the psychic response to color.

A great many of nature's colors are filled with peril, even if they are the "perils of ecstasy." (Letter #989) Nature, she blithely lies, rarely uses yellow (#1045), but when she does, she endows it with chilling qualities. Yellow is full of menace: Seas

are yellow (266) and the snake in the grass is a "long long yellow."

(#416) Yellow itself is suspect and appears in inverse proportion to the security of the familiar world, staining the universe with an unearthly and often surrealistic tint. Lightning, sepulchral and alarming, passes with "yellow feet" (#630), and of course, that seasonal villain, frost, comes prematurely, with blood-chilling nonchalance, in the guise of a yellow-haired assassin, to lay waste the flowers.

In Dickinson's private nightmare world, the strong colors play a dramatic role. Bursts of ominous purple, dazzling and imperial, crowd the imagination of the shy, neurotic poet. Even though her plain good sense warns her that purple is "teazing" (sic) and not to be trusted (#239), it is nonetheless a focal color. Moats, ships, and brooks are purple (#122, #266, #265), anticipating Stephen Crane's threatening horizons, along which "purple winds [go] moaning."⁶ Dickinson's meek spirit is intimidated by purple (#98), especially when she perceives it is a nightmare vision of a "purple finger on the slope" in bizarre company with the "print of a vermilion foot." (#140) The pomp implicit in purple fascinates the quaint daughter of the Puritans, to whom the exotic indiscriminate hummingbird appeared with regularity in her familiar landscape as a self-contradictory "purple democrat." (#380) "The hills erect their purple heads," (#1688) says the poet in a homely tribute to her

familiar native hills of the upper Connecticut River Valley, whose hues are sufficiently striking to cause Thornton Burgess at a later date to name them the Purple Mountains in his children's tales. In Dickinson's vivid imagination these same hills become transmuted into the great peaks of the volcanic mountains that traverse the largest of the Canary Islands--never seen by the poet in her lifetime:

Ah, Teneriffe--Receding Mountain--
Purple of Ages halt for you--⁷

The poet stands in awe of purple; she finds it in the main overwhelming and sinister. Occasionally she musters her courage and attempts the light touch: "The purple ribaldry of morning" (#592) and the "purple shoes" of March (#1213) are whimsical and even coy, but the true purpleness of purple, its amethyst menace, its regality and mystery, are the dominant emotional equivalents of the color.

In the company of purple, the poet often sees red. Red appears in riotous shades and tones, often in conflict and emitting waves of tension. "Whole gulfs--of Red, and Fleets of Red--/ and Crews of solid Blood" (#658) appear as the "Authorized Arrays" of sunset. Landscapes are tinged with sanguine hues:

656

The name of its is "Autumn"--
The hue of it is Blood--
An Artery upon the Hill--
A Vein along the Road--

The gruesome anatomical imagery, again reminiscent of the florid word paintings of Crashaw, is amplified and stained more garishly with "great globules in the alleys" and "scarlet rain" that spills into the "ruddy pools" and eddies away in "vermillion wheels." Red appears in a varied number of shades from scarlet to carmine to the terrifying crimson of blood. Within the threatened privacy of the poet's mind's eye, "day's departing tide oozes in crimson bubbles." (#28) Red alternately stimulates and depletes her. "The Red upon the Hill," which she sees--in the manner of metaphysical poets--as an emblem of God's fearful presence, "taketh away [her] will." (#155) The rubies which cram the treasure house of her fancy excite her because they are "like the Evening Blood," (#223) a deranged metaphor for the setting sun. The excesses of her imagery, designed to express both the ecstasy and terror of her response to nature, often result in ghoulish fantasies like Crane's later exaggerated word-paintings of a fearsome world that glows with a "dire red stain."⁸

Other intriguing deployments of color in the nature poetry must be classified as metaphysical in the very special sense in which Oscar Williams defines the term. "Metaphysical," says Williams, is also the name for a particular "condition of poetry, . . . when the poetry goes inward, becomes least public, least professional, most speculative." The term, in Williams' judgment, applies

most particularly to poets like Dickinson for the reason that "there is a metaphysical temperament . . . which transcends other distinctions and links together poets of a special intelligence, psychological complexity, and high linguistic inventiveness, who may be removed from one another by centuries, by language, and by quite different cultures and beliefs."⁹ The most striking evidence of this complex temperament is the poet's ability to visualize the exotic in terms of the familiar and homely, and conversely, the homely and familiar in terms entirely personal and often exotic. Thus the poet transforms the familiar Amherst countryside into the splendor of "opal cattle" on a "sapphire farm." (#628) The agency for the transmission of the eccentric vision is color. Amherst is transformed into exotic far away places like Cashmere (#179) and Tenerife (#300, #666) and the Himalayas. (#252, #350, #481, #682) These imagined realms are painted in the jewel tones of pearl, emerald, amethyst, and topaz. The sloops which transport the poet to these fancied destinies are made of precious amber (#1272) and when she arrives, she discovers that the hillsides are littered with "duds of emerald." (#219) The unfolding of an ordinary day is etched in "hindered rubies" and "breadths of topaz." (#304) Like Crane's "chorus of colors" which comes over the waters in songs of carmine, violet, green, and gold,¹⁰ her morning skies appear in emotional

rhythms: slashes of blue, sweeps of gray, scarlet patches, waves of gold. Her every effort is bent on communicating the incommunicable, the transcendent and insupportable joy of seeing.

It would be both pretentious and high-handed to draw hard or facile conclusions about Dickinson's emotional complexion from the evidence of the nature imagery presented here. Her dazzling syn-aesthetic effects, such as the blue buzz of the fly at the moment of receding consciousness in the instant of death, (#465) are of greater value as evidence of her metaphysical temperament which governs her approach to life than of any actual experience with the borderline moment between living and dying. When she colors the grave white, (#411) she is at her most ambiguous by virtue of the inherent mystery in whiteness. It is simultaneously colorless, obliterating, sacrosanct, and morbid. At the same time, the pinwheels of color which whirl within her mind illuminate a fantasy world hidden from a gross humanity. One can only conclude that there is as much of Dante's fear and trembling in her emotional response to nature as there is of Emerson's tranquillity. Her inner life is phantasmagoric, perhaps in counter-reaction to the austerity of her daily life, presided over by that "vieille roche of Puritanism," her father, a man who read "lonely and rigorous books." (Letter 342a)¹¹

To her, nature is not man's ally or his extension in the Emersonian

sense, but frequently inimical, harboring as much peril as ecstasy. Perhaps a clue may be found in her famous self-introduction to Higginson: "Forgive me if I am frightened. I never see strangers." (Letter 342a) Her timidity, clashing with her bold imagination, may be responsible for those bloody landscapes, those threatening purple skies, the menace of those amethyst moats. If indeed the consciously repudiated Calvinist Jehovah still crowds her unconscious mind, then those hot and pallid colors of her landscapes might provide a useful index to her terror. In other words, a fearsome powerful nature replaces the abandoned formalized fearsome deity of her heritage. Her natural surroundings thus are transformed by her oblique angle of vision into meaningful and emotionally charged settings for the psychic life which is translated into multi-colored explosions behind her closed eyelids. Color in nature not only releases her from the factual "dun" of her daily existence, (#473) but puts her in the company of feudal ladies and earls and Eastern potentates. (#473)

For the purpose of clarifying this analysis of nature's connection with Dickinson's psychic state, let me at once state that I am aware of the danger inherent in the contention that the poet's emotional life may be judged on the evidence of her poetry. I agree with Kermode when he declares that Marvell's "Garden"

ought not to be read as spiritual autobiography, with nature as the setting intended to reflect the poet's state of mind.¹² I believe it is similarly misapplied scholarship to conclude that Dickinson's powerful nature poetry is entirely indicative of a disturbed or disoriented spiritual state. However, Oscar Williams has observed that the metaphysical poets were given to making "personal inventories of their inner conflicts" and dramatizing them in concrete form.¹³ Dickinson's inner life is in that sense dramatized through the metaphor of nature in her various moods and shadings as is Marvell's and Thoreau's. It is in this light that Thoreau's nature writing must be investigated so that it will satisfy the purpose of this study. To claim any intention of dealing with all of Thoreau's responses to nature or even to come to any unified conclusions would be foolhardy if not impossible. Thoreau as naturalist--the role which he himself assessed as primary in his life--has been evaluated and brought into literary and historical perspective by scholars and historiographers and naturalists from Havelock Ellis to Norman Forester. Therefore, it is not to Thoreau as naturalist that these comments will be addressed, but to Thoreau the nature writer whose reflections about the natural universe offer indications of the metaphysical cast of mind.

First, one must deal with Thoreau's preoccupation with decay

in nature, an absorption which he shares with his seventeenth century precursor, John Donne. Elsewhere in this paper Donne's enunciation of the decay of nature has been explored as the consequence of the impact of the new rational science on the traditional world picture of theological ordering of cosmic harmony and unity. The primary vehicle for this point of view is, of course, the first of "The Anniversaries," which is a threnody for the death of the body of the world. In an article forthcoming in PMLA in 1974, entitled "Scatology and Eschatology: The Heroic Dimension in Thoreau's Wordplay," Michael West, the author, contends that Thoreau's view of nature is marked by a preoccupation with decay, a product of something which he calls Thoreau's "excremental vision."¹⁴ He cites a number of instances in Walden and the Journal in which the scatological punning on human and natural functions is centered on the processes of waste and decay. The flatulency of the pond, the double intention in the description of "squatting," the watering of the bushes as well as the frequent use of the metaphor of the bowels--in the physiological and not in the Biblical sense--all denote to the author of the article a morbid preoccupation with decay in nature as an expression of skepticism about the human condition. Certainly the passages are common to Thoreau's nature writings. One of the most explicit occurs in Chapter 17, "Spring," in Walden

and bears quoting because of the consistency of its decay imagery applied to a scene of natural burgeoning in the first thaw of spring:

"This phenomenon (the flow of sand in consequence of thaw) is more exhilarating to me than the luxuriance and fertility of vineyards.

True, it is somewhat excrementitious in its character, and there is no end to the heaps of liver, lights, and bowels, as if the globe were turned wrong side outward." The passage continues with

the figurative language of decay, making reference to the "purgative" role of nature in ridding the earth of its "fumes and indigestion," an indication that "at least Nature has some bowels."

Further, the compost is described as "foliaceous heaps" lying along the bank like "the slag of a furnace, showing that Nature is 'in

full blast' within." The frequent wordplay alone is indicative of the metaphysical style in its punning, analogies and varieties of

wordplay. More to the point, however, is the human and social equivalent which Thoreau draws from his observations of cyclical

decay in nature. Although his conclusions are most frequently

optimistic in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne in his Religio Medici,

on occasion they are pessimistic in the manner of Donne. Two

separate Journal entries may be quoted to document Thoreau's

periodic skeptical interpretation of decay or death in nature as

symbolic of the decline of the human condition. The first is an

account of a parasol fungus' rapid wasting away after it had been plucked: "It defiled all it touched. . . . Probably one night produced it, and in one day, with all our pains, it wasted away. Is it not a giant mildew or mould? . . . The mould, which is the flower of humid darkness and superstition. . . . Slavery is such a mould and superstition." (June 18, 1853: J, V, 274) Inordinately responsive to the moods as well as to the species in nature, he broods:

A cold and dark afternoon, the sun being behind clouds in the west. The landscape is barren of objects, the trees being leafless, and so little light in the sky for variety. Such a day as will almost oblige a man to eat his own heart. . . . Finding yourself yoked to Matter and Time. Truly a hard day, hard times these! Not a mosquito left. Not an insect to hum. Crickets gone into winter quarters. Friends long since gone there, and you left to walk on frozen ground, with your hands in your pockets. . . . What do the thoughts find to live on? What avails you now the fire you stole from heaven? Does not each thought become a vulture to gnaw your vitals? . . . You are as dry as a farrow cow. . . .

(Nov. 13, 1851; J, III, 112)

Even more pessimistic is the occasional entry which reveals the author's skepticism about any meaningful design in nature, imputing to her a haphazardness reminiscent of some of Dickinson's suspicions about the amoral and random power of nature: "I remarked how many old people died off on the approach of the present spring. It is said that when the sap begins to flow in the trees our diseases

become more violent. It is now advancing toward summer apace, and we seem to be reserved to taste its sweetness, but to perform what great deeds? Do we detect the reason why we also did not die on the approach of spring?" (April 9, 1856; J, VIII, 269)

It is Krutch's opinion that entries such as the former-- which he does not cite, but which illustrates his point very well --are indicative of the fact that "Thoreau came ultimately to suspect something Copernican in nature's plan and more and more he found himself somewhat unwillingly cultivating a kind of objectivity which rejects all the too facile interpretations of natural metaphors."¹⁵ He hastens to point out, however, that Thoreau never relinquished one attitude for the other, and that all his life he continued to entertain the polarities of interpretation of the evidence which nature provided for man's enlightenment, and thus his "profoundest thinking" about nature remained "dialectic" rather than consistent.¹⁶

The other and more common polarity in Thoreau's approach to nature was the assignment of deep moral and spiritual meaning to natural phenomena and an attendant search for clues in nature to provide man with a guide for his behavior and, more important, the formation of a philosophy of living. Nature remained the basic source of truth for the man of conscience. Thinking about

nature was secondary to primary awareness of nature through participation in her processes and reliance upon her certainties. "Once I was part and parcel of Nature; now I am observant of her," he stated in 1852. The process required a certain objectification for the purpose of detachment necessary to cull the lesson from the events of nature. Looking down from Fair Haven Hill, Thoreau spots a hawk soaring above a pine wood:

Travelling ever by wider circles. What a symbol of the thoughts, now soaring, now descending, taking larger and larger circles, or smaller and smaller! It flies not directly whither it is bound, but advances by circles, like a courtier of the skies. . . . Circling and circling. . . . The poetry of motion. . . . As if that hawk were made or be the symbol of my thought, how bravely he came round ever those parts of the wood which he had not surveyed, taking in a new segment, annexing new territories!

(Dec. 21, 1851; J, III, 144)

The analogy between natural process and human thought is explicit.

Sometimes the poet is so much attuned to the natural landscape that the analogy is submerged within the unity between man and nature:

I go about to look at flowers and listen to the birds. There was a time when the beauty and the music were all within, and I sat and listened to my thoughts, and there was a song in them. . . . I lay long on the rocks, foundered like a harp on the seashore, that knows not how it is dealt with. [I] sat on the earth as on a raft, listening to music that was not of the earth, but which ruled and arranged it. Man should be the harp articulate.

(May 23, 1854; J, VI, 294)

The entry is revealing because of the emphasis on turning inward.

Anderson explains this attitude as the poetic process: "The poet draws all things into himself--Space and Time, Nature and God--only so that he can give them out again recreated as metaphors."¹⁷ He points to the influence which Thomas Browne had upon Thoreau in his formation of this particularly metaphysical mode of translating experience into philosophy. In 1840, Thoreau had copied into a commonplace book a passage from Religio Medici in which Browne had averred that he could match all experience in "the cosmography" of himself." It is not a far cry from that quotation to Thoreau's celebrated "Explore thyself." Certainly his Journal offers ample evidence of the fact that he explored nature in order to understand himself: "As travellers go round the world and report natural objects and phenomena, so faithfully let another stay at home and report the phenomena of his own life,--catalogue stars, those thoughts whose orbits are so rarely calculated as comets. . . . A meteorological journal of the mind." (August 19, 1851; J, II, 403)

The sentiment bears a close resemblance to the following reflection in Browne's Religio Medici: "The world that I regard is my self; it is the Microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on; for the other I use it but like my Globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation."¹⁸ The conclusion to be drawn from the parallel quotations taken from the writing of Browne and Thoreau is that

each man finds in nature a model for the self, and that moreover each has that quality of mind which T. S. Eliot calls the "unified sensibility" of the metaphysical.

Basil Willey has said, in his discussion of Sir Thomas Browne as a metaphysical, that he thinks that "something of the peculiar quality of the 'metaphysical' mind is due to this fact of its not being committed to any one world."¹⁹ Thus, he cites as an example that while Browne is writing as a naturalist, his experience as a poet or scholar or scientist or mystic is available to him and he makes use of it fully. This unifying process is an illustration of Eliot's famous example of Spinoza and the smell of cooking in "The Metaphysical Poets."²⁰ The same may be said of Thoreau as of Browne. When he writes most specifically as naturalist, he also draws upon other areas of his experience to form his conclusions. Observing the dead fish that float annually to the surface of the Concord River, he muses: "When I realize the mortality of suckers in the spring is as old a phenomenon, perchance, as the race of sucker itself, I contemplate it with serenity and joy even, as one of the signs of spring. . . . [This] proves its necessity and that it is part of the order, not disorder of the universe." (Mar. 28, 1857; J, IX, 310) To this particular observation, he brings philosophy and weds it to his scientific

observation, thus enriching his conclusions. To others of his nature writings, he adds the dimension of mythology, much as Willey observes that Browne thinks of Gorgons when he is explaining the properties of crystal, and then fuses them into a whole.²¹ In writing of the large mud turtles whose life patterns Thoreau follows from egg to full grown creature, he brings to his naturalism the enrichment of mythology, much as Browne did: "If Iliads are not composed in our day, snapping turtles are hatched and arrive at maturity. . . . With what tenacity nature sticks to her idea." (Aug. 25, 1854; J, VI, 474)

With the reference to the Iliad, he causes nature and her works to grow to epic, even heroic proportions. Elsewhere, in the momentous decision to leave Walden after his two year sojourn, the agonies of the decision are dramatized by the introduction of metaphor from the experience and content of formal theology: "But why I changed? Why I left the woods? I do not think that I can tell. . . . Perhaps if I lived there much longer, I might live there forever. One would think twice before he accepted heaven on such terms. A ticket to Heaven must include tickets to Limbo, Purgatory, and Hell."

(January 22, 1852; J, III, 214) As in Browne's writing, two fashions of looking at the same phenomenon enrich the feeling of the writing. Thought is wedded to feeling as it is in Eliot's description of Donne, and sensibility is modified and expanded in the process.

A further link with Browne, as well as the other metaphysicals, is cited by Willey as a stylistic device peculiar to the metaphysicals. It is the trick of juxtaposition of opposites or disparate images in the attempt to present "truths" in a new light. Actually, Willey declares that the metaphysicals got their "thrills" more out of the act of fusing dispartes than in getting at any truths. Thus Browne was able to introduce with no apparent incongruity images from one unlikely source into a seemingly unrelated discussion, all with good effect. He offers as illustration an introduction of a mathematical image into a learned discourse on Christianity.²² Thoreau also brings the experience of his scholarship and erudition in other fields into his study of nature by way of startling or unlikely images. As Browne introduces a mathematical image into his discussion of abstract Christian philosophy, describing its ascendant spirituality to all other, who must "diminish their diameters and be poorly seen in Angles of contingency," so does Thoreau introduce geometric imagery into his most aesthetic descriptions of nature. Observing through a spyglass a family of hawks, he describes the sweeping arcs made by the circling male: "Meanwhile the male is soaring, apparently quite undisturbed, at a great height above, evidently not hunting, but amusing or recreating himself in the thinner and cooler air, as if pleased with

his own circles, like a geometer, and enjoying the sublime scene." (J, V, 235-6) In the metaphysical manner there is no incongruity between the simile of the geometer and the closely juxtaposed sublimity of the aesthetic experience. Such a metaphysical leap of the imagination occurs often in Walden, as the poet enforces a moral from Nature with imagery drawn from scientific scholarship: "Thus it seems that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic for us?" (Chapter 17, "Spring," Walden) Further along in the same passage, he develops an analogy for nature's sequences from literature, creating a fanciful juxtaposition of images: "This is the frost coming out of the ground; this is Spring. It precedes the green and flowery spring as mythology precedes poetry." Nowhere in Thoreau's writing is the metaphysical cast of mind more apparent than in this lengthy baroque passage dealing with the burgeoning of nature in the springtime. The complexities of nature's various intermeshing parts are clarified through an elaborate conceit drawn from a series of analogies between man and nature:

What is man but a mass of thawing clay? The ball of the human finger is but a drop congealed. The fingers and toes flow to their extent from the thawing mass of the body. Who knows that the human body would expand and flow out to a more genial heaven? Is not the hand a spreading palm leaf with

its globes and veins? The ear may be regarded fancifully as a lichen, *umbilicaris*, on the side of the head, with its lobe or drop. The lip--labium, from labor (?)--laps or lapses from the sides of the cavernous mouth. The nose is a manifest congealed drop or stalactite. The chin is a still larger drop, the confluent dripping of the face. The cheeks are a slide from the brows into the valley of the face, opposed and diffused by the cheekbones.

The reader is hard put to remember that the subject of this elaborate fancy, which extends five pages or more, is not man but nature, specifically the fine sand mixed with clay in the cut of the railroad through which Thoreau often walked on his way to the village. The entire chapter is given to the observation of the flow of the sand-clay mixture down the slope when the frost comes out of the ground. If one is to credit Willey's contention that metaphysical writers such as Browne "can fuse into a strange amalgam materials from many mental countries,"²³ then this passage from Walden is a direct continuum of the cast of mind which can introduce and juxtapose an incongruous image without damage to the context. Indeed, the meaning of the passage is enhanced through the fusing of disparate for the purpose of enhancing and broadening emotional response to the subject. Willey cites a selection from Urn Burial in which the author incorporates into one passage materials from the Bible, Greek legend, Egyptian burial customs, and mathematical formulae, as an instance of the metaphysical approach to subject

matter. Thoreau the metaphysical, as distinct from Thoreau the Transcendentalist, often indulges in this approach to nature. In a Journal entry on July 20, 1857; J, IX, 496, he clarifies and elaborates his description of the leaf of the plane tree with a collection of materials from a great many "mental countries," both historical and geographical and classical, drawing his materials equally from a breathtaking variety of sources, including Dionysus the geographer, Loudon's "Arboretum," the morea tree of the Peloponnesus, and the entire American Northeast. The process calls to mind Milton's description of Satan in terms of his tremendous size in Book 1, 1.192-210, of Paradise Lost. In that context Milton employs the Homeric simile as a device to transmit to the reader Satan's gigantic size and power. To accomplish that end, Milton also draws from a great variety of sources or "mental countries," both geographical and historical, mythical and actual.

Thoreau's disquisition on so seemingly definable a phenomenon as that visible reflected radiated energy called moonlight is a case in point of the metaphysical habit of drawing from a number of "mental countries" for emotionally expanded comprehension:

What an immeasurable interval there is between the first tinge of moonlight which we detect, lighting with mysterious, silvery, poetic light the western slopes, like a paler grass, and the last wave of daylight on the eastern slopes! It is wonderful how our senses ever span so vast an

interval, how from being aware of the one we become aware of the other. . . . Yet moonlight, like daylight, is more valuable for what it suggests than for what it is. It is a long past season of which I dream. . . . Ah, there is the mysterious light which for some hours has illustrated Asia and the scene of Alexander's victories, now at length, after two or three hours spent is surmounting the billows of the Atlantic, come to shine on America. There, on that illustrated sand-bank, was revealed an antiquity beside which Ninevah is young. . . . I passed from dynasty to dynasty, from one age of the world to another age of the world, from Jove perchance back to Saturn. What river of Lethe was there to run between? (July 6, 1851; J, II, 284-5)

Like Browne, Thoreau draws from the world of the Bible, the world of history and the world of mythology to make his metaphysical definition. Like Milton, tracing the history of the leviathan through real and mythical history, Biblical and classical, he traces the history of moonlight through every real and imagined source, infusing the whole with the romantic imaginings of the poet.

There remains still one aspect of the metaphysical approach as defined by Willey in his discussion of Browne, a metaphysical mind. That is, the discovery of some animating principle or spirit which informs nature, and which is essentially scholastic in origin. As an illustration, Willey quotes from a chapter of the Pseudodoxia Epidemica, bk. ii, ch. v, a history of coral, speculating about its origin as some woody substance or from the "sprouting spirit of salt." The innate quality or spirit central to nature's phenomena is akin to the informing principle in nature which Jungians later

called the "anima," and which in the nineteenth century came to be known as the "oversoul," or the soul of the whole by the Transcendental community. In fact, it is this spirit which brings together the Transcendentalist and the Metaphysical poet in their response to nature. Krutch sees this spirit as the essence of pantheism,²⁴ but mere pantheism denies, or at least does not admit of the moral dimension which Browne's definition incorporates. The reason for the central spiritual quality in a phenomenon of nature is that it explains or defines it in terms of its significance to human nature or behavior. The two, nature and man, are thus linked by their sympathy or mutuality. In Thoreau's writing, a great many references to the illuminating spirit are to be found, both positive and negative, some comparative, others implied. Sometimes, there is such interaction between man and nature or such a felt influence of nature over us that the two become fused. In the passage on moonlight quoted above from the Journal, Thoreau offers an illustration of the animating principle in nature which is at one and the same time metaphysical and transcendental: "I turn and see the silent, spiritual, contemplative moonlight shedding the softest imaginable light on the western slopes of the hills." (July 6, 1851; J, II, 284) Informing the light with a spiritual and contemplative quality is describing it in terms of human reactions. The effect

is an intensification of spirituality in both man and nature. Water is animated by the same spiritual force. Describing Walden, he comments in his Journal that the water "shines with an inward light like a heaven on earth." (June 11, 1851; J, II, 248) Walden Pond itself may be seen as a single all-embracing vital spirit. Thoreau calls it "the earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depths of his own nature." (Chapter 9, "The Ponds," Walden) That all of nature has this animating force, providing a parallel spirit to his own, is made evident in passage after passage in the Journal: "Nature will not speak through but along with him. His voice will not proceed from her midst, but, breathing on her, will make her the expression of her thought. . . . He is another Nature, --Nature's brother. . . . Each publishes the other's truth." (J, I, 74-75) Nature, with its central intelligence and spirit, demonstrates an equivalent morality to man's.

An even more immediate source for the "anima mundi" is to be found in the seventeenth century Cambridge Platonists, most particularly in the philosophy of Ralph Cudworth whom Thoreau admired. On one occasion he noted in the Journal that when he read Cudworth, he found he could "tolerate" all, a tribute to a rarity, "man musing." (June 24, 1840; J, I, 151) In another Journal entry, he credits Cudworth as an originator of the philosophy of the "anima"

in nature, which carries over into the spirit of man as he communicates with the universe: "Cudworth says, 'We have all of us by nature . . . a certain divination, presage and parturient vaticination in our minds, of some higher good and perfection than either power or knowledge.' . . . My desire for knowledge is intermittent; but my desire to communicate with the spirit of the universe, to be intoxicated with the fumes, call it, of that divine nectar, to bear my head through atmosphere and over heights unknown to my feet, is perennial and constant." (Feb. 9, 1851; J, II, 152)

A final consideration in the metaphysical link between the pastoral and the contemplative derives from one of the epigraphs to the Journal, briefly described in Chapter I of this dissertation. The reference is to the excerpt from the Marvell poem, "The Garden," misquoted by Thoreau: "Two Paradises are in one,/ To live in Paradise Alone."²⁵ Because Marvell is the most pastoral as well as the most contemplative of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets, and because it has been established that he knew Marvell's poetry, it may be seen that Thoreau shared with Marvell some idealized conceptions of nature. In an article entitled "Pastoral Form and Idea in Some Poems of Marvell," Harold Toliver points to the motivating force behind Marvell's pastoral excursions, which was the conflict between a "complex, pressing society" and the search

for "simplicity."²⁶ Since the keynote to Walden is the apostrophe: "Simplify, Simplify, Simplify!" in company with the adjuration to live life "close to the bone," there is some basis for comparison. Further, Toliver remarks that the general pattern of Marvell's pastoral poems falls into a sequence of leaving the world, followed by spiritual gains in the return to nature, reorientation toward society, and ultimately, re-entry. Although it is not the purpose of this paper to undertake a literal comparison based on biographical history, the Walden experiment offers evidence of a similar cast of personality and behavior. Certainly the literature, in the concrete evidence of the Journal, suggests that the same procedure was at work. Time and again the contemplative emerges from the pastoral. They provide a close counterpart to Marvell's lines: "How could such sweet and wholesome Hours/ Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs'":

Catch the pace of the seasons. . . . Let your
life be a leisurely progress through the realms
of nature.

(J, III, 182)

What are threescore years and ten hurriedly
and coarsely lived to moments of divine
leisure in which your life is coincident
with the life of the universe?

(J, IV, 433)

Saw a large hawk circling over a pine wood below
me, . . . Travelling ever by wider circles. What
a symbol of the thoughts, now descending, taking
larger and larger circles, or smaller and smaller!
. . . So a man is said to soar in his thoughts,
ever to fresh woods and pastures new.

(J, III, 143-4)

All of these quotations are illustrative of Marvell's "green thought in a green shade," particularly because they are all products of the process of "annihilation," which Marvell uses in its theological sense. In mystical writings, the conception of annihilation was not a negative one, but a positive and creative conception. It applied to the soul's "withdrawal from self-interest and from the attraction of created things, as it moved toward a mystical intuition of the Divine."²⁷ Martz, who provides the theological source of the definition from the Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, concedes that Marvell uses the term "annihilation" for his own purposes in "The Garden," which are somewhat more contemplative and less traditionally theological. Nonetheless, the fusion of the secular/sacred, so prevalent in all areas of metaphysical poetry, is apparent in Marvell's pastoral poetry, as it is later in Thoreau's pastoral musings. Kermode notes that the garden is a "rich emblem," incorporating the concept of the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise, the retiring place for solace or meditation, and Nature as God's book.²⁸ Many

passages in the Journal fuse the secular and the sacred in the concept of nature as God's book. The sacramental intention is apparent in the figurative language:

The fields and hills are a table constantly spread. Wines of all kinds and qualities, of noblest vintage, are bottled up in the skins of countless berries, for the taste of men and animals. To men they seem offered not so much for food as for sociality; that they may picnic with Nature,--diet drinks, cordials, wines. We pluck and eat in remembrance of Her. It is a sacrament, a communion. The not-forbidden fruits, which no serpent tempts us to taste. Slight and innocent savors, which relate us to Nature, make us her guests and entitle us to her protection.

(J, V, 330-331)

All the elements of Marvell's garden are incorporated into the passage. The innocence of the second stanza of Marvell's poem are found in Thoreau's serpentless garden. The fulsomeness of nature in her dispensation of her gifts of fruit and wine, celebrated in the fifth stanza of "The Garden," is reflected in Thoreau's praise of nature's bounty of berries and cordials. Addressing Quiet and Innocence, Marvell applauds their "sacred plants" in Stanza 11, which are unlike the worldly palm, oak, and bay, emblems of the material and secular labors of men. The sacramental treatment of nature's plants in Thoreau's garden is in a similar metaphysical vein. And finally, Thoreau's "sociality" is not offered in the conventional sense of meaning the concourse

of men with one another, but of one man with nature. It is a paraphrase of Marvell's "delicious solitude."

If Marvell's garden is a rich emblem, how much more so is Thoreau's pond, by virtue of the author's prolonged contemplation of its manifold depths and moods and symbolic associations. In Chapter V of this paper there was some discussion of the circle or sphere in Thoreau's imagery as representative of the circle of perfection as well as the magnetic sphere of influence. An analogy may be drawn between Thoreau's deep preoccupation with circles, examples of which are to be seen in his frequent contemplative abstracts derived from the circular soaring of birds, and the many examples of circle imagery in the poems of Donne as cited by Marjorie Nicolson in Chapter 11, "The Circle of Perfection," in The Breaking of the Circle. In The Magic Circle of Walden, a book which explores the circle image in all its sources of origin--pantheism, Oriental mysticism, Platonism, metaphysical perfection, transcendental intuition--Anderson concludes that the pond represents the circle of perfection. All of Thoreau's philosophical sources for that central circle image overlap each other and lead to the same interpretation: "At the very heart of the book lies Walden Pond, the central circle image. All paths lead into this chapter, 'The Ponds': all lines of meaning radiate from

it. Here Thoreau found his ideal Self in that symbol of perfection which was the exact opposite of all those imperfections he had inveighed against in the life of society."²⁹ Marvell found society rude in "The Garden" and escapes into the Walled Garden of solitude. Thoreau, punning upon the name of the pond, calls it "Walled-in Pond" in the chapter called "The Ponds." The overt reference is to the stony shore; the implicit reference is to the walled garden as a temporary retreat from the imperfections of society. There is some suggestion of nature as a haven from society's imperfections in the "Mower" series of Marvell's pastoral poems, expressed in its most elementary form in the first of the series, "The Mower Against Gardens." Here he inveighs most angrily against "luxurious man," whose vice has harmed nature at her "most plain and pure." In a Journal entry, written during the Walden period, Thoreau finds similar fault in man's disharmony with nature, which results from the crime of not communicating with Nature, not understanding her language, "because he is not at one with nature." (J, III, 368) Thoreau's conclusion would correspond with Toliver's evaluation of the Mower's condition, particularly as it is delineated in "Damon the Mower." "The unfortunate part of the Mower's condition," Toliver claims, "is his growing alienation from true simplicity."³⁰ Simplicity, as it has been noted, is the keynote of Thoreau's

approach to nature. It is vital to respond to nature on her terms, as an insider rather than an outsider. This will enable man to "take an original and unprejudiced view of Nature, letting her make what impression she will on you, as the first men, and all children and natural men still do." (J, XIII, 168-9) The message corresponds with one of the messages in the "Mower" poems. Most especially in "The Mower's Song": Interference with nature is destructive of innocence, or more accurately, of spontaneity. In Marvell's case, Juliana is the interloper, separating the Mower from his green meadows and his native contemplation. In Thoreau's world, it may be the scientist who interposes his artificially gained knowledge of nature between man and his environment, interfering with his "original and unprejudiced view of Nature." (J, XIII, 168-9) The "remedies" that Damon seeks in Marvell's poem are to be found in mystical union with nature, without superimposing "learned" values from the outside world. In contemplating nature from the "inside," Thoreau achieves his greatest satisfaction:

How much, what infinite leisure it requires,
 as of a lifetime, to appreciate a single phe-
 nomenon! You must camp down beside it as for
 life, having reached your land of promise, and
 give yourself wholly to it. It must stand for
 the whole world to you, symbolical of all things.
 . . . Unless the humming of a gnat is as the
 music of the spheres, and the music of the spheres
 is as the humming of a gnat, they are naught to
 me. It is not communications to serve for a

history, which are science,--but the story itself,
that cheers and satisfies us.

(J, IV, 433-4)

The most central phenomenon of Thoreau's natural world is the pond, and it is symbolic of all things, as he suggests in the foregoing quotation. It is not only symbolic of the self, both his own ideal self and the cosmic self as it is delineated within its depths as the "earth's eye," but of God. In Chapter 16, "The Pond in Winter," referring to the Pond as his well, Thoreau goes to it to "bathe [his] intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta." At his well he is nourished by the same waters that slake the divine thirst of the priest of Brahma and Vishnu. "The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges." The incorporation of Hindu mysticism into the religious philosophy of the transcendental philosopher is common to the thought of Emerson and his school of romantic poets. It also represents a carryover from the seventeenth century habit of mind which prompted Marvell to "return to the concept of nature as a divine hieroglyph," most particularly in idyllic poems such as "Bermudas."³¹ Toliver sees the Bermudas as an Eden, with God as eternal Providence dispensing His good gifts to untarnished man. Thoreau sees Walden as a nineteenth century equivalent to

the Bermudas. In Chapter 9, "The Ponds," he interposes a poem of his own making into his description of the pond:

I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.

He proposes that the pond be named "God's Drop." The pond is indeed a "divine hieroglyph," a work of its Maker, "who rounded this water with his hand, deepened and clarified it in his thought, and in his will bequeathed it to Concord." As a divine symbol, it is fitting that it be referred to in the imagery of sanctification. Thus Thoreau extends the sacramental tone by noting that the pond has "rarely been profaned by a boat."

Finally, it should be observed that nature provides for Thoreau the richest source for his metaphysical wit, if that term may be defined according to Leo Spitzer's definition: "In poetry of wit abstract qualities concretize themselves in objects." The pond serves as the central source of the abstract qualities of perfection around which an elaborate concrete conceit is constructed. The basic metaphor is a mirror, but the poet, in weaving his elaborate embroideries on the basic image, achieves the "omnivorousness" which Spitzer holds is central to metaphysical wit, enabling it to "devour all sorts of experience in one gulp."³² His expanded definition is a more satisfactory reworking of

Abraham Cowley's definition of wit in his poem "Wit," which holds that "in a true piece of Wit all things must be/ Yet all things there agree." The conceit will be quoted in its entirety so that all the "turns" of the mirror image may be noted:

In such a day, in September or October, Walden is a perfect forest mirror, set round with stones as precious to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs: no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh;--a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush,--this the light dust cloth,--which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still.

The pond, with its manifold reflections of the world, both past and present, serves as the mirror of all of life, which, as in Cowley's poem, "without discord or confusion, lie/ in that strange mirror of the Deity." Its divinity is suggested but not declared by the fragmentary ambiguous phrase, "sky water." Its grandeur is reduced in a fashion much exploited by Edward Taylor and Emily Dickinson, the metaphysical wits who reduced the grandiose to the homey and familiar through the imagery of brooms and mops and spinning wheels. Thus the pond is dusted by the dust cloth of the sun's hazy brush, which keeps it eternally pure. Its immortality

is suggested by the eternal resilvering of nature. And it should be noted that the entire complicated string of figures is held together by a series of negatives, so skillfully contrived that they provide a natural background of linked images for the final burst of affirmation. And so, because the selection incorporates so many of the elements of metaphysical style and content, it is an appropriate extract with which to conclude this study.

* * * * *

This study was undertaken as an attempt to trace the emergence of metaphysical style and content in American literature, and to establish a connection between the metaphysical writers of the seventeenth century and the two nineteenth century American heirs to their turn of mind and idiom. It has been supported by a substantial body of evidence found in analogous interpretations of the general subjects of love, religion, death, and immortality, privacy, community, and nature. Moreover, at every turn of the investigation, Thoreau and Dickinson have emerged as purveyors of the indispensable commodity of the metaphysical poet: verbal wit. While it is true that Thoreau's wit is more caustic, aimed as it often was at institutions, and Dickinson's is less acerbic and subtler--as a reflection of her more introversive personality--

still, wit is the indissoluble link between the two of them and between them and their predecessors. The Journal, published half a century after Thoreau's death, remains the best repository of his wit. It records his impressions, stores his ideas for exploitation in Walden and A Week on the Concord and Merrimack, and provides the best evidence of his metaphor-laden style.

It is the place where he transacted (to borrow a phrase from "Economy" in Walden) his "private business," and where he could indulge his predilection for punning: "The true sites for human dwellings are unimproved. They command no price in the market. . . . a real estate." (J, II, 215-216)

It is a storage vault for epigrams which will reappear in others of his writings: "You cannot rob a man of anything which he will miss" (J, II, 163), and analogies: "The brave man . . . seems to run through all extremes with impunity; like the sun, which now appears in the zenith, now in the horizon, and again is faintly reflected from the moon's disk, and has the credit of describing an entire great circle, crossing the equinoctial and solstitial colures, without detriment to his steadfastness or mediocrity." (July 8, 1840; J, I, 164)

Above all, the Journal is the place in which he establishes his definitions of the human experience, linking it to nature at every

turn. When he describes the soaring hawk as "strange and wild to the masses of men, as is genius itself," (J, XI, 450-51) he extends his definition of natural life to human life. In defining the pond at Walden as a "perfect forest mirror," he is framing a definition in the best metaphysical tradition, to serve as the appropriate linguistic equivalent for man's soul. The definition expands the possibilities of the pond into a metaphysical realm created by the interfusion of the intellect and the imagination. The pond becomes "the earth's eye, looking into which the beholder measures the depths of his own nature." It serves as the perfect vehicle for Thoreau's wit, that single quality which Spiller maintains differentiates Thoreau from the other Transcendentalists. It engenders the "reverse aphorism which carries a sting as it provokes a smile."³³ The ponds, he says, "are too pure to have a market value; they carry no muck." A perfectionist, his definitions idealized and expanded the subjects with which he dealt. If Dickinson rarefied and internalized experience, Thoreau broadened and externalized it through the irony of his wit. Contemplating the breakup of the pond's ice in the thaw following the winter, he speculates that we might be able to get our feet "through the mush and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance," to reach the "hard bottom and rocks in place,

which we can call reality." An idealist in the first half of the statement and a hard realist in the second, the "bachelor of nature" is at all times a wit.

In Dickinson's case, the wit derives less from definition than from a fine gift of revelation. She did not so much define experience as dramatize the human soul. Allen Tate has suggested that an appropriate setting for her would have been the age of Cowley or Donne, a period which was hospitable to the poetry of ideas, more particularly of tensions. "Like Donne," says Tate, "she perceives abstraction and thinks sensation."³⁴ In short, her wit is the matter of the conceit. The abstractions with which she deals most frequently--mortality, eternity, renunciation--are translated into literal Calvaries, "dimpled tombs," horse-drawn carriages, brooms for "sweeping up the heart" and a variety of floral and faunal concretions. "She sees the ideas and thinks the perceptions," observes Tate, referring to the brilliance and originality of the wit which wrenches the familiar images into fresh relation to the universal abstractions arising from the human experience. In this respect she is at one with the seventeenth century poets:

Neither the feeling nor the style of Miss
Dickinson belongs to the seventeenth century;
yet between her and Donne there are remarkable
ties. Their religious ideas, their abstractions,

are momentarily toppling from the rational plane to the level of perception. . . . They have become . . . the terms of personality; they are mingled with the miscellany of sensation. . . . The two poles of the mind are not separately visible; we infer them from the lucid tension that may be most readily illustrated by polar activity. There is no thought as such at all; nor is there feeling; there is that unique focus of experience which is at once neither and both.³⁵

The "fractured" sensibility engenders a paradoxical integrity of expression. Perhaps the extreme imagery is the only appropriate vehicle for the wrenched perceptions at the core of Dickinson's poems. It is significant that it is Tate, regarded as a twentieth-century metaphysical poet, who undertakes to define the element of wit in Dickinson's poems and link it so intimately with Donne's.

When the basic component of Thoreau's wit--the defining of experience through concrete analogy, metaphor and pun--is extracted and combined with Dickinson's major element of wit--the dramatization of personal experience through far-reaching and eccentric imagery--the definition is complete. Although Thoreau and Dickinson exercised no influence upon one another, the cumulative influence they exerted on American poetry is incalculable. Especially did T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Richard Wilbur part from Romantic and Victorian conventions to incorporate into their poetry a seventeenth-century tradition which Thoreau and Dickinson carried into the nineteenth century and which may be

defined as "complex, sensuous, and intellectual."³⁶ The conclusion is inevitable: While the subject matter of the metaphysical poets does not depart radically from the subjects other poets write about, it is the persistence of a tone, largely formed by the tensions between intuition and intellect, which underlies the wit of metaphysical poetry in general, and in this study, the writing of Thoreau and Dickinson in particular.

Notes

¹Louis Martz, "Henry Vaughan: The Man Within," PMLA, ed. William R. Keast (Oxford, 1971), p. 45.

²E. E. Cummings' nature poems are famous for their fusion of impressions in coined descriptives such as "mud-luscious."

³R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of Nature (New York and Oxford, 1960), pp. 3-9, quoted in Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (New York, 1960), p. 1.

⁴Charles R. Anderson, Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York, 1960), p. 158.

⁵Anderson, pp. 158-9.

⁶Stephen Crane, War is Kind and Other Poems, Poem #LXII.

⁷Tenerife appears to be a favorite metaphor for the exotic or the unattainable goal. Donne uses it in line 286 of "The First Anniversary." Thoreau refers to it in his Journal, Vol. II, p. 48.

⁸A more detailed treatment of color in Dickinson's poetry, with especial emphasis on its psychological dimension, appears in Rebecca Patterson's article, "Emily Dickinson's Palette," in The Midwest Quarterly, V. 4, pp. 271-291.

⁹Oscar Williams, The Major Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century, ed. Edwin Honig and Oscar Williams (New York, 1968), p. 6.

¹⁰Crane, Poem #XXV.

¹¹Twenty years after Thomas Wentworth Higginson conducted his interview with the poet, he reminisced about the occasion: "The impression made upon me was that of an excess of tension, and an abnormal life. . . . She was much too enigmatical a being for me to solve in an hour's interview, and an instinct told me that the slightest attempt at direct cross examination would make her withdraw into her shell." Letter 342b in The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, 3 vols., (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), Vol. 2, p. 476.

¹²Frank Kermode, "The Argument of Marvell's Garden," Seventeenth Century English Poetry, p. 334.

¹³Williams, p. 11.

¹⁴Michael West, "Scatology and Eschatology: The Heroic Dimensions of Thoreau's Wordplay," Forthcoming in PMLA in 1974. By permission of the author.

¹⁵Joseph Wood Krutch, Thoreau (New York, 1948), p. 170.

¹⁶Krutch.

¹⁷Charles R. Anderson, The Magic Circle of Walden (New York, 1968), p. 271.

¹⁸Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1967), p. 46.

¹⁹Willey, p. 43.

²⁰T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays (New York, 1964), p. 247.

²¹Willey, p. 44.

²²Willey, p. 45.

²³Willey.

²⁴Krutch, Chapter 6, "Pantheist and Puritan," op. cit., pp. 167-216.

²⁵Thoreau misquoted Marvell's "'twere" as "are."

²⁶Harold E. Toliver, "Pastoral Form and Idea in Some Poems of Marvell," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, V (1963-64), p. 85.

²⁷Louis Martz, The Anchor Anthology of Seventeenth Century Verse, Vol. I, ed. Louis Martz (Garden City, 1969), p. 487.

²⁸Kermode, p. 337.

²⁹Anderson, The Magic Circle of Walden, p. 222.

³⁰Toliver, p. 368.

³¹Toliver, p. 362.

³²Leo Spitzer, "Marvell's 'Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Faun': Sources versus Meaning," Modern Language Quarterly, XX (1958), p. 236.

³³Robert Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York, 1955), p. 50.

³⁴Allen Tate, "Emily Dickinson," On the Limits of Poetry (New York, 1948), p. 205.

³⁵Tate, pp. 206-208.

³⁶George Williamson, The Donne Tradition (Cambridge, 1930), p. 57.

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