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THE RELIGIOUS VOICE OF EMILY DICKINSON

City University of New York PH.D. 1980

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THE RELIGIOUS VOICE OF EMILY DICKINSON

by

DOROTHY HUFF OBERHAUS

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

1980

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

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Abstract

THE RELIGIOUS VOICE OF EMILY DICKINSON

by

Dorothy Huff Oberhaus

Adviser: Professor Miriam K. Starkman

Emily Dickinson is often considered in terms of American literary and religious traditions. However, she is not only an American poet, but also one who wrote in the poetic tradition of devotionalism. She is therefore in some ways more like other religious writers, especially George Herbert and the seventeenth-century English poets, than like her own American predecessors and contemporaries.

A reading of the canon in context of the poetry of devotion illuminates her work in a new way. ED is like other devotional poets in that the Bible pervades her work; Jesus is a central figure; she uses sacramental and liturgical language as well as that of sacred parody; her concerns are eschatological, death for her going "to God" (e.g., P-390). Moreover, like them, her sensibility is strikingly, emblematically visual; she

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sometimes expresses doubt and anguish at loss of contact with Deity; many poems are colloquies with God, Jesus, her soul, and her readers. Circumstantial evidence indicates that she read Herbert, Thomas à Kempis, and other religious texts, internal evidence that she learned from them, transforming their concepts and images in the service of her own unique voice. Although she rejected the nineteenth-century institutionalized church, ED's work is "aglow with God and immortality," as her unfairly maligned friend and literary confidante, Susan Dickinson, wrote of her life in an unsigned obituary.

Many poems are to and about Jesus. In those on the life of Christ, ED is "little 'John'" (P-497), for the poems comprise a contemporized Gospel. Similarly, the prayer-poems to Jesus form a modern and revitalized prayer book, her own fresh alternatives for the traditional prayers she rejected. Since the sacraments are commemorations of Christ (Webster, P-833), the poems on baptism, holy orders, the eucharist, and matrimony must be included with the Jesus cluster. When understood in light of these poems, the much-debated nuptial group are about her earthly marriage to Jesus as sacred Muse, a marriage which prefigures her ultimate union with him in eternity. The Master letters are also about Jesus and poetry, her expression of the devotional trope of the dark night of the soul in which she has lost contact with Jesus and therefore of poetic inspiration.

ED's God is a "Force illegible"; however, "All Circumstances are the Frame / In which His Face is set --"

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(P-820). Therefore, God's existence and love can be known not only through Jesus, the Logos, but also through the soul, poetry, and nature. Although ED sometimes criticizes God for his aloofness and the pain of death, she does not doubt his existence. Further, these reproaches and their frequently comic form indicate that ED is on intimate terms with God. More consistently she praises him for his creation and expresses faith in a God who did not "Ignite[d] this Abode / To put it out--" (P-1599).

Often she contemplates the soul's nature and destiny: ED's soul is immortal; body and soul are separate, even sometimes debate with one another as in the devotional tradition beginning with medieval times. ED's soul-guest poems are her versions of the religious trope of the pure heart as dwelling for Deity; she stresses that the soul must be wed to divinity in order to achieve its goal, particularly to create the work of art.

ED is a sacred poet whose "Business is Circumference" (L-268), to live fully and meditatively the life of the soul in the presence of divinity and to "sing" about her variegated experiences because of "love" for God and her fellow creatures (L-269). The white she wore, like the white of the poems, is symbol for her dedication to the eternal, to God, the soul, and poetry.

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To

EDWARD OBERHAUS

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I wish to thank members of the faculty who have aided and supported me. Miriam K. Starkman was encouraging from the inception of this study and provided valuable insights and careful guidance throughout. Coleman O. Parsons was immensely helpful in his advice as to style and clarity of presentation. Samuel R. Levin made highly useful suggestions about language and manner of expression.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ED	Emily Dickinson
P- (or Poem)	The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955).
L- (or Letter)	The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958).
PF	"Prose Fragments," printed as an appendix to Letters (1958).
Lexicon or Webster	An American Dictionary of the English Language by Noah Webster, 1848 ed.

In all cases, I have followed ED's spelling and punctuation.

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PART ONE

A READING OF EMILY DICKINSON

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I. Introduction

It is generally agreed that Thomas H. Johnson's 1955 and 1958 Variorum editions of Emily Dickinson's poems and letters introduced a new era in ED scholarship. For the first time, all became available in a form close to the one she seems to have intended for serious textual consideration.[1] In his seminal 1960 Stairway of Surprise, Charles R. Anderson addressed himself to an explication of the poems, declaring that "the real task" remaining for modern readers of ED is to "give her poetry the serious attention it deserves . . . "; to "study it intensively, to stare a hole in the page until those apparently cryptic notations yield their full meanings. . . . "[2] Although since that time other textual studies have been made, several acknowledged to be inspired by him,[3] there is still work to be done; there are still poems not sufficiently pondered. This study, then, is another response to Professor Anderson, for it is a close reading of the ED canon.

My reading is different from other textual studies, however, in that it is a consideration of the poems in context of the tradition of religious poetry, particularly of the English devotional or meditational poets of the seventeenth century.[4] Although ED has been acknowledged by some to be a religious poet, scholars have stopped short of a full definition

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of her as such. Professor Anderson refers to her as "the most religious poet this country has produced," yet repeatedly warns against pushing religious interpretations too far. Further, he believes the Bible to have been chiefly a source of imagery for her.[5] Similarly, although Richard B. Sewall notes that the Bible pervades her mind like no other book and suggests the possible importance of The Imitation of Christ, he, like Anderson, is cautious, noting the hazards of claiming "too much for . . . parallels" with The Imitation.[6] I must reject the warnings of Anderson and Sewall, for ED's religious sensibility pervades her work. The Bible is not merely a source of imagery for her; rather, as for other religious poets, it is indispensible to the structure and meaning of the canon. Also, circumstantial and internal evidence strongly argue the importance for ED of Thomas à Kempis as well as of George Herbert and the devotional poets of the seventeenth century.

Among critics who have considered ED in a religious context, most have viewed her in terms of American religious and literary history. In his highly influential 1932 essay, Allen Tate finds that because she lived at a time of transition when the Puritan theocracy was crumbling, she assimilated into her poetic vision its world order and ideas without its rigid beliefs as Shakespeare had medievalism; this "perfect literary situation," like that of the period between 1580 and the Restoration, made possible the "fusion of sensibility and thought," "the poetic use of ideas," integral to ED's poetic greatness.[7] George F. Whicher says that she was "nurtured in

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Puritan orthodoxy" and explains that her biblical language and orientation are a result of the all-pervasive religious atmosphere of nineteenth-century New England.[8] Thomas H. Johnson believes that "her most powerful compulsions derived from her Puritan past" and, like Whicher and others, finds elements of Emersonian Transcendentalism in her thought as well.[9] Richard Chase stresses the importance of New England Calvinism in her imagination although he finds her to be "on the whole an unbeliever."[10] Albert Gelpi places her in the American literary tradition and emphasizes her American Puritan heritage; according to him, she is "haunted . . . by the Puritan spirit."[11] Robert Sherwood, too, cites the effects of American Puritanism on her sensibility; in fact, he believes that she experienced a conversion in the American Puritan sense in 1862.[12] Richard B. Sewall describes her as being "founded solidly on the [American Puritan] tradition."[13]

Some have found ED to be a skeptic or even a non-believer, one who uses religious and biblical language only as metaphor for secular or even heretical ideas.[14] It is often stressed that she did not attend church after the age of about thirty and that she was highly critical of organized religion and her contemporary "christians," a word she rarely capitalized. However, one must make a clear distinction between church membership and religious sensibility. Although ED did not "respect 'doctrines'" (L-200), the cast of her mind was essentially religious. She declared her "Spirit" to be "Puritan" (L-866), defined in the "Lexicon" she acknowledged

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to be an important "companion" (L-261) as one who "follow[s] the pure word of God, in opposition to all traditions and human constitutions." Webster's definition describes very well the way in which ED was religious. A reading of the poems discloses that although she rejects the institutionalized church and its traditions, she follows "the pure word of God," especially as revealed by Jesus, in an "Old fashioned" way (e.g., P-70). She is a "Pagan" (e.g., L-976) in that she is not a Christian in the nineteenth-century meaning of the word (Webster).

Although I disagree with those who find ED to be a non-believer, certainly it is not the purpose of this study to challenge those critics who find in ED correspondences with American religious and literary traditions. She is, after all, an American poet who sees "New Englandly" (P-285). However, I propose that a close reading of the canon reveals that ED is not only an American poet; she is also one who wrote in the poetic tradition of devotionalism. Her work is therefore in some ways more like that of other religious writers, particularly Herbert and the English poets of the seventeenth century, than like her own American predecessors and contemporaries. In fact, the meeting of these two traditions in the mind and art of ED probably accounts to a great extent for her widely acclaimed "unique voice."

I am indebted for my definition of devotionalism to Professor Miriam K. Starkman's seminar on Religious Poetry. Although the poems of ED were not included in the course, as Professor Starkman described and defined the devotional

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tradition, it became more and more clear, to my considerable surprise, that ED is one of the group of poets whose axis extends from Dream of the Rood and the Pearl poet through the medieval lyricists, Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw in the seventeenth century and ED's near-contemporary, Gerard Manley Hopkins, to Eliot and Auden. Like these poets, ED relies heavily on Scripture; Christ is for her a central figure; she uses ecclesiastical and liturgical language as well as that of sacred parody; her concerns are eschatological, death for her a Christian experience.[15]

ED resembles the devotional poets of the seventeenth century in terms of form and style as well as of religious sensibility. Like them, she is essentially dramatic, conversational, colloquial, and witty; her poems, like theirs, often begin with startling first lines; her images, like those of Donne and Crashaw especially, are sometimes baroque or mannerist. Further, like the seventeenth-century poets, she is frequently meditational, for hers is a mind engaged "in the act of finding what will suffice."[16] Some poems are even in the three-fold meditational form, addressing in turn memory, understanding, and will, the three functions of mind corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity.[17] Perhaps most significantly, like all religious poets, especially those of the seventeenth century, ED's imagination is startingly, emblematically visual. Often she enclosed a flower, a picture, or even a dead bee with a poem as the emblem on which it is based. More often, the visual object for meditation is implied;

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yet an understanding of the suggested hieroglyph is sometimes crucial in deciphering a particular poem.[18]

This reading of ED in context of the conventions of the devotional tradition is one suggested for The Temple by Rosamond Tuve in A Reading of George Herbert. As the title of this chapter suggests, my study is greatly indebted to her critique in which she urges that readers must bear in mind the traditional religious meanings of figures used by Herbert, what images meant to him rather than what they might mean to a twentieth-century secular-minded reader.[19] Such a reading is correct, too, for the poems of ED: since she was in fact a poet writing in the devotional tradition, an understanding of religious tropes and figures is of great importance in interpreting her poems.

Another of Professor Tuve's important insights is her emphasis on a holistic reading of The Temple. She stresses that her explication of particular paradigmatic poems informs the reading of all Herbert's poems; therefore, she urges the reader always to be aware that Herbert's is a religious sensibility and that all the poems must be read accordingly.[20] Similarly, I do not mean to isolate ED's poems on such specifically devotional subjects as Jesus, God, and the soul, labelling them her devotional poems. Rather, these particular poems illuminate all the poems which, significantly, she refers to as "hymns" and "psalms."[21] What I propose, then, is a new "Reading of Emily Dickinson" as devotional poet, one whose work, like her life,

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is "aglow with God and immortality."[22] I believe such a reading to be essential to an understanding of those "cryptic notations."

* * * * * * * * * *

This study seemed to fall naturally into four parts. Part One consists of the above statement of purpose and acknowledgement of debts to scholars who have been particularly important to my thinking about ED. It also includes sections on each of the following assumptions basic to my reading of the canon. First, ED was a "bookish" poet and therefore probably learned from a number of religious texts which were available to her. Second, sometimes like the seventeenth-century devotional poets, at other times in her own particular way, ED's use of the comic is of importance in understanding her unique religious voice. Third, the nature of the poet's lifelong literary and personal friendship with Susan Gilbert Dickinson, though often denied, must be acknowledged. Understanding their relationship is vital to understanding the poet and her work; Susan Dickinson's evaluation of the poet as intensely religious is of particular value to this study.

Parts Two, Three, and Four are divided according to Professor Anderson's cluster method: rather than explicating each poem as an entity, groups of poems on single themes or images are read together so that each illuminates the others.[23] Such a reading is particularly appropriate for the ED canon because, like the seventeenth-century meditational poets, she

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dramatically projects various personae on the stage of her mind and poems for critical examination.[24] Since these personae sometimes present differing points of view--various possible attitudes toward a single subject--it is particularly misleading to read a single poem in isolation from others on the same subject. Therefore, Part Two is devoted to the cluster of poems to and about Jesus; Part Three to the God cluster; Part Four to the soul cluster. Each of these chapters is in turn divided into sections or sub-clusters. For example, the poems to and about Jesus are divided into: (I) The Life of Christ Poems, (II) Prayer-poems to Jesus, (III) Sacramental Poems, and (IV) Master Poems and Letters. It is by reading each of these sub-clusters as a group in the larger context of the Jesus cluster that one can begin to understand ED's meanings.

It seems important to consider the Jesus cluster first since the Christocentricity of so many of the poems is unmistakable evidence that ED is indeed writing in the devotional tradition. Although even such an estimable critic as Thomas H. Johnson minimizes the importance of Jesus to the canon,[25] a reading of the Jesus poems as a cluster reveals that for ED as for other devotional poets Jesus is a major figure and that the poet expresses through a variety of personae a consistently loving and admiring portrait of the second person of the Trinity. The many poems based on the life of Christ as well as the prayer-poems to him dispute Professor Anderson's theory that the Bible was for her chiefly a source of imagery for her true religion, which was poetry. Although ED sometimes does

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conflate her poetic gift with Jesus and write of poetry as divine, especially in the sacramental group and in the Master poems and letters, her Christology far exceeds such limits.

In Part Three, the many poems specifically to and about God are considered. The portrait of the Father is understandably less clear and consistent than that of the Son; in fact, ED plays with various concepts of God,[26] projecting images of him and attitudes toward him on the stage of her mind and poems much as she projects possible selves. Sometimes he is "distant --stately Lover" (357), at others "noted Clergyman" (324), "Old Neighbor" (623), "Mastiff" (1317), or "Burglar! Banker-- Father" (49). She concludes that God is finally unknowable except through Jesus, nature, poety, and the soul. All speak for God and prove his existence. Although he is ultimately "A Force illegible," "All Circumstances are the Frame / In which His Face is set --" (820).

Chapter Four is a close reading of the poems in which ED meditates on the nature and destiny of the soul. Like other religious poets, she often addresses her soul. Further, for ED the soul is sacred and immortal. Body and soul are separate and distinct; sometimes the two even carry on dialogues with one another as in the religious tradition beginning with the medieval debates between body and soul. The soul is sometimes dwelling or temple for Jesus or God, the soul's "Guest"; this union between soul and divinity is necessary for the creation of poetry. In the soul chapter, ED's poems of inner exploration are also considered because for her as for the seventeenth-

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century religious poets, relentless self-examination is a religious rather than a narcissistic exercise, a search for God and Paradise within.[27] As she says, "Paradise is no Journey because it. . . is within --" (PF-99).

In the chapter dealing with the soul poems, as in those to and about Jesus and God, I have limited my discussions almost exclusively to poems in which these religious topics are specifically named because it is of first importance to establish that ED is writing on undeniably Christian themes. However, as stated above, I do not mean to suggest that only these poems are devotional, for all the poems inform one another. If, for example, there are a number of poems in which death is described as a Christian experience, by extension all the many poems about death invite a metaphorical devotional interpretation. Similarly, if in a number of poems nature is specifically presented as proving God's existence and love, as in "The Star's Etruscan Argument/ Substantiate a God --" (P-1528), all the many nature poems lend themselves to a devotional reading. Most important, the many poems in which God, Jesus, and the soul are specifically named or addressed indicate that she does so in others as well. Like the Old Testament Psalmist, Herbert, and à Kempis, ED often addresses Deity, her soul, and her readers. In fact, I believe that the canon is best understood holistically as the account of a reverential life lived in the presence of divinity. Like The Temple, it is the meditative autobiography of a soul as it progresses through the finite world toward its "divinely appointed destiny of union with God."[28]

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II. ED as "bookish poet"

Although one cannot give incontrovertible proof that ED read certain books and was influenced by them, there is much evidence that she, like Henry Vaughan, was a "bookish poet," to borrow Frank Kermode's descriptive phrase for the earlier devotional poet. Because ED, like Vaughan, was isolated from literary contemporaries, her dependence on books was great. Further, just as Vaughan in Silex Scintillans acknowledged his debt to George Herbert, so ED in L-261 to T. W. Higginson acknowledged hers to Sir Thomas Browne, her "Lexicon," and "the Revelations." In poems, too, she indicates her reliance upon books, for there are many poems in praise of books. Internal evidence also indicates that ED's poems were sometimes inspired by books. Therefore, as Professor Kermode says of Vaughan, often one is better advised to search for a literary rather than a personal inspiration for a particular ED poem.[29]

The role of books in ED's poetic development is a controversial subject. Anderson and Whicher believe literary influence to have been slight, Anderson even commenting that "no poet was ever less indebted to books."[30] It seems to me, however, that Sewall and Miller are more correct in their evaluation of literary influence on ED: often she engaged in

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a kind of dialogue with literary predecessors, carefully reading their work, then thoughtfully presenting her own variation.[31] For example, P-480 seems almost unmistakably a response to her beloved Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How do I love thee?" and P-1393 her own compressed version of T. W. Higginson's "Decoration." In fact, ED enclosed the latter poem in a letter to Higginson three years after his own was published, with a note concluding, "I was rereading your 'Decoration.' You may have forgotten it" (P-1393n). There are a number of other poems which seem to be responses to or meditations on themes and stories from biblical and other devotional sources. Those based on the life of Christ are contemporized versions of the Gospels (e.g., P-1612); many about God, variations on biblical passages (e.g., P-1254); and an overwhelming number of poems seem to be responses to George Herbert and Thomas à Kempis, for there are striking similarities between their work and her own in idea, image, and form.

Therefore, although ED was not a plagiarist,[32] nor a victim of "anxiety of influence," her books and literary predecessors seem to have been important sources of inspiration. In fact, literary and personal friends seem to have been almost interchangeable, all part of her "estate" (L-193). Just as she often preferred a letter, "the mind without corporeal friend" (L-330) to a personal encounter, her literary friends seemed as real to her as personal ones. There were pictures on her bedroom wall of George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning, and Thomas

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Carlyle.[33] Also, her elegies for literary figures, especially those for Elizabeth Browning (P-312, 363, 593) and George Eliot (P-1562, 1564), express real loss in a personal sense. In fact, P-154 served as elegy both for her beloved nephew Gilbert and for George Eliot whom she knew only through her writings.

Although there is evidence of the poet's interest in and debt to a number of literary sources, the books which are of particular interest to this study are the Bible, Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, George Herbert's Poetical Works, Quarles's Emblems, The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, anthologies containing selections by Donne, Vaughan, and Crashaw, and Thomas à Kempis' The Imitation of Christ. An examination of these volumes in the Dickinson Collection at the Houghton Library reveals that markings thought to be by her are scarce; however, their inclusion in the Collection indicates that all were probably available to her either in Susan Dickinson's library or in that of ED's family. More significantly, internal evidence suggests that she read and assimilated a great deal from these books as will be specifically pointed out in this study.

As previously noted, it is important that the poet herself in a letter to T. W. Higginson acknowledged a debt to her Lexicon, Sir Thomas Browne, and the Book of Revelation. Certainly, the Bible, including Revelation, pervades her work like no other.[34] As with other devotional poets, if all biblical references were removed, the canon would crumble. Her own Bible, presently in the Dickinson Collection at the

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Houghton Library, is an 1843 edition, presented to her by her father in 1844, its fragile condition indicating frequent use.

An 1844 copy of Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, in the same collection, is perhaps the "Lexicon" she mentions. However, scholars do not agree. Professors Anderson, Miller, and Whicher cite the Dictionary of 1847;[35] Willis J. Buckingham, that of 1846;[36] Jean Mudge, that of 1844,[37] the copy in the Dickinson Collection. Certainly, we cannot be certain which volume or volumes she used. However, there are three early major editions of Webster's Dictionary, those of 1828 and 1840, then a revised 1847 edition. Other printings of the 1840s seem to have included comparatively minor changes, abridgements, etc.[38] Since B. F. Newton, her earliest "Tutor," died in 1853 (L-110), after which "for several years" her "Lexicon" was her "only companion" (L-261), it seems likely that her "Lexicon" was a volume published between the major edition of 1840 and the date of Newton's death, perhaps the 1844 copy from her father's library, even more probably, considering her deep interest in words, some version of the more recent 1847 edition. Interestingly, a comparison of the Harvard copy with that of 1848 upon which I have relied extensively indicates that for key words such as "awe," "circumference," and "master," definitions are in almost every case identical. Probably more significant than ascertaining the exact copy she used is noting the Americanization of spelling and definition in all versions as well as Webster's consistently Christian

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frame of thought, for he often includes scriptural references in his definitions. The Lexicon, then, is not only important in understanding current definitions of words; it is also in a sense another religious text from which she learned.

The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, acknowledged in the same letter as important, is also in the Dickinson Collection at Harvard. The three volumes of the 1852 edition are inscribed "Susan Huntington Gilbert," indicating that Sue owned the books before her marriage in 1856 and that therefore they were available to ED long before 1858 when she seems to have begun seriously to write poetry.[39] Not only did ED have early access to the prose work of Sir Thomas Browne; Judith Banzer gives convincing evidence that she also probably read at least some of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets early enough to have learned from them.[40] Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw were represented in anthologies in both Susan Dickinson's and the Dickinson family libraries. Susan Dickinson's library also included an 1824 edition of Quarles's Emblems as well as an 1857 edition of Herbert's Poetical Works. We can be sure that ED read Vaughan and Herbert, although not precisely when, for she mentions Vaughan in an 1880 letter to T. W. Higginson (L-653). Also, two stanzas of Herbert's "Mattens," written in her own hand, were found among her papers after her death. The stanzas were thought to be by her and even published as hers in an early edition of the poems.[41] Although their influence on ED cannot be proved unquestionably, it is highly probable that she read and

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learned from these seventeenth-century writers.

ED never mentions The Imitation of Christ in a letter or poem; however, it seems apparent that for her as for George Herbert, the book was of great importance.[42] She had access to both the 1857 and the 1876 editions, the first inscribed with her name in Sue's hand, the second a Christmas gift from Sue, inscribed "Emily with love."[43] That the first copy was shared with Sue and the second given her by Sue is especially important because of their close friendship and the literary influence Sue may have had upon the poet.[44] The 1857 edition at the Houghton Library is well-worn, in fact precariously held together by a shoe string. Strangely, there are several uncut leaves in the volume; and almost all the markings thought to be ED's are in the final section having to do with preparation for the eucharist, perhaps providing a clue to her eucharistic poems, to be discussed fully later. Other sections which I find to be probable inspirations for poems are unmarked. However, since markings in her Bible and the Dickinson library eight-volume edition of Shakespeare are similarly sparse, we must simply recognize that she left few clues as to the passages she found most inspiring. Still, there are a number of striking correlations between the Imitation and the poems, which I will point out in specific instances in this study.

Although one cannot give incontrovertible proof of literary influence upon ED, it is important to note that in poems and letters she herself acknowledges her debt to

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books; that the Bible, Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, George Herbert's Poetical Works, Quarles's Emblems, and à Kempis' Imitation were available to her; and that internal evidence indicates she almost certainly read these books and assimilated many of their ideas and images, transforming them in the service of her own unique religious voice. Therefore, although she wrote to Higginson that she "never consciously touched a paint mixed by another person" (L-271), indications are that her reading was extensive and that she learned from it.

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III. "God be with the Clown" (P-1333)

Another assumption of this study is that ED frequently made use of comic techniques, particularly in presenting specifically biblical and devotional themes. By comic, of course, I do not refer merely to the funny, but rather to a particular perspective on life.[45] Certainly, the Christian and the comic are compatible, comic irreverence appearing more often in religious rather than in secular ages.[46] In fact, from the beginning, comic elements are to be found in Christian thought and tradition: Christ as clown appeared as early as in the catacomb drawings of him with the head of an ass and as late as in the paintings of Roualt and the play Godspell.[47] Also, mystery and morality plays are both religious in theme and often comic rather than tragic or solemn. There is even a question as to whether tragedy, comedy's opposite mode and world view, can be written in a Christian context, for tragedy portrays the individual as utterly alone in the world and completely destroyed or damned in the end. Christianity, on the other hand, stresses the idea that God's eye is always on the individual and that he is therefore never really alone. Also, although Christ was destroyed as were Promotheus and Oedipus, the real emphasis in the Christian story is not on the crucifixion, but rather on his resurrection and glorious

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ascension into heaven. The emphasis in Christian thought, then, is on the final triumph of the resurrected individual. Death is not annihilation, but a going "to God," as ED expresses it (e.g., P-390). The progress of the Christian life, like that of comic action in The Divine Comedy, for example, is from bad fortune to good.

As well as being appropriate to the devotional tradition, the comic is also a means of achieving distance, the "anesthesia of the heart" necessary for laughter or objectivity.[48] As ED writes in P-1715, "The truth I do not dare to know / I muffle with a jest." In P-165, she says, "Mirth is the Mail of Anguish." The comic, then, is a means of intellectualizing an emotional subject. In this way, ED is like the seventeenth-century poets who with "unified sensibility" dealt with feelings in logical, legal, and witty language. ED is both like and unlike these poets in her use of the comic, for although she is often witty in the metaphysical style, at other times she is more broadly humorous in the American sense.[49] Her use of both seventeenth-century wit and American humor is appropriate to her unique religious voice, for as noted above, she is both an American poet who saw "New Englandly" and a "bookish" poet who wrote in a poetic tradition.

As is often pointed out, the most frequently used word in the Dickinson canon is "I," linking her not only generally to the colloquialism typical of seventeenth-century poets, but in specific poems to the oral tradition of American humor as well. This American oral tradition began with the tall tales

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told by early settlers to one another in the wilderness, perhaps reached its acme in the first person lectures and books of Mark Twain, and probably its decline in the twentieth-century stand-up comic. This American teller of the first person story is often irreverent, as in Huck Finn's remark that he was interested in the story about "Moses and the Bulrushers" until he discovered that Moses was dead, explaining, "I don't take no stock in dead people."[50] Huck is but one manifestation of this typical American comic persona; another is the "I" of Walden, which ED had probably read. Always he/she is practical and shrewd, colloquial, and one who applies the rules of plain common sense to lofty, often religious subjects.[51] Poem 597 is a good example of ED's use of American humor:

It always felt to me -- a wrong
To that Old Moses -- done --
To let him see -- the Canaan --
Without the entering --

And tho' in soberer moments --
No Moses there can be
I'm satisfied -- the Romance
In point of injury --

Surpasses sharper stated --
Of Stephen -- or of Paul --
For these -- were only put to death --
While God's adroiter will

On Moses -- seemed to fasten
With tantalizing Play
As Boy -- should deal with lesser Boy --
To prove ability.

The fault -- was doubtless Israel's --
Myself -- had banned the Tribes --
And ushered Grand Old Moses
In Pentateuchal Robes

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Upon the Broad Possession
'Twas little -- He should see --
Old Man on Nebo! Late as this --
My justice bleeds -- for Thee!

The projected persona, the "I" who is telling the story and commenting on it, is the irreverent, shrewd Yankee. She is seemingly as unaware of the comic aspect of her irreverent judgment of God as is Huck in his dead-pan pronouncement that Moses is uninteresting because dead or the "I" of Walden in his reference to the Bible as "an old book."[52] ED, in this poem as in many others, uses American humor to contemporize and make more relevant traditional biblical stories. However, not only is humor a means of telling her version of the story, of responding to a literary model; it is also a means of ridiculing and criticizing Old Testament "Tellers" (P-1545) who portray an unloving and unlovable God.

ED uses such typical techniques of American humor as the Yankee persona, colloquial language, irreverence, exaggeration, and local color. She also frequently employs other forms of the comic, such as irony, especially in the late poems; surprise in her use of unexpected or foregrounded words; and sometimes satire, particularly in poems about the institutionalized church of which she was highly critical (e.g., P-1207). Certainly, her much discussed compression is a comic form, for brevity and condensation are central to wit.[53] ED also uses wit as a means of achieving a sense of complicity and intimacy with her readers, for the comic "always implies a kind of secret freemasonery."[54] Sometimes, too, she projects a persona

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who is a "mechanical man" and therefore laughable as in the speaker who is comic in his "machine-like" and "rigid" use of professional legal language to prove the truth of the after-life (P-432).[55] In other poems, she "calls . . . attention to the physical . . . when it is the moral side that is concerned";[56] one such poem is 465 in which an interposing fly appears at an awesome death scene. Still another use of the comic is her outrageous turning the tables on God as in P-597 above and others in which she imagines herself as God and sometimes even God as herself.[57] Even ED's dramatic presentation of various personae on the stage of her mind and poems for critical evaluation is closely connected to the comic, for as Bergson says, "wit is a certain _dramatic_ way of thinking. Instead of treating his ideas as mere symbols, the wit sees them, hears them, and, above all, makes them converse with one another like persons."[58] ED shares this dramatic way of thinking with the seventeenth-century metaphysical or meditational poets.[59]

ED's most frequently used comic device and the one central to her thought is "bisociation" or "reciprocal interference of a series." The former term is Arthur Koestler's for "the perceiving of a situation or idea . . . in two habitually incompatible frames of reference." Koestler goes on to explain that bisociation is common to both comic and creative thinking; it is double-mindedness, thinking on two levels at one time. He adds that this "clash of two mutually incompatible codes" leads both to laughter and to discovery.[60] Henri Bergson's term, "reciprocal interference of a series," is similar to

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Koestler's bisociation; as Bergson points out, a situation is invariably comic if it belongs simultaneously to two independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different ways at the same time.[61] One form of bisociation or reciprocal interference of a series is anachronism,[62] which ED and other devotional poets use as a means of expressing the timelessness of the Christian message. Just as W. H. Auden presents the nativity as taking place in the twentieth-century in "For the Time Being," ED's nineteenth-century persona in P-1487 says that he and Jesus were boys together. Similarly, in P-1254 she substitutes a nineteenth-century American "Wagon" for Elijah's usual fiery chariot, therefore contemporizing and making timeless the Elijah story. Another form of bisociation is the so-called metaphysical conceit in which two disparate objects or ideas are made to "clash" and reveal meanings. As John Donne brings together two lovers and a pair of compasses,[63] ED begins P-254 with "'Hope' is the thing with feathers." In both cases, the "clash" of two seemingly disparate codes results in surprise and then discovery.

Pun is still another form of bisociation or reciprocal interference of a series, for in pun two distinct definitions meet in a single word or in two words which sound almost exactly alike. Although pun was frequently used and highly regarded by seventeenth-century poets and Shakespeare, thereafter such word play fell into disrepute. Once more, literary influence is suggested, for ED makes frequent use of pun, not merely to

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evoke laughter, but more often to explore meanings, to make unexpected discoveries through the "clash" of two disparate objects or ideas within a single word. ED's frequent use of the sun-son pun especially recalls the seventeenth-century poets; George Herbert even wrote a poem, "The Sonne," in which he pays tribute to the English language because it lends itself to such word play.[64] In P-106 ED's sun is the celestial body in Stanza 1, the second person of the Trinity in Stanza 2. In fact, the "Compound Vision" of both ED and the seventeenth-century poets[65] is often expressed in the form of pun, a means of uniting the earthly and infinite within a single or aurally similar word. Her use of such words as "immortality," for example, unites earthly poetic immortality with the eternal life of the soul. "Master" sometimes refers to earthly preceptors like Newton and Higginson, at others to her soul's "Master," Jesus and/or poetry, suggesting a correspondence between the finite and the infinite. This multiplicity of sometimes disparate meanings for a single word in the form of pun is crucial in understanding the poems of ED. As Professor Anderson says, she exploits punning, "not in a frivolous context but as the legitimate adjunct of a superbly serious style."[66]

The comic, then, is central to ED's poetic thought. Sometimes it is a means of evoking laughter, at others of achieving distance; at still others, comic techniques are a means of attaining a sense of intimacy with her readers or of criticizing institutions or people of whom she disapproved. Often, metaphysical wit or American humor provide strategies for responding to a literary predecessor, frequently the Bible,

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and of telling the story in a fresh new way. Her most important comic device, however, is "reciprocal interference of a series" or "bisociation," particularly in the form of pun, a means of seeing double or multiple meanings and of exploring language and thought. Instances of her use of the comic will be discussed more specifically in the explication of particular poems.

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IV. In Defense of Sue

One of the most important assumptions of this study is that ED and Susan Gilbert Dickinson were lifelong friends and literary confidantes and that therefore Sue's evaluation of the poet and her work in her unsigned obituary in The Springfield Republican deserves serious consideration. Although the focus of this study is on the poems rather than on the life of the poet, a long digression to consider Sue's obituary, ED's letters to her, and reasons why the intimacy of the two women is denied seems essential in order to justify subsequent references to Sue and reliance upon her judgment of the poet.[67]

In her elegiac essay, Sue expresses loss, affection, and admiration for her friend as well as keen insight into the value and nature of the poems. The elegy also is evidence that Sue herself wrote clearly and gracefully and that her style, ideas, and use of language sometimes reflect the poet's own. One is reminded of Carew's elegiac poem for John Donne.[68] Like Carew's elegy, Sue's is a fine piece of early literary criticism of the poet's work and one in which use of language and metaphor suggest the poet's influence. It is also interesting to note that in her obituary Sue expresses informed opinions about many of the issues that have concerned

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ED scholars ever since. For example, she believed ED's withdrawal from society to have been the natural, gradual, and deliberate choice of a "sensitive nature" who "turned to her own large wealth of individual resources for companionship," finding "the sacred quiet of her own home . . . the fit atmosphere for her worth and work." If Sue was intimate with the poet and therefore correct in her opinion, much time has been wasted in searching for a more dramatic reason: a repressive father, a disappointing love affair, agoraphobia or some other mental aberration.[69]

Other perceptive statements in the obituary include, "Her talk and her writings were like no one else's." Here, Sue prefigures the "new critics'" pronouncement that ED has a unique voice, and that at her best she "resembles no one."[70] Sue also has a definite opinion on the much debated question of whether or not ED wished to publish. According to her, the poet did not, and, in fact, never would have published even those seven poems which appeared in her lifetime except that "some enthusiastic literary friend . . . turn[ed] love to larceny and cause[d] a few verses surreptitiously obtained to be printed." Sue's alliterative and witty phrase "love to larceny" could almost have been ED's own. Similarly, her description of ED's withdrawal into her own resources and the way in which she always withstood the "frequently notable persons" who paid her visits "in an attempt to convince her to publish" suggests ED's P-303:

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> The Soul selects her own Society --
> Then -- shuts the Door --
>
> . . .
>
> Unmoved -- she notes the Chariots -- pausing --
> At her low Gate --
> Unmoved -- an Emperor be kneeling
> Upon her Mat -- . . .

Sue's description of ED's wit as a "Damascus blade gleaming and glancing in the sun" is sometimes quoted. One wishes that Sue had written extensively and more specifically upon this subject as well as upon the others she mentions so briefly in her graceful little essay. She then compares ED's "swift poetic rapture" to that of the "long glistening note of a bird one hears in the June woods at high noon." "Swift" suggests the movement so characteristic of many of the poems. "Glistening note" is a synesthesia typical of ED's syntax. Also, Sue's metaphor of the poet as "bird" as well as her reference to "noon" are typical of the Dickinson vocabulary.

Sue writes of the "simplicity and homeliness as well as profundity" of the poems, an apt description of the deceptive simplicity characteristic of ED's particular voice. More significant for this study is her reference to the way in which the poet is able to catch "shadowy apparitions of the brain and toss[ed] them in startling picturesqueness to her friends," a perfect analysis of ED's way of exploring her inner self, reifying the thoughts and ideas she finds there, and then emblematically presenting them, a poetic process which links her strongly to the seventeenth-century devotional poets.

Sue refers to ED's "intimate and passionate . . . love

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of Nature" and her "Keen and eclectic" literary tastes, the former suggesting that Sue was widely familiar with the Dickinson canon with its strong emphasis on nature, the latter exhibiting a close familiarity with ED's personal reading habits whose eclectic nature has been substantiated more recently by Jack L. Capps in ED's Reading.[71] Such an analysis of her reading habits is also germane to this study which assumes that ED read widely and probably was inspired and influenced by her readings. Sue's description of the way in which ED "seized the kernel [of an idea] instantly, almost impatient of the fewest words, by which she must make her revelation" is probably the earliest comment on ED's much admired and discussed compression.

Susan Dickinson concludes her elegiac obituary by stressing ED's religious sensibility:

> To her life was rich, and all aglow with God and immortality. With no creed, no formulated faith, hardly knowing the names of dogmas, she walked this life with the gentleness and reverence of old saints, with the firm step of martyrs who sing while they suffer. How better note the flight of this "soul of fire in a shell of pearl" than by her own words --
>
> Morns like these, we parted;
> Noons like these, she rose;
> Fluttering first, then firmer,
> To her fair repose.

Sue's closing remarks are of great importance to this study in which her evaluation of the poet's religious sensibility is supported by a close reading not only of the many poems specifically about God, Jesus, and the soul, but of the many others in which she expresses a reverential attitude to the

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world, including nature and the soul, as manifestations of divinity (e.g., P-932 and P-1451). As Sue said, ED had "no creed," did not "respect doctrines," as she herself expressed it (L-200). However, as Sue points out, the poet possessed a distinctly religious sensibility.

Sue's concluding metaphor for the poet, a "'soul of fire in a shell of pearl,'" is an apt description of ED's outwardly uneventful but inwardly passionate life. Also, the poetic quality and nature of the phrase is such that it might have been ED's own, for it recalls a number of poems in which the persona is similarly described as being inwardly volcanic but outwardly serene (e.g., P-1677). The metaphor, too, strengthens my argument that the poems are the meditative autobiography of a soul rather than the literal autobiography of a nineteenth-century Amherst woman. It is significant, too, that P-27 with which Sue ends the elegy is not one of the poems known to have been sent to her by the poet, for it reinforces the suggestion throughout the obituary that Sue's familiarity with the poet and her work was extensive. Her use of this poem makes clear that her knowledge of the canon exceeded the 276 poems known to have been sent to her.

A close reading of Sue's elegy is revealing in a number of ways. Her affection for the poet is apparent from the sincerity of her tone. The obituary also reflects language typical of ED's poetry and letters, suggesting that their intimacy was of the sort resulting in a similar use of words, a real influence (perhaps reciprocal) of style, language, and

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thought. The little essay suggests as well that Sue was impressively familiar with the ED canon and that she was an able enough literary critic to make perceptive, sometimes even prophetic, analyses of the poet and her work.[72] Sue possessed an understanding of ED's solitary life, her reluctance to publish, the uniqueness of her voice, her wit, her reifying and emblematically visual imagination, the movement characteristic of so many of her best poems, her love of nature, her reading habits, the intense compression characteristic of her verse, and her religious sensibility and reverential attitude toward life and poetry. The obituary, if examined closely, is an elegy reflecting the personal intimacy of the two women as well as early and impressive literary criticism of the poems themselves.

* * * * * * * * * * *

But why have Sue's words not been taken more seriously? Why have her literary and personal evaluations of the poet been ignored? Sue's opinions have not been valued because she has been much and unfairly maligned. The nature of her friendship with the poet has been distorted, for it is generally believed that although Sue and ED were friends as girls, their relationship cooled to the point of indifference or even of hostility in later life.[73] However, it must be remembered that these opinions are based on the testimony of Mabel Loomis Todd and others who might have been wrong or even have wished for personal reasons to

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obscure Sue's close relationship with ED. It is my contention that in evaluating ED's friendship with Sue, less attention should be given to personal opinion and hearsay; rather, emphasis should be placed on the poet's own words in the more than 180 existing letters she sent to Sue and her children over a period of nearly forty years. The task remaining for modern readers of the letters as well as of the poems is to "give them the serious attention they deserve," "to stare a hole in the page."

Before examining the letters, it seems important to consider reasons why Mabel Loomis Todd, ED's first editor, might have been unaware of the poet's friendship with Sue or even have wished it to be suppressed. Generally, scholars feel enormous gratitude toward Mrs. Todd, for it is believed that if she had not gathered, edited, then seen through publication the poems and letters, they might have been lost forever. Certainly, this is a grim possibility, causing one to be grateful for Mrs. Todd's energy and diligence. However, we must remember that in addition to being ED's first editor, Mrs. Todd was ED's brother Austin's mistress for the last thirteen years of his life.[74] Therefore, it is not surprising that Mrs. Todd and Susan Dickinson were enemies. In fact, Mrs. Todd herself referred to Sue as "my most bitter enemy,"[75] causing one to question the objectivity of Mrs. Todd's judgment both of Sue and of Sue's friendship with the poet. It is possible that Mrs. Todd honestly did not know the depth and scope of their relationship; however, even if she did,

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because of her role as "other woman" and Sue's as "wronged wife," Mrs. Todd would not have been inclined to praise Sue or to credit her as being an important influence on the poet. And, indeed, she did not. Rather, she pictured Sue as cruel and vindictive and claimed that Sue's and ED's relationship was distant, even hostile,[76] judgments directly contradicted by the existing letters ED sent to Sue and her children.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Todd's assessment of Sue's and ED's relationship has been supported and strengthened by her daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, whose editing of ED's poems and critical work has caused her, too, to be influential to ED scholarship. In fact, many contemporary critical and biographical works begin by acknowledging a debt to one or both women.[77] However, Richard B. Sewall's monumental 1974 biography includes new information about Mrs. Todd and her role in the Dickinson drama which lead one to question the validity of the legend of "War between the Houses"[78] as well as Mrs. Todd's objectivity in her judgment of Sue and her friendship with the poet. Such new information provides good reason for another look at Mrs. Todd's editions of poems and letters and at Mrs. Bingham's <u>Ancestors' Brocades</u>.[79] The new data also suggest the value of a closer examination of the cluster of existing letters to Sue, as well as those to Mrs. Todd, all available for the first time in their entirety, in an unexpurgated form, and in probable sequence in Thomas H. Johnson's 1958 edition of the letters.

An examination of Mrs. Todd's 1894 and 1931 editions

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of the letters reveals that from the beginning she and/or someone seemed determined to erase all evidence of Sue's existence and of her friendship with the poet, substituting instead the suggestion that Mrs. Todd herself was the poet's dear friend. There are in fact no letters to Sue in either edition. Considering the rivalry between the two women, Sue probably would have refused to allow Mrs. Todd access to her letters even had she been asked. However, not only are these letters missing; all the many references to Sue in letters to others are also deleted. Mrs. Todd explains that the name of "a relative then living" does not appear in either edition because Austin and Lavinia had requested that it be omitted.[80] Perhaps this is so; yet such editing is a distortion of the truth and has had a deleterious effect on ED scholarship.

Not only did Austin and/or Mrs. Todd or someone else erase all evidence of Sue in the letters; Mrs. Todd also discredited Sue's obituary. Interestingly, had it not been for her, the obituary might have served as preface to the first edition of the poems. However, when Mr. Higginson suggested this in a letter, Mrs. Todd seems never to have responded. At least Mrs. Bingham includes no such response, reporting only that her mother said that such a suggestion had infuriated Lavinia.[81] Later when an admirer of the poems wrote to Mrs. Todd requesting information about the obituary which Mr. Higginson had suggested as a valuable source, Mrs. Todd assured the questioner that she knew that "no extra copy" of the obituary existed in the Republican office, adding

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that "it gives very little of her personality" and that Mrs. Todd's own paper "prepared for Women's Clubs in Springfield, Boston and other places . . . contains more of her life than anything else has done. . . ."[82]

Personal ambition as well as hatred for Sue was probably a contributing factor to Mrs. Todd's discrediting of Sue, for Mrs. Todd seems to have been ambitious even to the point of sharp practice. Mrs. Bingham herself gives evidence of this in her account of Mrs. Todd's having rewritten a book by her astronomer husband in order to make it suitable for popular consumption, a task not unlike the one she performed for the poems of ED. After she had completed her revision, Mrs. Bingham tells us that Mr. Todd decided that the book was Mabel's and insisted that her name alone be credited. "That is how Total Eclipses of the Sun, by Mabel Loomis Todd . . . came to be published. . . ."[83] Obviously, one must conclude that Mrs. Todd did not mind taking credit for a book she had not written if it would enhance her literary reputation.

Other evidence of Mrs. Todd's personal ambition is to be found in Lavinia's testimony in the court trial between them, a legal battle over a piece of Dickinson property Mrs. Todd claimed Austin had left her upon his death. Although Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham consistently have claimed that Lavinia forced the poems upon Mrs. Todd and that, even though she had many other important projects, she edited them, presumably because of her good heart,[84] Lavinia testified that Mrs. Todd had asked to edit them, that she "thought it would be for her

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literary reputation to do it, and it made her reputation."[85] And so it did. Who, after all, would have heard of Mabel Loomis Todd, for all her ventures into writing, little theatre, and painting if she had not edited the poems and letters of ED, then in the nineties lectured frequently on the poet whom she claimed to have known intimately? Although I do not propose to pass judgment on the fairness of the court's decision, it is perhaps significant to add that Lavinia won the case on both local and state supreme court levels.[86] And although Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham have protested the unfairness of the verdict and claimed that Lavinia perjured herself throughout the trial, I propose that the opinions of the town of Amherst and the State of Massachusetts should be given at least as much consideration as that of Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham, also that Lavinia's story about Mrs. Todd's asking to edit the poems be given as much weight as the account of the two women that Lavinia forced them on her.

It seems important to note that although Mrs. Todd suggests that she and the poet were on intimate terms, there is little evidence that this was so. Although she admits that she never met the poet face-to-face, in her 1894 edition of the letters, Mrs. Todd writes: "From the many notes sent me by ED during the last four years of her life, it was a difficult matter to select those best fitted for publication."[87] Professor Sewall includes Mrs. Todd's written reminiscence that, "As Sue grew farther from me, Emily came closer, and her notes and messages grew more frequent and more intimate."

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"Her little notes were the acme of each day."[88] However, there are, in fact, only ten existing letters to Mrs. Todd, plus one she claims ED sent her with flowers, a claim disputed by Thomas H. Johnson who points out that the note is in the "hastily jotted handwriting" ED used for first drafts, "never for fair copies" and that therefore it is "unlikely" that the note was sent to Mrs. Todd (L-748). Since Mrs. Todd would not have destroyed letters sent her by the poet, one must conclude that she exaggerated the number of letters sent to her, suggesting even that she received one each day rather than ten over a period of four years. In addition, a close reading of the ten letters, to be discussed later in this section, indicates that they are far from "intimate."

In assessing Mrs. Todd's judgment of Sue, it is significant to note that Mrs. Todd was not one to see the best in others. She referred to ED's beloved Norcross cousins as "dull, uninteresting, commonplace"; even as "geese."[89] Also, her descriptions of Lavinia Dickinson, especially the following of her late in life, makes one glad that she never in fact saw the poet:

> Vinnie's mouth was perfectly hideous and full of false teeth . . . her face was repulsive. . . . Her hands had grown-out joints and were always dirty.[90]

In view of Mrs. Todd's acidly critical nature, is it any wonder that she had few good words for her "most bitter enemy," Sue?

Although her critical nature and personal ambition to the point of dishonesty are important in considering Mrs. Todd's

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misunderstanding or misrepresentation of Sue's friendship with the poet, no doubt the most important factor is that she was Austin's mistress, and Sue was Austin's wife. It is not surprising, therefore, that they did not admire one another; two women in a love triangle generally do not. Yet, although Professor Sewall includes in his biography an account of Mrs. Todd's affairs, first with young Ned, then with Austin, as well as her subsequent confrontation with Sue,[91] never does he question Mrs. Todd's objectivity in her evaluation of her hated rival. I propose that such information is highly relevant in evaluating Mrs. Todd's negative judgment of Sue.

According to Professor Sewall, the liaison between Mabel and Austin was an affair of spiritual and physical intimacy which ended only with Austin's death in 1895. Details of their relationship are included in the biography: their afternoon rides, clandestine meetings, and daily love letters; the first confirmation and consummation of their love; confrontations between Sue and Mabel and between Sue And Austin.[92] Other pertinent information is to be found in Professor Sewall's Appendix which includes documents pertaining to the "War between the Houses" section. Mrs. Bingham writes of her suffering as a child as she waited downstairs while Mrs. Todd entertained Austin upstairs and of her bewilderment as she noted that her mother had moved her original wedding and engagement rings to her right hand in order to wear an "almost identical" pair given her by Austin on her left.[93] Mrs. Bingham writes too of her final interview with her father in the insane

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asylum where he (understandably?) ended his days. Although Todd seems to have been tolerant of the menage à trois while it was going on, perhaps because he was Astronomy Professor at Amherst and Austin the College's powerful Treasurer,[94] at the end of his life he expressed resentment: "Austin was a 'wonderful' man but 'very unmoral'"; ". . . it (adultery) ruined my life."[95]

All this information about Austin's and Mabel's affair is by no means a condemnation of their actions. However, under the circumstances, can we really expect objectivity from Mrs. Todd in her judgment of Sue? I think not, for Mrs. Todd's hatred of Sue was such that it extended even beyond the grave. In an extraordinary account written shortly before her death and included by Professor Sewall in the same Appendix, Mrs. Todd expresses the belief that her paralytic stroke of 1913 was in fact caused by Sue who had just died. According to Mrs. Todd, the stroke was an attack by Sue's spirit; Mrs. Todd was only saved from death by Austin, by this time dead for eighteen years, whose spirit gave battle on her behalf against the ghost of his dead wife.[96]

In light of this and all the above evidence, it seems impossible to continue to accept Mrs. Todd's opinions about Sue. Although gratitude is due her for editing the poems and letters and to Mrs. Bingham for her lifelong dedication to ED scholarship, their evaluation of Sue and her relationship with the poet must be seriously questioned. A close reading of

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ED's letters to Sue and her children as well as those to Mrs. Todd further disproves the Todd-Bingham legend of hostility between ED and Sue.

* * * * * * * * * *

If the more than 180 letters to Sue and her children are considered, like the poems, as a cluster, some valuable insights result. Of first importance is the autobiographical portrait of the poet as person, as warm and loving friend and aunt, which is unavailable elsewhere. Another insight from such a reading is into the artistic development of the poet, for the letters extend in a fairly consistent pattern over a period of 36 years, from 1850 when the two women were nineteen or twenty years old until ED's death in 1886. The letters, therefore, represent incredible growth from the exuberant, sometimes cloying style of the early letters to the high art of ED's elegies for little Gilbert. And, most significant for our present discussion, these letters if read in sequence as a cluster disclose the nature of the loving and lifelong relationship of the two women, for in almost every letter, the poet expresses affection and regard for Sue and her family. It is important to remember that Sue and the poet were friends long before they were sisters-in-law, the first surviving letter probably written in December 1850, six years before the marriage of Austin and Sue. Also important to remember is that there are existing letters to Sue from almost every

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year of the poet's life. If there was, in fact, alienation between the two friends, as Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham claim, when did it occur? Not, as they suggest, late in the poet's life, for more than fifty of the letters to Sue were written in the last six years of her life, including the magnificent elegies for Gib and a number of hyperbolically loving, grateful, and admiring letters.

The early letters to Sue, those written from 1850 to 1854, and included in Volume I of the Johnson collection, are extravagant, humorous, and warmly affectionate. From the beginning, ED was experimental in her letters to Sue. In fact, the two women seem to have shared a private language based on mutual readings and associations which sometimes makes the letters difficult for later readers to understand. Even in early letters, ED sometimes refers to Sue as "Sister," including Sue with Austin and Vinnie as a member of the family even before the marriage of Austin and Sue.[97] In L-56, she refers to herself and "Susie" in an intimate and slightly mocking tone as two "who please ourselves with the fancy that we are the only poets, and everyone else is prose. . . . " This sense of rapport and even complicity appears with consistency throughout the cluster. In these early letters, ED's hyperbolic protestations of love are odd to late twentieth-century ears, reminding one of the poet's child persona when it is least successful: for example, "Oh, Susie, I would nestle close to your warm heart"; "I love you so already, that it almost breaks my heart" (L-74). However, even if one cannot

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admire the early style, the letters do attest to the poet's affection for Sue.

Of particular interest are ED's reflections on marriage in L-93:

> How dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold, and who gathers pearls every evening; but to the wife, Susie, sometimes the wife forgotten, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world.

She goes on to discuss the dangerous aspects of marriage, expressing her fear "lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up." Her sentiments are both ironic and prophetic considering the seemingly disastrous later years of Sue's marriage as well as ED's choice to remain unmarried.

Much has been made of L-173, written in about 1854 when the two women were 24, beginning, "Sue -- you can go or stay --." However, that this is really the only letter in the existing group to Sue which unquestionably reflects disagreement between the two seems surprising to me, for how many people are friends for almost forty years, correspond regularly, and only disagree in one letter out of more than 150? Although Professor Sewall suspects that other letters recording disagreement have mysteriously disappeared,[98] it seems inconceivable that there were a substantial number of letters expressing a hatred equal to the love of the existing letters. Quite probably the two did on occasion fail to see eye-to-eye; however, the existing letters indicate that their friendship survived

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such possible disagreements.

The two letters written in 1855 which begin Volume II disclose a still fond but less youthfully exuberant ED, one whose style is becoming more controlled. The first existing letters to Sue after her marriage are dated 1858 and include an extravagantly loving poem probably written in honor of Sue's 28th birthday:

> One Sister have I in our house,
> And one, a hedge away.
> There's only one recorded,
> But both belong to me.
>
> One came the road that I came --
> And wore my last year's gown --
> The other, as a bird her nest,
> Builded our hearts among.
>
> She did not sing as we did --
> It was a different tune --
> Herself to her a music
> As Bumble bee of June.
>
> Today is far from Childhood --
> But up and down the hills
> I held her hand the tighter --
> Which shortened all the miles --
>
> And still her hum
> The years among,
> Deceives the Butterfly;
> Still in her Eye
> The Violets lie
> Mouldered this many May.
>
> I spilt the dew --
> But took the morn --
> I chose this single star
> From out the wide night's numbers --
> Sue -- forevermore!

Obviously, Sue's marriage in 1856 did not diminish ED's enthusiasm and admiration for her friend. Attempts to read

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this poem as subtly indicating the poet's disillusionment with Sue seem to be only attempts to read into it the Todd-Bingham hostility tradition.[99] It is interesting to remember that this poem is the one whose packet copy was almost entirely obliterated by scribbling.[100] Obviously some person or persona wished to erase all signs of the poet's affection and admiration for Sue in poems as well as in letters.

Other letters in Volumes II and III include those written when either was out of town as well as those sent "Pony Express," as Sue designated L-238, one of many sent across the hedge separating their houses. In this L-238 series, the two discuss a second stanza for P-216, "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers." Whether or not one agrees with Sue's rejection of the first, then the second version of Stanza 2, it is clear that ED took her judgment seriously, for she wrote a new version each time Sue rejected the previous one. Also, Sue's comments on the poem indicate that, as in the obituary, she sometimes uses language strikingly like that of the poet:

> I am not suited dear Emily with the second verse --It is remarkable as the chain lightning that blinds us hot nights in the Southern sky but it does not go with the ghostly shimmer of the first verse as well as the other one--

Here one is reminded of such poems as 1247 in which ED compares poetry with thunder. Sue then writes, "You never made a peer for that verse, and I <u>guess</u> you[r] kingdom does'nt hold one --." "Kingdom" is a typical Dickinson term for one's sphere, particularly, as here, one's poetic sphere. Sue's next comment,

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"I always go to the fire and get warm after thinking of it [the first stanza], but I never can again," is almost exactly ED's own definition of poetry as quoted by T. W. Higginson in L-342a of 1870: "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry." Sue adds, "Did it ever occur to you that is all there is here after all," suggesting that she, like the poet, sometimes suffered from eschatological doubts; then that she is "tired making bibs for her bird," meaning Ned who was born that same summer. Obviously the friends were still intimate personally as well as poetically. One line in ED's return letter, in which she includes a "crumb" for Ned and a "spray for his Nest," has been read as a reproach to Sue for her hypocrisy.[101] However, such a reading is out of keeping with the sincerity and intimacy otherwise characteristic of the exchange. Such a meaning is only possible if one reads the second half of the first sentence out of context, bringing to it a belief in the Todd-Bingham legend of hostility between the houses:

> Dear Sue --
>
> Your praise is good -- to me -- because I know it knows -- and suppose -- it means --
>
> Could I make you and Austin -- proud -- sometime -- a great way off -- 'twould give me taller feet --

ED's letter expresses appreciation for Sue's "praise" because she respects her judgment. As noted above, "suppose -- it means --" has been interpreted as expressing ED's serious doubt as to Sue's sincerity. However, such an interpretation

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would be incongruous in an otherwise loving and sincere exchange. Probably, rather, the phrase is much less pointed than is thought, an expression of the poet's hope that Sue is not praising her just to be kind. Significantly, ED closes with the wish that she might make Sue and Austin proud of her one day.

L-239 is another which is sometimes read as pertaining to "The tension which developed between ED and Sue, when the infant Ned began to absord Sue's attention" (L-239n):

> Could I -- then -- shut the door--
> Lest my beseeching face -- at last --
> Rejected -- be -- of Her?

The sense of the letter-poem seems to be that the persona would never shut the door in Sue's or someone's face for fear that this other person might in return reject her. The poem refers to a literary or personal event unknown to later readers. To interpret it as an allusion to ED's jealousy of Ned which resulted in a tension between the two women is once more to impose one's own information on the poem. Certainly, there is no reference in other letters in the cluster to suggest that ED was jealous of Sue's children.

Many other letters are extravagant in their expressions of love and admiration: "Susan's Idolator keeps a Shrine for Susan" (L-325); "To see you unfits for staler meetings" (L-346); "I am greedy to see you" (L-407); "Only Woman in the World, Accept a Julep" (L-447); "vast and sweet Sister" (L-660); "To be Susan is Imagination, / To have been Susan, a Dream -- /

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What depths of Domingo in that torrid Spirit!" (L-855). In others, the poet expresses the rapport between the two which seems to be continuous from the earliest to the latest letters: "In a Life that stopped guessing, you and I should not feel at home --" (L-586). In still others, ED expresses sympathy and a desire to help for some unknown grief: "May I do nothing for my dear Sue?" (L-431); her wish to be of use at Gib's birth: "Emily and all she has are at Sue's service, if of any comfort to Baby --" (L-443). Obviously, too, over the years, the two women exchanged books (L-456), flowers (L-774), and produce (L-998), as well as letters. Late in her life as ED's health declined, Sue sometimes sent her supper by one of the children (L-680 and 1025). One can only wonder in amazement that the testimony of those who never even saw the poet or knew her personally has been accepted although so contradicted by the poet's own words in her letters. Clearly Mrs. Todd was wrong, intentionally or otherwise, when she wrote that "For many years before coming to Amherst [in late 1881] there had been no communication between the Dickinson houses."[102]

Mrs. Todd also claims that ED did not see Sue's children, again an assertion contradicted by the numerous loving letters to and about each of them.[103] There are 22 existing letters to Ned and many in which he is mentioned, including a letter heralding his birth (L-232) and one thinking Sue for sending supper by him, in which he is referred to as "thy Son -- / our Nephew" (L-680). There are also six surviving letters to Mattie, including L-942

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written shortly after her departure for Miss Porter's school. ED begins, "We almost question where we are, without our martial Mattie." She goes on to write, "I recall with a pang the lovely Suppers you last Summer brought me, Niece of my better Days." Is it possible after reading these letters to think niece and aunt never saw one another? Or that ED's life was "shortened by years" because of Sue's cruelty?[104]

Obviously, ED was especially fond of Sue's third child, Gilbert, who was born in 1875 when both Sue and ED were 45; he was a boy most "revered" (L-754) by his aunt, his mother, and other family members. In L-664, ED shares an anecdote with Sue about their darling boy:

> Memoirs of Little Boys that live --
> "Were'nt you chasing Pussy," said Vinnie to Gilbert?
> "No -- she was chasing herself" --
> "But was'nt she running pretty fast"? "Well, some slow and some fast" said the beguiling Villain -- Pussy's Nemesis quailed --
> Your Urchin is more antique in wiles than the Egyptian Sphinx --.

Letters 711 and 712 reveal a devoted aunt who is willing to send both plants and poems to Gilbert's teacher. Letter 542 to Mrs. Holland portrays a Gilbert who is hardly a stranger in the Homestead: "'Home -- sweet Home' -- Austin's Baby sings -- 'there isno place like Home -- 'tis too -- over to Aunt Vinnie's.'"

ED's elegies for Gib, all sent to Sue, from whose death the poet seems never to have receovered, are among her finest work. Perhaps the most magnificent is L-868:

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Dear Sue --

The Vision of Immortal Life has been fulfilled --

How simply at the last the Fathom comes! The Passenger and not the Sea, we find surprises us --

Gilbert rejoiced in Secrets --

His Life was panting with them -- With what menace of Light he cried "Dont tell, Aunt Emily"! Now my ascended Playmate must instruct me. Show us, prattling Preceptor, but the way to thee!

He knew no niggard moment -- His Life was full of Boon -- The Playthings of the Dervish were not so wild as his --

No crescent was this Creature -- He traveled from the Full --

Such soar, but never set --

I see him in the Star, and meet his sweet velocity in everything that flies -- His Life was like the Bugle, which winds itself away, his Elegy an echo -- his Requiem ecstasy --

Dawn and Meridian in one.

Wherefore would he wait, wronged only of Night, which he left for us --

Without a speculation, our little Ajax spans the whole --

Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light,
Pangless except for us --
Who slowly ford the Mystery
Which thou has leaped across!

The second elegy is a short note sent with a flower to Sue, "the dear grieved Heart." The third and fourth (L-870 and 871), like the first, are great poetry and hardly the work of one who was alienated from the child or his mother. It is particularly revealing of the character of the poet that ED remembered Gilbert's friends after his death and wrote to Kendall Emerson, for one, the last two Christmases that she lived (L-956 and 1027). Her final existing letter to Sue about Gilbert was probably written on the first anniversary of his death (938):

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> Twice, when I had Red Flowers out,
> Gilbert knocked, raised his sweet Hat, and asked
> if he might touch them --
> Yes, and take them too, I said, but Chivalry
> forbade him -- Besides, he gathered Hearts, not
> Flowers --
>
> Some Arrows slay but whom they strike --
> But this slew all but him --
> Who so appareled his Escape --
> Too trackless for a Tomb --

In concluding this already long discussion of the poet's letters to Sue, it seems crucial to consider three late letters. The first is L-757 written in 1882: "With the exception of Shakespeare, you have told me of more knowledge than any one living -- To say that sincerely is strange praise." Thomas H. Johnson's note to this letter quotes Mrs. Todd's and Mrs. Bingham's testimony about the tension between the two houses, concluding that, "It is probable that Sue's resentment concerning the attachment of Emily to Judge Lord was made clear to Emily, and may account for this note of 'strange praise.'" This interpretation is once again turning somersaults to try to conform the letter to the testimony of Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham. I propose that in the context of ED's other loving and admiring letters to Sue we take the letter at face value: ED was honestly grateful to Sue for having taught her so much. Since ED is comparing her friend to Shakespeare, it seems probable that she is using the word "strange" as Shakespeare used it, for example, in The Tempest, Act I, Scene ii, to mean "wonderful," Webster's fourth meaning for the word.

In a later letter, 1024, written in late 1885, ED

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closes with a more personal tribute to Sue: "The tie between us is very fine, but a Hair never dissolves. Lovingly -- Emily --." Letter 1030, written shortly before her death in 1886, is the poet's final letter to Sue and once more makes clear the poet's esteem and gratitude for her friend: "Thank you, dear Sue -- for every solace --."

To maintain in the face of such evidence that the two were estranged seems indefensible.

* * * * * * * * * *

In contrast to ED's letters to Sue, those to Mabel Loomis Todd are formal, often cryptic, and perhaps sometimes even ironic. As noted above, although Mrs. Todd claimed that she received "many" letters from the poet, even one every day, there are in fact only ten bona fide existing letters and five poems sent to her. It is perhaps significant that some of the letters sent to Mrs. Todd as well as those sent to her parents are in response to a gift, note, or Christmas card, as though they had sent such missives and tokens for the purpose of eliciting a response from the by this time celebrated Amherst "Myth."[105]

The most cordial letter of the ten is 769, written late September 1882, in which she thanks Mrs. Todd for the panel of Indian pipes which she had painted for the poet. Although Professor Sewall refers to her painting as of "professional quality,"[106] ED never comments on the artistic merit of the

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painting. Rather, the poet stresses the happy association of Indian pipes with her childhood. Although I do not propose to pass judgment on the quality of Mrs. Todd's painting, one wonders if the poet would have chosen Mrs. Todd's Indian pipes as the device appearing on all early volumes of her poems and letters as Mrs. Todd did so that they became, in Mrs. Todd's words, "in a way, her symbol."[107] Again, Mrs. Todd secured considerable fame, probably not otherwise obtainable, because of her connection with ED.

After the two letters of 1882 thanking Mrs. Todd for the Indian pipes, the next letter (831) Mrs. Todd received from the poet is thought to have been written in the summer of 1883, after Mrs. Todd's affair with Ned had almost concluded and the one with Austin had begun. She addresses Mrs. Todd as "Brother and Sister's dear friend." One wonders if she had in mind Lavinia or Sue, for she sometimes refers to Sue as "sister," both in letters to her and in letters to others, as when she assured Mr. Higginson that her "Brother and Sister<u>s</u>" (emphasis mine) looked forward to seeing him (L-413). If the poet did mean Sue, it seems possible that her salutation is ironic. It seems important to note portions of Mrs. Todd's journal entry for February 3, 1883, approximately six months before:

> The root of all my trouble is that I allowed that affair with Ned to progress too much. I got over all especial feeling for him in the summer and supposed he did for me. But . . . he cared more for me than ever when I came back. . . . [He] is of a very jealous disposition, and began to think I must

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> care more for his father than himself. So he got angry, and went to his mother with some very mean things . . . that I was an awful flirt . . . and was trying the same thing with his father.[108]

Professor Sewall notes that at the time of this entry Mrs. Todd's affair with Austin was "well advanced," in fact "five months under way." Apparently liaisons with father and son were for a time concurrent. It seems that September 11, 1882, was the day Austin and Mabel confessed and/or consummated their love, for as Professor Sewall notes, Austin wrote in his journal the "otherwise inexplicable word, 'Rubicon,'" and seven years later, both he and Mabel commemorated the date with glowing love letters.[109] Of course, we will never know whether or not ED knew of their affair or if she did what she thought of it, but we do know from Mabel's journal that Sue learned of both affairs six months before ED wrote the letter in question and that Sue and Mabel met to discuss the situation.[110] Whether or not ED's reference to Mrs. Todd as "Brother and Sister's dear friend" is ironic must remain unanswered.

Another year passed, the year in which Gib died, before ED again wrote to Mrs. Todd, a stylized, obscure letter perhaps about the death of summer (L-906n) written for some reason in mid-July. In March 1885, ED sent a cryptic acknowledgement of Mrs. Todd's gift of a painted jug (978). One notes that her final line, "'You knew, Oh Egypt' said the entangled Antony" is a reference to a middle-aged lover who was "entangled" even as Austin was at this point with Mabel. It may or may not be significant that in L-1016 ED refers to Othello, another

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middle-aged Shakespearean hero who was destroyed by unwise love.

In considering the poet's last letter to Mrs. Todd, it is interesting first to recall her final letter to Sue written at about the same time: "Thank you, dear Sue -- for every solace." Her final letter to Mrs. Todd is again cryptic, a four-word acknowledgement of a gift, this time of a bronze plaque which Mrs. Todd had painted with thistles:

Or Figs of Thistles?

The quotation is from Matthews vii.16, a chapter which begins, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," a command stressed in the Imitation and one which ED seems to have lived by; at least the idea appears more than once in poems and letters. One is tempted to wonder if this was her attitude to Mrs. Todd: she knew of her illicit association with Austin, but declined to judge her. Whether or not such a meaning is intended, the specific biblical context of the poet's message suggests that she might not be expressing "delight at the gift" (L-1033n). Rather, the biblical context of Matthew vii is decidedly negative:

> (15) Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves.
> (16) Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? [emphasis mine]
> (17) Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.
> (19) Every tree that bringeth nor forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

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Perhaps ED expected Mrs. Todd to know Scripture well enough to supply the rest of the quotation; or perhaps she wished to direct Mrs. Todd's attention to the chapter which stresses the approachability of Jesus, the difficulty of the straight and narrow gate, and the warning that corrupt trees which bring forth evil fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire. In any case, this is an odd acknowledgement of the "thistles" painting, one which might possess negative rather than positive connotations.

* * * * * * * * * *

It seems that certain truths about ED's life and poetry have been obscured by being filtered through the prejudiced testimony of Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham, the former the "other woman," the latter the loyal daughter who wished to defend her mother. Probably the relationship between ED and Sue was not without some misunderstanding and disagreement. However, that their friendship turned to hostility in later years is denied by the poet's own words in the sequence of existing letters sent to Sue. Like other devotees of ED, I am grateful that the poems and letters were not lost and that if only Mrs. Todd was available to edit them she did so. Also, Mrs. Bingham's lifelong dedication to the poet and her work is well-known and deserving of respect in many ways. However, I deeply regret that ED as revealed in her letters to Sue and her children as well as Sue's opinions of the poet and her work as expressed in

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the obituary have been ignored for so many years. Such neglect has been detrimental to ED scholarship.

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PART ONE: NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955); The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958). All poems and letters cited are in the Johnson editions. The facsimile edition of poems presently underway at Harvard will bring the poems to their original state and probably will provide still further reasons for close textual study, particularly of such aspects as line arrangement, capitalization, punctuation, and principles underlying fascicle inclusion.

[2] Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. xiv.

[3] Textual studies include David T. Porter, The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, The Voice of the Poet: Aspects of Style in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Inder Nath Kher, Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson's Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Robert Weisbuch, Emily Dickinson's Poetry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); and Albert Gelpi, "Emily Dickinson: The Self as Center," The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[4] Anderson, p. 299, suggests that there is "a kinship of spirit rather than anything specific" with Herbert, Vaughan, and Sir Thomas Browne, although he acknowledges that a "painstaking study . . . might yield more than one would suspect." Judith Banzer, "Compound Manner: Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical Poets," American Literature, XXXII (1961), 417-433, cites impressive parallels between ED and these poets and argues convincingly that she read at least some of them early enough to be influenced by them. Louis L. Martz, The Poem of the Mind: Essays on Poetry, English and American (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 28, 90-104, believes ED to be a meditational poet and points out similarities with the seventeenth-century meditational poets.

[5] Anderson, p.296; pp. 20, 44, 45, 56, and passim; p. 57.

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[6] Richard B. Sewall, The Life of Emily Dickinson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), II, 694; 688-94.

[7] Allen Tate, "Emily Dickinson," Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard B. Sewall (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963). Tate also stresses parallels between ED and John Donne.

[8] George Frisbie Whicher, This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson (1938; rpt. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 20; pp. 153-70; pp. 189-206.

[9] Thomas H. Johnson, Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 4, p. 233; passim.

[10] Richard Chase, Emily Dickinson (London: Methuen & Co., 1952), passim, p. 163.

[11] Albert Gelpi, Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), passim, p. 52; "Emily Dickinson," Tenth Muse.

[12] William R. Sherwood, Circumference and Circumstance: Stages in the Mind and Art of Emily Dickinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), passim, p. 138.

[13] Sewall, Life, I, 19-27.

[14] Anderson, p. 257, and Weisbuch, p. 3, are among those who describe her as alternately skeptic and believer; Anderson and others stress that the Bible was for her chiefly a source of imagery, p. 57; Chase calls her "on the whole an unbeliever," p. 163; Sherwood, p. 3, says she is "blasphemous as often as devout."

[15] Miriam K. Starkman, Seminar on Religious Poetry, CUNY Graduate Center, Fall 1975. See also her "The 'Grace of the Absurd': Form and Concept in W. H. Auden's For the Time Being," Harvard Theological Review, 67 (1974), 275-288; and "Noble Numbers and the Poetry of Devotion," in Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas 1600-1800, ed. J. A. Mazzeo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 1-27.

[16] Martz, The Poem of the Mind, p. 24, quotes Wallace Stevens' definition of modern poetry as suitable for meditative

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poetry as well: "The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice."

[17] Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 25-39.

[18] See Rosemary Freeman, English Emblem Books (New York: Octagon books, 1966) for an excellent study of the emblematic tradition. George Monteiro belives that ED wrote emblematically; see his "The One and Many Emily Dickinsons," American Literary Realism, 7 (1974), 137-141, and, with Byron L. St. Armand, Abstract of "ED and the Popular Emblem Tradition," MLA meetings in New York City, 29 December 1976, Emily Dickinson Bulletin, 32 (1977), 154.

[19] A Reading of George Herbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); "'The Sacrifice' and modern criticism," pp. 19-99 and passim.

[20] Tuve suggests a holistic reading throughout, specifically referring to "the larger unity of his whole book" on p. 202.

[21] In P-261, L-307, and L-674, for example. These and other references to her poems as hymns and psalms are discussed on p. 155.

[22] Susan Gilbert Dickinson's unsigned obituary in The Springfield Republican, May 18, 1886, in Jay Leyda's The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), II, 473. The obituary can also be found in Martha Dickinson Bianchi's Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), pp. 103-105, and in draft, edited, and published forms in Box 9 of the Dickinson Collection, Houghton Library.

[23] Anderson, p. xiii.

[24] Martz stresses the seventeenth-century poets' dramatic projection of possible selves on an inner stage, e.g., The Poem of the Mind, pp. 7, 33.

[25] Johnson, Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography, p. 245.

[26] David Higgins, Portrait of Emily Dickinson: The Poet and Her Prose (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 47.

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[27] Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, pp. 150-152.

[28] Leo Sherley-Price, "Introduction," The Imitation of Christ, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1952), p. 15, says this of the Imitation.

[29] Frank Kermode, "The Private Imagery of Henry Vaughan," Review of English Studies, I (1950), 206-225.

[30] Anderson, p. 299; Whicher, p. 224.

[31] Sewall, Life, II, 670; Ruth Miller, The Poetry of Emily Dickinson (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), pp. 221-231.

[32] As argued by John Evangelist Walsh, The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971).

[33] Bianchi, Life and Letters, p. 83.

[34] Sewall, Life, II, 694.

[35] Anderson, p. 31; Miller, p. 231; Whicher, p. 232.

[36] Emily Dickinson: An Annotated Biblipgraphy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 246.

[37] Jean Mudge, Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), p. 11.

[38] Harry R. Warfel, "An American Dictionary of the English Language," Noah Webster: Schoolmaster to America (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), pp. 345-377; Mario Pei, "Introduction" to American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828 ed. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970), p. v.

[39] Herbert E. Childs, "ED and Sir Thomas Browne," American Literature, XXII (1951), 455-465, discusses similarities between the two.

[40] Banzer, "Compound Manner." Although Miller in The Poetry of ED, pp. 212-221, sets out to refute Banzer's theory that the metaphysical poets influenced ED, she is finally not convincing. She argues that ED was not widely familiar with their work early enough for them to have affected her. However,

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even if ED had access to some of the poets at an early date, which she probably did, reading even a few of them might have convinced her of their similar sensibility and taught her a great deal.

41 In Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham, eds., Bolts of Melody (New York: Harper, 1945), first printing.

42 Among those who stress the importance for Herbert of The Imitation is Louis L. Martz, Poetry of Meditation, pp. 286-287.

43 Sewall, Life, II, 688.

44 Jean Mudge, "ED and 'Sister Sue,'" Prairie Schooner, 52 (1978), 90-108; Lillian Faderman, "ED's Letters to Sue Gilbert," Mass. Rev., 18, No. 2 (Summer 1977), 197-225. Although Ms. Faderman is more interested in a supposedly homoerotic relationship between the two women, she suggests Sue's literary influence as well, p. 209.

45 Harvey Cox, The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 149.

46 Cox, passim.

47 Cox, "Christ the Harlequin," pp. 139-149.

48 Henri Bergson, "Laughter," trans. by arrangement with the Presses Universitaires de France, in Comedy, introd. and app. Wylie Sypher (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 63-64.

49 See George F. Whicher, "American Humor," This Was a Poet, pp. 170-188; also, Constance Rourke, American Humor: A Study of the National Character (Garden City: Doubleday, 1931), pp. 209-212.

50 Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 4.

51 My definition and discussion of American humor are based chiefly on Rourke's American Humor.

52 Henry David Thoreau, Walden (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), p. 109.

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[53] Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), passim.

[54] Bergson, p. 64.

[55] Bergson, pp. 67-103; 176.

[56] Bergson, p. 93.

[57] Bergson, pp. 121-123.

[58] Bergson, p. 129.

[59] Martz, The Poem of the Mind, pp. 7, 33, says this of the seventeenth-century poets.

[60] Arthur Koestler, Act of Creation (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), pp. 35-36; pp. 64-65.

[61] Bergson, p. 123.

[62] Bergson, p. 125.

[63] "A valediction: forbidding mourning," The Poems of John Donne, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 49.

[64] The Works of George Herbert, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 167.

[65] Banzer and P-906.

[66] Anderson, p. 33.

[67] I had written my "Defense of Sue" before reading Mudge's essay, "ED and 'Sister Sue.'" However, I was pleased to discover that her argument, which stresses the poems sent to Sue, strengthens my own, which emphasizes the letters, the obituary, and biographical information on Mabel Loomis Todd.

[68] Thomas Carew, "An Elegie upon the death of the Deane of Pauls, Dr. J. D.," The Poems of John Donne, pp. 378-380.

[69] First to suggest the importance of ED's father was T. W. Higginson in L-342b; possible lovers have been named by

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many, including Bianchi in Life and Letters, Whicher in This Was a Poet, and Ruth Miller in The Poetry of Emily Dickinson. John Cody, After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1968) posits that she suffered from maternal deprivation and agoraphobia.

[70] Louise Bogan, "A Mystical Poet," Emily Dickinson: Three Views (Amherst: Amherst College Press, 1960), p. 32.

[71] Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836-1886 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

[72] Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 18, says that Sue wrote "perceptively" of the poems in her obituary.

[73] See, for example, Sewall quoting Mrs. Todd, Life, I, 282.

[74] Sewall, Life, I, 170.

[75] Sewall, Life, I, 291.

[76] e.g., Sewall, Life, I, 196.

[77] Among recent acknowledgements to Mrs. Todd is Sherwood, p. xi, who says that without "the labor and devotion of ED's principal editors, Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas H. Johnson . . . I could not have written this book"; Ruth Miller refers to Mrs. Todd as "the warm and affectionate friend of Lavinia and Austin and Emily," p. 7. Among recent acknowledgements to Millicent Todd Bingham are Anderson, p. xv; Mudge, p. xx; Miller, p. ix; Kher, p. x; and Ralph W. Franklin, The Editing of Emily Dickinson: A Reconsideration (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. vii. It is particularly significant that Richard Sewall, Life, acknowledges a great debt to Mrs. Bingham, p. xiv and passim.

[78] The title of Section II, Volume I, pp. 161-235, in Sewall's Life.

[79] Ancestors' Brocades: the Literary Debut of Emily Dickinson (New York: Harper, 1945).

[80] Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd (New York: Harper, 1931), p. x.

[81] Bingham, AB, pp. 61-62.

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[82] Bingham, AB, pp. 178-179.

[83] Bingham, AB, p. 214.

[84] See, for example, Bingham, AB, pp. 16-19.

[85] Bingham, AB, p. 358.

[86] For a discussion of "The Lawsuit," see Bingham, AB, Chapter XIV, pp. 349-367.

[87] Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd (Boston: Robert Bros., 1894), II, 430.

[88] Sewall, quoting Mrs. Todd, Life, I, 287-288.

[89] Bingham, AB, p. 284, p. 238.

[90] Bingham, AB, p. 297.

[91] Sewall, Life, I, 175.

[92] Sewall, "Mabel Loomis Todd and Austin," Life, I, 170-185.

[93] Sewall, Life, I, 298,299.

[94] Sewall, Life, I, 179-180; 294.

[95] Sewall, Life, I, 292, 293.

[96] Sewall, Life, I, 291-292.

[97] See, for example, L-135 written "about October 1853" almost three years before Austin and Sue were married in July 1856.

[98] Sewall, Life, I, 203.

[99] Sewall, Life, I, 168-169.

[100] Franklin, pp. 67-81.

[101] Sewall, Life, I, 201.

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[102] Sewall, quoting Mrs. Todd, Life, I, 284.

[103] For example, Sewall, quoting Mrs. Todd, Life, I, 290.

[104] Sewall, quoting Mrs. Todd, Life, I, 290; Mrs. Todd, supposedly quoting Lavinia, Life, I, 280.

[105] Sewall, quoting letter from Mrs. Todd, Life, I, 216.

[106] Sewall, Life, I, 173.

[107] Letters, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd, 1931, p. xi.

[108] Sewall, quoting Mrs. Todd's journal, Life, I, 175.

[109] Sewall, Life, I, 176.

[110] Sewall, quoting Mrs. Todd's Journal, Life, I, 175.

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PART TWO

THE JESUS CLUSTER: "Tender Pioneer"

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Jesus is a major figure in the ED canon. Not only are there more than seventy poems in which he is named specifically as Christ, Jesus, Son, Redeemer, Savior, Lord, and Master; there are at least as many others in which he is referred to less directly.[1] Included in these poems to and about Jesus are meditations on and dramatizations of his birth, life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection; prayer-poems addressed to him; sacramental poems based on the eucharist, baptism, holy orders, and matrimony; and poems, as well as prose-poems in the form of letters, to and about the Master.

The portrait of Jesus which emerges from these poems is consistent, yet richly diverse and uniquely ED's own. Although ED's Jesus is always a loving and beloved figure, he is presented in various roles. Sometimes he is the friend with whom she carries on intimate and affectionate dialogues. At others, he is the heroic and willing sacrifice who chooses incarnation and crucifixion for the sake of his "little Fellowmen" (1487). In still others, Jesus is lover or husband, particularly in the sacramental and Master poems and letters in which poetic as well as religious meanings are suggested. ED's Jesus is one whose perfect life deserves imitation. Moreover, his life, suffering, death, and resurrection prefigure those of subsequent men and women; he is the "Tender Pioneer" who has

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"traversed first" so that "No New Mile remaineth -- Far as Paradise --" (P-698). Always he is the human and accessible member of the Trinity, the Logos or "Envoy" (P-357) who is a means of coming to know something of an "illegible" God (P-820).

In portraying Jesus, ED makes frequent use of certain poetic strategies. Of first importance is the dramatic projection of various personae, often identifiable "I's" who speak the poems. These personae include "Daisy," Jesus' modern-day disciple; the gruff and hearty Aunt/Uncle Emily she becomes especially in poems and letters sent to her nephew Ned; and the somewhat comic lawyer-persona who uses legal language to speak of sacred subjects. Other devices include compression, especially in the words of Jesus, so that the reader must participate actively by supplying missing portions of the biblical text;[2] anachronism to stress the universality and timelessness of the Christian message; and pun, particularly to emphasize correspondences between the finite and infinite worlds. Important among the devotional conventions she uses is sacred parody, erotic and nuptial language to express religious feelings.

In the Jesus cluster, ED contemporizes and revitalizes the Gospels and Christian prayers and sacraments. Although she criticizes "condemn[ing]" scriptual writers (e.g., 1545) the nineteenth-century institutionalized church (e.g., 324), and contemporary "christians" (e.g., 1207), Jesus' life as well as traditional prayers and sacraments are valuable enough

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to be reworked and retold. In the Jesus cluster, ED acts as Orpheus, the "warbling Teller" (1545):[3] she considers Gospels, prayers, and sacraments, then responds with her own fresh and unique versions.

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I. The Life of Christ Poems

In these poems, ED is not only Orpheus, she is Jesus' "little 'John'" as well (P-497), for she is a modern writer of the Gospels who is especially like the fourth evangelist in that she stresses Jesus' loving message. Obviously, these poems are devotional in subject and tone. Obviously, too, their inspiration was literary, for they are ED's versions of original Gospel accounts. A close reading of 1545 provides insights into ED's way of writing about the Bible:

> The Bible is an antique Volume --
> Written by faded Men
> At the suggestion of Holy Spectres --
> Subjects -- Bethlehem --
> Eden -- the ancient Homestead --
> Satan -- the Brigadier --
> Judas -- the Great Defaulter --
> David -- the Troubadour --
> Sin -- a distinguished Precipice
> Others must resist --
> Boys that "believe" are very lonesome --
> Other Boys are "lost" --
> Had but the tale a warbling Teller --
> All the Boys would come --
> Orpheus' Sermon captivated --
> It did not condemn --

The persona projected here is the humorous, irreverent one she sometimes becomes when writing about the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, and in letters and poems sent to Ned, Austin's and Sue's oldest child. In this poem, which

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was in fact sent to Ned in 1882, the Bible is "antique," suggesting that it is old, but of value. Further, its writers are "faded"; here, as elsewhere, she criticizes not God and certainly never Jesus, but rather the Bible's "Teller[s]." Although biblical subjects were divinely inspired by "Holy Spectres," they are in need of being contemporized, which she then proceeds to do by defining them in familiar and domestic terms: Eden is the ancient "Homestead," probably an allusion to her own home; Satan, a general who assaults Eden and by implication the Homestead as well; Judas, a "Great Defaulter," one who is a "delinquent," one "who fails to account for public money entrusted to his care," according to Webster; David, a "Troubador," her frequent word for poet. She wryly observes that in the Bible, as today, "Sin" has to do with "Others," rather than with oneself, again stressing the similarity between biblical and contemporary events and attitudes. Although believers are "lonesome" because there are so few of them, non-believers are even worse off: they are "lost" both in the sense of being "forfeited" by God and in the sense of being not "able to find the right way" (Webster). What the Bible needs, then, is a "warbling Teller" who, like Orpheus, can elicit a warm response.

In an earlier draft version, one of the thirteen variants for "warbling" is "typic," defined in her Lexicon as "Emblematic, figurative; representing something future by a form, model, or resemblance." Further, Webster gives as illustration of the

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term Abraham's offering of Isaac as "typical of the sacrifice of Christ." The concept of Christian typology, then, was available to ED not only by example in Scripture and in the writings of such poets as George Herbert, but also by definition in her Lexicon. There is considerable evidence in the poems that ED did think and write typologically, sometimes in the conventional exegetical sense that the Old Testament prefigures the New, but more often in the general sense of prefiguration and fulfillment.[4] In P-1545, for example, a variant for Line 5 is "Eden -- Bethlehem's ancestor," suggesting that the Old Testament is type, the New, antitype, both terms defined in her Lexicon exegetically as well as more generally.

In other poems, it is unclear whether ED intends such a typological meaning for Old Testament characters and events. Although Moses is like subsequent men and women who labor for a goal and are then denied its realization (P-597), the poet does not specifically portray him as type of Jesus. Moses, then, might be described as "analogue," meaning that he "resemble[s]" (Webster) later human beings. Although Moses might be described as "type," too, in the sense that Herbert drew "typological parallels" between the dangers and troubles of the children of Israel and his own and every life,[5] the poet's typological thought is more precisely and consistently revealed in the Christocentric poems. In these, the events of Jesus' life are prefigurations or types of subsequent spiritual pilgrimages. Not only are contemporary correspondences between Jesus' life

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and death and those of his followers stressed; in some poems he is specifically portrayed as the "Tender Pioneer," "One [who] goes before to remove obstructions or prepare the way for another" (Webster). In these poems, then, Jesus is more than mere analogue for his followers; rather he is the trail-blazer, the precursor, who "hath traversed first" both life and death so that "Base must be the Coward / Dare not venture -- now --" (698). Similarly, in 1433, a meditation on "Faith" as a "Bridge" to be trod in this life, the poet concludes that God "sent his Son to test the Plank / And he pronounced it firm." Once more, Jesus is more than mere symbol or analogue for those who come after him. He is one sent to level the road for them (1487). "Type," then, is a term which more precisely describes the relationship between ED's Jesus and those who follow than is "analogue." Although as usual ED interprets things in her own way, altering them to suit herself, her Christological thought is typological in the sense that Jesus' life is type or prefigurement of every spiritual pilgrimage, the individual life, in turn, fulfillment or antitype.

In 1487, Jesus's role as precursor is emphasized; his incarnation has "leveled" the "Road" for his "little Fellowmen":

> The Savior must have been
> A docile Gentleman --
> To come so far so cold a Day
> For little Fellowmen --

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The Road to Bethlehem
Since He and I were Boys
Was leveled, but for that twould be
A rugged billion Miles --

One of the few poems named by ED in her lifetime, "Christ's Birthday" is thought to have been sent to Sue at Christmas with an iced cake. Since this is ED's only poem about Jesus' birth, it seems that, like other Protestant devotional poets and St. John, she is less interested in the nativity than in Jesus' life, words, death, and resurrection. Here as in other poems, "Bethlehem" seems to refer not only to Jesus' birth, but more generally to his incarnation, meaning his entire human life. His birth and life on earth have made less "rugged" the lives of those who came after him.

In this poem, ED is like other devotional poets in several identifiable ways. First, the projected persona is specifically defined as male; the poem, then, is a dramatic monologue, a form used by both John Donne and George Herbert.[6] Further, his reference to the time when he and Jesus were "Boys," through anachronism, another devotional device, suggests the brotherhood and intimacy between Jesus and the speaker. Another instance of anachronism is the reference to the coldness of the day of Christ's birth as though it had taken place in snowy nineteenth-century New England rather than in Bethlehem. Jesus' willing choice of incarnation is also a convention of the devotional tradition. In "Dream of the Rood," for example, Jesus is "steadfast and strong; / With

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lordly mood in the sight of many / He mounted the Cross to redeem mankind" (emphasis mine). Herbert's Jesus, too, chose to "climbe the tree" to atone for "Man [who] stole the fruit."[7] Similarly, ED's Jesus is gentlemanly and heroic in willingly assuming human form for the sake of his "little Fellowmen."

In 85, Jesus' free choice is again stressed:

> "They have not chosen me," he said,
> "But I have chosen them!"
> Brave -- Broken hearted statement --
> Uttered in Bethlehem!
>
> I could not have told it,
> But since Jesus dared --
> Sovreign! Know a Daisy
> Thy dishonor shared!

As in the previous poem, Bethlehem is not merely the scene of the nativity, but rather all the places in which his life was enacted, for he utters his "Broken hearted statement" in Bethlehem. Although Jesus' words seem to be those of John xv.16, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you," the meaning of the poem is different from its apparent biblical analogue. In the Gospel account, Jesus explains to his apostles that he "ordained" them rather than that they freely chose their discipleship. In the poem, however, Jesus seems to refer to his having freely chosen incarnation only to be rejected by humankind. The meaning is closer to Verse 18 of the same chapter: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." One is reminded of Herbert's "The Sacrifice," a dramatic monologue spoken by Jesus. In Herbert's

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poem, Jesus tells of particular instances in which he chose humankind only to be rejected, concluding each verse with, "Was ever grief like mine?" ED's "Broken hearted" Jesus resembles Herbert's grief-stricken Jesus; however, he says only, "I have chosen them," but "They have not chosen me," allowing the reader to supply specific instances.[8] Further, ED's speaker anachronistically responds to Jesus as though she were there; she too has chosen but been rejected. This Daisy persona is one who appears often as speaker in the Jesus poems and in the Master letters as well. She is Jesus' nineteenth-century disciple. In this poem and others, she might even be said to be antitype, for Jesus' life prefigures her own.

In other poems, ED refers more indirectly to Jesus' life and words, sometimes through his apostles, at others through specific events in his life; frequently she relates the Gospel character or event to modern times. In 140 and 1274, she speaks of Nicodemus whose question to Jesus about the possibility of regeneration continues to "Confront" her, receiving its "annual reply" in spring. In 203, she likens Peter's denial of Jesus to an unspecified event in her own life. Doubting Thomas is another disciple whom she mentions more than once (555 and 861); for her as for Sir Thomas Browne, he is figure for those who wish concrete proof of the Christian message.[9] Number 1113 is an especially good example of an indirect reference to Jesus, here the Jesus who walked on the

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sea in Matthew xiv and John vi:

> There is a strength in proving that it can be bourne
> Although it tear --
> What are the sinews of such cordage for
> Except to bear
> The ship might be of satin had it not to fight --
> To walk on seas requires cedar Feet

In this rough draft, ED as usual relies upon the reader to be familiar with the story and to respond accordingly. The strength and faith necessary for Jesus (and in Matthew for Peter as well) to walk on the sea is like that required of every human pilgrim who walks on the turbulent sea of this life. Again, ED suggests that all Christian pilgrimages are like that of Jesus.

In still other poems, ED refers to the words and commandments of Jesus, always stressing their contemporary relevance. Number 23 is based on the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew xviii.12-13); 234, beginning, "You're right -- 'the way is narrow' --" is obviously a response to Matthew vii.14; 1467 is a variation of Jesus' saying, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew xxiv.35). Most often, however, ED presents the loving message of Jesus, his sympathy and accessability to all who "thirst," and his commandments that his followers love and forgive one another. Poem 132 is a narrative in which the speaker tells of bringing wine to comfort a dying friend. Unfortunately, she brings the wine too late; she then concludes:

> . . . And so I always bear the cup
> If, haply, mine may be the drop
> Some pilgrim thirst to slake --

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> If, haply, any say to me
> "Unto the little, unto me,"
> When I at last awake.

The speaker expects to be responsible at the Judgment for acts of Christian kindness. "Unto the little, unto me" is a characteristic condensation of Jesus' words, here his repeated admonition as in Matthew xxv.40 that "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." As usual, ED expects the reader to know the Bible well enough to understand the compressed quotation; it is even possible that she wishes to inspire the reader to go to the Bible to discover the context.[10]

In 964, too, Jesus' words are condensed:

> "Unto Me?" I do not know you --
> Where may be your House?
>
> "I am Jesus -- Late of Judea --
> Now -- of Paradise" --
>
> Wagons -- have you -- to convey me?
> This is far from Thence --
>
> "Arms of Mine -- sufficient Phaeton --
> Trust Omnipotence" --
>
> I am spotted -- "I am Pardon" --
> I am small -- "The Least
> Is esteemed in Heaven the Chiefest --
> Occupy my House" --

The scriptural analogues for "Unto Me" are those in which Jesus invites all to come unto him for spiritual refreshment. In Matthew xi.28, he says, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In John vii.37,

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he tells his followers, ". . . [If] any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Jesus of Revelation xxi.6 says, ". . . I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." ED daringly develops this biblical theme by means of an intimate dialogue between Jesus and the imagined respondent who is unnamed but seems to be the familiar Daisy. Once more, Jesus is a loving, forgiving, strong figure. However, he is not the broken-hearted Jesus who has chosen humankind only to be rejected; he is the resurrected, triumphant Christ who assures the doubtful persona of her place in heaven.

In the last stanza, the persona refers to herself as "spotted," a comparatively rare reference to her sinfulness. Jesus, however, assures her that he will pardon her and that in heaven the last will be first. The persona also refers to herself as "small" as she does in other poems. It has always been assumed, therefore, that ED the Amherst poet was short until one critic sensibly measured one of her dresses and discovered that she was, in fact, about 5'5" tall, average to tall even for today.[11] The poet, then, refers to herself as metaphorically small, expressing the humility repeatedly urged by à Kempis in the Imitation: "Do not consider yourself to have made any spiritual progress unless you account yourself the least of all men." À Kempis' "Disciple" also refers to himself as small when addressing Christ the Beloved: ". . . Lord, poor and little as I am. . . . " The speaker of the Old Testament Psalms as well as Herbert similarly refer to themselves as

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small.[12] Presumably, à Kempis, the Psalmist, and Herbert, like ED, refer metaphorically to their insignificance before divinity rather than to their height. As is so often the case, one is better advised to look for a metaphorical meaning or a literary source for an ED poem rather than for literal autobiographical information.

ED's poem resembles Books Three and Four of the Imitation, too, in that it is in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and the speaker. This dialogue form appears often in the ED canon; more often, however, only the speaker's side of the dialogue is presented. Sometimes she speaks with Jesus or God. At others, she addresses her soul. At still others, she addresses the reader directly, thus placing him or her in the position of responding. Sometimes it is not clear precisely with whom she speaks; the poet presents but one side of the conversation, relying upon the reader to deduce the remarks and identity of the other. Often one may assume that the unknown respondent is, as in The Temple and Psalms, God, Jesus, the soul, or the reader. Again, reading the specifically devotional poems illuminates others which are then understood to be religious too.

In her frequent reference to the crucifixion as well as in the many meditations on and dramatizations of the event, ED once more resembles à Kempis who advises the reader to "keep ever before you the likeness of Christ crucified."[13] The crucifixion is sometimes merely alluded to as in 313 in which

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the suffering persona recalls "That Scalding [Prayer] -- Sabacthini" (sic), Christ's words from the cross (Matthew xxvi.46). Poem 341 contains another such reference: the persona's "stiff Heart" questions whether it was "He, that bore, / And Yesterday, or Centuries before?" Her pain is like that of the crucifixion to the extent that she cannot be sure whether it took place yesterday or eighteen hundred years before. In 553, Christ's crucifixion as analogue or figure for the suffering in every human life is not merely alluded to; it is the subject:

> One Crucifixion is recorded -- only --
> How many be
> Is not affirmed of Mathematics --
> Or History --
>
> One Calvary -- exhibited to Stranger --
> As many be
> As Persons -- or Peninsulas --
> Gethsemane --
>
> Is but a Province -- in the Being's Centre --
> Judea --
> For Journey -- or Crusade's Achieving --
> Too near --
>
> Our Lord -- indeed -- made Compound Witness --
> And yet --
> There's newer -- nearer Crucifixion
> Than That --

It should be noted that here as in the other Jesus poems ED does not doubt the truth of the Gospel account. Although in 597, for example, the persona refers to the story of Moses as a "Romance" and expresses her identification with him even "tho' in soberer moments" she realizes that "No Moses there can be,"

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never is such a qualification made about the Gospels. Jesus, then, was "true" for her, but whether historically as well as symbolically one cannot say. However, the important consideration in understanding ED as religious poet is not to separate her literal from her symbolic language and thought, but rather to be aware that the Bible, especially the Gospels and the Book of Revelation, was not merely a source of imagery for her, as Professor Anderson and others claim. Rather, as in 553, both Christ's crucifixion and the individual suffering it symbolizes are important. Although the poet defines Gethsemane as "a province -- in the Being's Centre," the poem must be understood as giving importance to both crucifixions; that of Jesus is not merely a symbol for expressing a truth about human life. The original crucifixion in which "Our Lord -- indeed -- made Compound Witness --" is not cancelled out but rather strengthened because it prefigures "newer -- nearer Crucifixion[s]."

A very different poem on the same subject is 1180:

> "Remember me" implored the Thief!
> Oh Hospitality!
> My Guest "Today in Paradise"
> I give thee guaranty.
>
> That Courtesy will fair remain
> When the Delight is Dust
> With which we cite this mightiest case
> Of compensated Trust.
>
> Of all we are allowed to hope
> But Affidavit stands
> That this was due where most we fear
> Be unexpected Friends.

A particularly dramatic meditation, this poem is also emblematic,

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a poetic analysis of a visual image from Scripture.[14] If included in a seventeenth-century emblem book, the hieroglyph heading the poem would be the familiar three crosses on the hill. The form is that of the three-fold Ignatian meditation. The first stanza dramatically and visually presents the biblical scene to be considered; it is the "composition of place," in which one's memory is addressed. In the second stanza, one's understanding is addressed through legal language; this "mightiest case / Of compensated Trust" is intellectually convincing of the possibility of even the blackest sinner's being saved. In the third stanza, the speaker addresses the reader's will, his "hope" to be saved; she assures the reader and perhaps herself as well that one should be comforted by the biblical story. If the thief was saved, salvation is possible for all.[15]

The persona is one who appears in a number of ED's specifically devotional poems. She (he?) uses legal language to speak of religious matters, is perhaps even a lawyer. This legal speaker is particularly effective in a number of ways. First, such language is a means of contemporizing biblical messages. Also, the use of logical legal language in discussing so moving a topic provides an ironic distance for contemplation. Such fusion of thought with feeling is characteristic of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets; surely had T. S. Eliot read ED he would have pronounced her sensibility to be undissociated like that of the seventeenth-century poets.

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The explanation most often given for the poet's use of legal language, however, is that her father and brother were lawyers. One remembers that Squire Dickinson carried in his pocket at all times a card on which was written, "I hereby give myself to God," as though he and the Almighty had made a legal agreement.[16] In ED's legal persona, there is some of the same somewhat comic quality as that of Squire Dickinson and his legal-religious card, for as Bergson points out, the excessive and inappropriate use of professional language is always comic.[17] Perhaps, too, ED suggests through this legal persona the somewhat ridiculous aspects of using earth-bound legal language to prove such spiritual questions as the truth of the after-life.

Another very different crucifixion poem is 1735:

> One crown that no one seeks
> And yet the highest head
> Its isolation coveted
> Its stigma deified
>
> While Pontius Pilate lives
> In whatsoever hell
> That coronation pierces him
> He recollects it well.

The persona in this meditation is recessed, almost invisible, rather than dramatically projected. In the first stanza, the poet reflects upon the crown of thorns and death as a crown unsought even though it has been sanctified by Jesus. In the second, she recalls Pontius Pilate as condemned to hell and to eternal contemplation of the "coronation." This reference to "hell" is rare in the ED canon; the word appears only eleven

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times, "heaven" 112 times. In this instance, hell seems to be a place or state of eternal and irremediable regret. Pontius Pilate is "pierced" eternally with the memory of Jesus' death, perhaps recalling Jesus' side being "pierced" (John xix.34). Rather than the customary neutral figure who washed his hands at the trial of Jesus, and presumably of the guilt of the crucifixion, ED's Pontius Pilate is condemned to hell. As usual, although ED writes of subjects typical of the devotional tradition, she interprets them in her own way.

In some crucifixion poems, ED mentions the resurrection as well. Number 567 begins, "He gave away his Life -- / To Us -- Gigantic Sum --" and concludes that he "Broke -- perfect -- from the Pod." Allusions to Christ's resurrection appear elsewhere too: in 300, "Morning" is defined as meaning for "Faith" "The Experiment of Our Lord." In 1543, however, Christ's resurrection is not merely mentioned; it is the subject. Further, Jesus' way of achieving resurrection is the means by which his followers, too, can achieve immortality:

> Obtaining but our own Extent
> In whatsoever Realm --
> 'Twas Christ's own personal Expanse
> That bore him from the Tomb --

Like other devotional poets, ED often wrote elegiacally. This poem, probably written about 1882, was sent to T. W. Higginson; it also served as elegy for the Reverend Charles Wadsworth and was sent at about the same time to his friend, James D. Clark. In the latter version, the poet's sole variant

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is "his" for "our" in Line 1 (1543n). Since the two were sent at about the same time, it is impossible to know whether the poem was originally inspired by the Reverend Wadsworth's death or later altered in order to be a suitable elegy for him. As usual, one cannot with any certainty assign a poem to a specific biographical event, as so many critics attempt to do. Although it is sometimes believed that the most important information in understanding an ED poem is what inspired it, such information, except in her occasional poems, is often almost impossible to discover, for she universalizes particular experiences so that the connotation is generally as well as sometimes specifically applicable.[18]

Certainly, there is no evidence in the poem as to the nature of ED's relationship to the Reverend Wadsworth. Although it is sometimes believed that there was some sort of romantic love between them, no convincing proof of such an attachment exists either here or elsewhere. However, although their correspondence is unfortunately missing, his one surviving letter to her suggests a pastoral rather than a romantic relationship. His letter seems to be a response to one she had written about a spiritual matter, even a crisis; his in return is kind, but impersonal, and one notes that he does not even spell her name correctly (L-248a). Further evidence that their correspondence was pastoral rather than romantic is to be found in another letter to Mr. Clark, written after the Reverend Wadsworth's death, in which she encloses P-1576, beginning,

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"The Spirit lasts -- but in what mode," a poem concerning her eschatological questions as to how the human spirit can exist without a body in eternity. She introduces the poem with, "These thoughts disquiet me, and the great Friend is gone who could solace them" (P-1576n). It seems probable, then, that Wadsworth was her "dearest earthly Friend" (L-807) not because she was in love with him and longed to marry him, but because he reassured her nagging religious questions and doubts. If we assume that hers was in fact a religious sensibility, such an interpretation makes more sense than the usual romantic one.

It seems important, too, that there are letters written by ED to a number of other clergymen: T. W. Higginson was, after all, a former clergyman; others include the Reverends E. E. Hale, J. L. Jenkins, and F. F. Emerson.[19] It is interesting that her beloved Elizabeth Browning carried on a correspondence with a clergyman on the subject of mystical experience.[20] Although, of course, ED could not have known of the Browning exchange, from existing evidence it seems probable that ED's correspondence with Wadsworth, too, concerned spiritual matters.

But to return to the poem. It is a good, perhaps even a great one, although difficult because very compressed. It is also an inversion, as are so many in the canon. In a decompressed, uninverted form, it might be:

> (As it) was Christ's own personal Expanse
> That (enabled him to rise from the dead) and (be) bor(n)e
> from the Tomb
>
> [no break]

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(So our salvation and hope of immortality lie in) Obtaining
but our own Extent
In whatsoever Realm (kingdom or sphere in which we choose
to work and devote our lives)

Christ here is not ED's best friend Jesus, but rather the exalted Christ who has conquered death and whose perfect life provides an ideal example for his followers to imitate. Circularity or the sphere is the image for earthly life in this poem as in so many in the canon, a subject to be discussed in Part Four. "Expanse" and "Extent" are synonyms, the former further defined as the circular "expanse of heaven," the latter "compass" or "circuit." "Realm," too, suggests circularity in that it is one's "kingdom, . . . extent of government" (Webster), or sphere. As Christ was resurrected from the dead because he expanded to the very limits of his sphere, so it is that subsequent pilgrims can achieve immortality. Here, as in both the New Testament and the Imitation, Christ's is the ideal life to be imitated.

In this poem as in all those based on Jesus' life, ED presents her fresh and original version of the meaning of his life and death. In fact, when read as a cluster, ED's life of Christ poems form a modern Gospel in which the major events of Jesus' life are retold by a "warbling," "typic" "Teller." As in the original Gospels, Jesus is praised as a loving, sympathetic, and heroic figure and as one whose life and death are of crucial significance to the lives and deaths of subsequent human beings. Further, as in The Imitation, his is the ideal, perfect life whose integrity is to be imitated by those who

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follow. Certainly, the life of Christ poems are not the work of a secular poet.

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II. The Prayer-Poems to Jesus

As the life of Christ poems comprise a contemporized Gospel, the prayer-poems to Jesus form a modern prayer book. This group includes some which close with prayers as well as others whose entire structure and meaning are those of prayers. Like the life of Christ poems, the prayer-poems to Jesus represent a fresh look at Christian belief and tradition. In fact, they might almost be in response to Jesus' advice in Matthew vi.7: ". . . when ye pray, use not vain repetitions. . . . " Some of these prayer-poems are revitalized versions of traditional prayers; others are original words of praise or supplication. All, in their freshness and variety, avoid the "vain repetitions" against which Jesus warns.

In considering the prayer-poems, it is once more important to remember that although one for whom life was "aglow with God and immortality,"[21] ED was highly critical of the nineteenth-century American church. A reading of 1207 makes clear the difference she makes between Christ and the "christian" church:

> He preached upon "Breadth" till it argued him narrow --
> The Broad are too broad to define
> And of "Truth" until it proclaimed him a Liar --
> The Truth never flaunted a Sign --
>
> Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence
> As Gold the Pyrites would shun --
> What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus
> To meet so enabled a Man!

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The recessed speaker of this poem is uncharacteristically, straightforwardly critical. Although ED more often looks inward, judging herself rather than others,[22] here she looks outward, satirizing a nineteenth-century American preacher who speaks of "Breadth" and "Truth" in his sermon, but betrays himself in every word as a narrow liar. Jesus appears only in the last two lines, the poet imagining what his reaction would be to this phony preacher: he would be confused and puzzled, as out of place as was the Jesus of Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor."[23]

The criticim of the hollow language of the contemporary church is unmistakable. The unexpected or foregrounded word in the poem is "enabled," defined in her Lexicon as "Supplied with sufficient power, physical, moral or legal." The church and its clergy have become powerful, then, but they have nothing to do with the origins of Christianity. ED expresses here and elsewhere the wish that Christianity might go back to its original simplicity and integrity. In her prayer-poems as in those on the life of Christ, she recovers this "Old fashioned" (e.g., P-70) quality of early Christianity and expresses it in "captivating" and relevant terms.

In this prayer-poem, as in all the Jesus cluster, Jesus is a well-defined figure, very different from the other persons of the Trinity. Therefore, ED must be described as Trinitarian in her poetic thought. Her God is distant and unknowable except through nature, poetry, the soul, and Jesus;

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Jesus is the Logos, the human and accessible person of the Trinity; the Holy Ghost, quite naturally less distinct, is sometimes wind, breeze, or spirit. In several instances ED specifically expresses this central Christian mystery of the Trinity. Number 18, for example, closes with a mock benediction:

> In the name of the Bee --
> And of the Butterfly --
> And of the Breeze -- Amen!

In this somewhat irreverent prayer closure, the bee, always a figure for power and energy for ED, is God the Father; the butterfly, image of rebirth from the cocoon-tomb, the resurrected Son; the ungraspable breeze, the Holy Ghost.[24] Poem 626, too, is specifically Trinitarian, for although the three persons are distinct as their three names and the plural "Jehovahs" indicate, they are one in that they are the singular "God," their ability to detect "Sorrow," and their respect for one's prayers:

> Only God -- detect the Sorrow --
> Only God --
> The Jehovahs -- are no Babblers --
> Unto God --
>
> God the Son -- confide it --
> Still secure --
> God the Spirit's Honor --
> Just as sure --

Number 1439 is still another poem reflecting her Trinitarian thought:

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How ruthless are the gentle --
How cruel are the kind --
God broke his contract to his Lamb
To qualify the Wind --

In this contemporized version of Jesus' explanation in John xvi.7 of the necessity for his crucifixion in order to make way for the Holy Spirit, once more legal language, "contract" and "qualify," modernizes the biblical text and creates an ironic distance for contemplation. Certainly, here, as in the other two poems, and by implication throughout the canon, the persons of the Trinity are separate and distinct.

ED's Trinitarian thought provides the rationale for the division of this study into separate chapters devoted to God and Jesus, for ED makes a decided distinction between them. Although they are one, as in P-626 above, almost always she treats them as entities; there is seldom a doubt as to which of the two she speaks of or addresses. The prayer-poems to God and Jesus are particularly different in tone and presentation. In those to God, for example, the speaker sometimes reproaches him for unanswered prayers or for the death of loved ones; her prayers to Jesus are consistently loving and express confidence in his sympathetic and forgiving nature.

Although the portrait of Jesus in these poems is consistent, the same dramatic figure as that of the Gospel group, once more ED uses a variety of techniques so that the prayer-poems are very different from one another: they are spoken by various personae, appropriate for different occasions,

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and expressed in language and symbols from nature as well as from the Bible and Christian liturgy. In 106, ED goes to nature for fresh language to address Jesus:

> The Daisy follows soft the Sun --
> And when his golden walk is done --
> Sits shily at his feet --
> He -- waking -- finds the flower there --
> Wherefore -- Maurauder -- art thou here?
> Because, Sir, love is sweet!
>
> We are the Flower -- Thou the Sun!
> Forgive us, if as days decline --
> We nearer steal to Thee!
> Enamoured of the parting West --
> The peace -- the flight -- the Amethyst --
> Night's possibility!

In the first stanza, a scene from nature is dramatized: the "Daisy" follows the "Sun" as he passes through the heavens from sunrise to sunset, faithfully waiting for him to rise again. The two natural objects are personified, the relationship between them somewhat erotic, the daisy even confessing her love for the sun when he rises again. In the second stanza, the Daisy-persona speaks, addressing Jesus by means of the traditional sun-son pun, drawing an analogy between human life and the nature parable of Stanza 1. Just as the flower follows the sun throughout the day, so Christ's followers are responsive to and dependent on him throughout life. Also, just as the flower at nightfall sits "shily" at the sun's feet, so human beings "steal" nearer to Jesus, the Son, as death approaches, longing for "Night's possibility," the unknown after-life when the Son will again appear. Here as elsewhere the natural world is a

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second Scripture in which the poet finds symbolic religious meanings:[25] the flower is Jesus' follower (probably a play on words), the individual human life or soul; the sun, Jesus; sunset and the West, death; sunrise, rebirth to the eternal life. All are symbols which appear frequently in the canon with consistent meaning.

The speaker of Stanza 2 is the familiar "Daisy" of P-85 discussed above. In that poem, she is his modern-day disciple who anachronistically responds to his Gospel statement. Here, too, she is his follower-flower; however, she addresses him in the form of prayer. Even more interestingly, she shifts from the singular of Stanza 1 to "We" in Stanza 2: when Daisy addresses Jesus, she is speaking not just for herself, but rather for all Jesus' followers. She is priest as well as poet, for she prays to Jesus on behalf of all humankind.

An entirely different prayer-poem to Jesus is 225, an urgent supplication:

> Jesus! thy Crucifix
> Enable thee to guess
> The smaller size!
>
> Jesus! thy second face
> Mind thee in Paradise
> Of our's!

The persona prays that Jesus' having once been human will cause him to be more understanding of her present suffering, which might be described as antitype of his crucifixion. A sense of urgency is apparent throughout, expressed by means of the four

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exclamation points, the intense compression of the language, and the spondees beginning each of the two stanzas. This tone of great haste and need is heightened by the brevity of the poem and by the fact that each line ends with a variation of the "s" sound, giving the whole poem an appropriate breathless quality. In her plea that Jesus be reminded of "our['s]" faces, again the persona prays not only for herself but for others.

Perhaps the most interesting of the Jesus prayer-poems is 538, which seems to be based on the forgiveness Jesus asks from the cross for his persecutors and on the passage in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew vi.12):

> 'Tis true --they shut me in the Cold --
> But then -- Themselves were warm
> And could not know the feeling 'twas --
> Forget it -- Lord -- of Them --
>
> Let not my Witness hinder Them
> In Heavenly esteem --
> No Paradise could be -- Conferred
> Through Their beloved Blame --
>
> The Harm They did -- was short -- And since
> Myself -- who bore it -- do --
> Forgive Them -- Even as Myself --
> Or else -- forgive not me --

Although Jesus is not mentioned by name, two variant readings indicate that it is probably he who is addressed: "Christ" for "Lord" in Line 4 and "Else -- Savior -- banish Me --" for the last line. The speaker is not identified; however, she resembles Daisy in her devotion to Jesus and in her Christ-like

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loving and forgiving tone.

In the conversational first line, the speaker seems to respond to Jesus' or someone's pointing out the cruelty of her persecutors. She defends them, explaining, like Christ on the cross, that they knew not what they did, as usual making her version more specific and personal than that in the Gospels. Not only does she ask forgiveness for these persecutors; she asks that Jesus erase their transgressions from his mind, that he "forget." In Stanza 2, she goes on with the defense of her persecutors, praying that her testimony against them not hurt them in heavenly opinion, logically adding that their damnation could in no way help her. The persona's supplication for the forgiveness of her enemies builds to a climax in the final stanza. The last line is the ultimate plea for her enemies: she is willing to risk eternal damnation for their sakes.

Other prayer-poems to Jesus include 1111 addressed to "savior," perhaps inspired by Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew xxvi.30); 1539, a witty, somewhat irreverent version of the child's familiar, "Now I lay me down to sleep"; and 502, in which she is desperate because she has lost contact with Jesus. In these prayer-poems as in all those to Jesus, the immediacy and originality of language and symbol are in contrast to the sermon of the phony preacher of P-1207 and to the "vain repetitions" against which Jesus warns. Once more, ED has contemporized and revitalized a "faded" Christian tradition.

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III. The Sacramental Poems

ED might be said to act as Orpheus in the sacramental poems as in the Gospel and prayer groups, for she alters traditional meanings so that the sacraments are more relevant for herself and her readers. Often in these poems, ED conflates religious with poetic meanings. In fact, poetry, too, is a kind of sacrament in the sense that Webster defines the word: "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace . . . enjoined by Christ . . . to be observed by his followers to avow their special relation to him." Sometimes ED, through pun, equates poetry with the eucharist. At others, she uses eucharistic language to describe poetic inspiration and the spiritual refreshment of reading inspired words. ED finds in baptism, confirmation, and matrimony metaphors for her elevation to the rank of sacred poet. Further, she describes her poetic vocation in terms of holy orders and matrimony, the latter her frequent metaphor for the dedication to poety in this life which prefigures her final union with Jesus in the next.

Since ED mentions each of the seven sacraments named by Webster as those of the Roman Catholic and Greek traditions rather than only of the Protestant baptism and eucharist, it seems apparent that once again her inspiration was literary, that she was writing in the devotional tradition rather than

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from her own personal experience at the First Church of Christ of Amherst.[26] Such a conclusion is strengthened by the Roman or Anglo-Catholic language she often uses: "nun," "shrine," and "unshriven," for example, are not words commonly used in nineteenth-century American Protestant churches. Other evidence of literary influence is to be found in the poems, for frequently they are strikingly similar in language, image, and form to the Gospels, the Book of Revelation, and The Imitation of Christ. One recalls that she acknowledges her debt to "the Revelations" in L-261. It is also significant that in the 1857 edition of The Imitation at Houghton Library, the only section of the book marked fairly heavily is Book Four, "On the Blessed Sacrament," a dialogue between Christ the Beloved and his Disciple concerning the eucharist.

Because ED, like Webster and à Kempis, stresses that the sacraments have specifically to do with Jesus, the sacramental group must be included with the Jesus cluster. In 833, for example, she refers to the eucharist as a commemoration of Jesus' death and resurrection:

> Perhaps you think me stooping
> I'm not ashamed of that
> Christ -- stooped until He touched the Grave --
> Do those at Sacrament
> Commemorate Dishonor
> Or love annealed of love
> Until it bend as low as Death
> Redignified, above?

This poem, like others in the sacramental group, resembles Book Four of The Imitation in several ways. First, like Book

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Four, it is in the form of a dialogue. However, although the speaker seems to be Daisy, Jesus' modern disciple, she does not, like the Disciple of Book Four, address Jesus about the eucharist. Rather, she discusses the sacrament and its Christian meaning with an unknown other, perhaps the reader, perhaps another aspect of herself. The poems recalls Book Four, too, in its use of the rather unusual word, "stooping." In The Imitation, the Disciple expresses his gratitude for Jesus' "stoop[ing]," willingly humbling himself, in order to present himself in the form of the eucharist.[27] The Daisy-persona likens herself to Jesus, for, like him, she lovingly stoops, probably as poet, in order to present herself to her readers in the form of poetry. One is reminded of ED's L-269 to Mrs. Holland in which she says, "My business is to love" and "My business is to sing." ED, then, is Christ-like; the poem is like the Host of the eucharist, for both are commemorations of loving sacrifice.

In another eucharistic poem, poetry is equated with the eucharist through pun, for "A Word made Flesh" refers both to Jesus of the eucharist and to "loved Philology":

> A Word made Flesh is seldom
> And tremblingly partook
> Nor then perhaps reported
> But have I not mistook
> Each one of us has tasted
> With ecstasies of stealth
> The very food debated
> To our specific strength --

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A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He --
"Made Flesh and dwelt among us
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology
(1651)

"Word made Flesh" is a direct quotation from John i.14, where it means Jesus. "Partook" suggests the eucharist in which one takes a portion in common with others (Webster). Jesus here, then, is the Jesus of the eucharist. However, ED's communion is not the ordinary liturgical one, for the speaker says that although not "reported" each of us has solemnly tasted the "food" to the limit of his/her particular strength. In the second stanza, she speaks more specifically of inspired language and poetry as the "Word made Flesh," the divine incarnated. "A Word that breathes distinctly" recalls her question to T. W. Higginson: Is my verse "alive"? Does it breathe? (L-260). Such a living, clear word, like Jesus, "Has not the power to die." Rather, it is as "Cohesive" ("tending to resist separation"--Webster) as is the immortal "Spirit." The next two lines are very obscure indeed. Since there is no autograph copy, only a transcript made by Sue in which she neglected to close the quotation, it is even possible that the transcript is incomplete. However, "It" seems once more to refer to the "Word," which may "expire," meaning both to "breathe out" and to "die," according to Webster, if "He," meaning Jesus, could or did. Obviously,

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in terms of life and death, the "Word" and Jesus are parallel as they are in the following lines in which Jesus' "condescension" is equated with the Word's "consent"; the first means "voluntary descending from rank," the second, "agreement of what one had a right to withhold" (Webster). Both the Word and Jesus, then, are the divine willingly stooping in order to be made human. Interestingly, "condescension" is another word which appears in The Imitation, where it means the eucharist.[28] Also, "Christ" is one synonym for "word" in her Lexicon. In this difficult poem, then, poetry and Jesus of the eucharist are equated through pun and parallel structure: both are immortal; both condescend or consent; both are the "Word made Flesh," the divine incarnate and, therefore, the "Bisecting Messenger" which tells us "All we know" "Of Paradise' existence" (P-1411).

In 1587, too, words provide eucharistic sustenance for the spirit. The analogue for the poem seems to be Revelation x.9-11:

> He ate and drank the precious Words --
> His Spirit grew robust --
> He knew no more that he was poor,
> Nor that his frame was Dust --
>
> He danced along the dingy Days
> And this Bequest of Wings
> Was but a Book -- What Liberty
> A loosened spirit brings --

Eucharistic terms describe writing rather than reading poetry in 1452:

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Your thoughts dont have words every day
They come a single time
Like esoteric sips
Of the communion Wine
Which while you taste so native seems
So easy so to be
You cannot comprehend its price
Nor it's infrequency

The key word here is "esoteric," meaning "Private; interior; opposed to exoteric or public," according to Webster. In ED's reworking of Christian tradition, writing, as well as reading poetry is the private equivalent of the traditional public eucharist.

In reading ED's eucharistic poems, one is reminded, too, of the emphasis in both the Gospels and the Imitation on Jesus' role as food for the spirit: "I am the bread of life" is only one such reference (John vi.35). Probably, then, many of ED's poems about hunger and food, especially those about bread and wine, are about spiritual hunger which can be satisfied by Christ or the private eucharist, inspired poetry. As dispenser of this eucharistic poetry, ED might be said to be one who has taken holy orders.

In 715, the persona is more specifically one who has taken holy orders:

The World -- feels Dusty
When We stop to Die --
We want the Dew -- then --
Honors -- taste dry --

Flags -- vex a Dying face --
But the least Fan
Stirred by a friend's Hand --
Cools -- like the Rain --

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> Mine by the Ministry
> When thy Thirst comes --
> Dews of Thessaly, to fetch --
> And Hybla Balms --

The speaker wishes that she might be of comfort at the death of the person addressed, probably the reader. "Ministry," defined by Webster as "ecclesiastical function or profession," suggests that she wishes metaphorically to serve as priest who performs the sacrament of last rites or extreme unction, "the rite of annointing in the last hours; . . . the application of sacred oil . . . " (Webster). Such a meaning is strengthened by "Balms," both that which "soothes" and "fragrant or valuable ointment," according to Webster. That the alternate word for "Hybla" is "holy" reinforces the poem's sacramental meaning. The speaker, then, wishes to perform the priestly rite of extreme unction, to annoint the reader at death with her soothing, holy verse.

The speaker also refers to herself as one who has taken holy orders in 918:

> Only a Shrine, but Mine --
> I made the Taper shine --
> Madonna dim, to whom all Feet may come,
> Regard a Nun --
> (First stanza)

Although this supplication to the Virgin does not prove that ED was a nun manqué of a particular order,[29] if read in context of the sacramental poems, as well as in light of the impressive number of those to and about Jesus, it does indicate that this

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persona considers her poetic vocation to be a sacred one. She is the devot, her "Taper" the religious equivalent of the "Lamps" lighted by "Poets" in P-883. Interestingly, "Shrine" is defined by Webster both as "altar" and as "A case or box . . . in which sacred things are deposited." It seems possible that "Shrine" refers to the chest in which ED kept her poems. The poems would then be sacred.

Also included in the sacramental poems are those about baptism and matrimony, both suggesting the persona's formal entry into a new state of being. As those on holy orders suggest that the persona is a sacred poet, the baptism and matrimonial poems can be understood as having to do with her election to this rank. In 473, the two sacraments are fused: the speaker concludes that she was "Baptized -- this Day -- A Bride --." The subject of 508 is baptism:

> I'm ceded -- I've stopped being Their's
> The name they dropped upon my face
> With water, in the country church
> Is finished using, now,
> And They can put it with my Dolls,
> My childhood, and the string of spools,
> I've finished threading -- too --
>
> Baptized, before, without the choice,
> But this time, consciously, of Grace --
> Unto supremest name --
> Called to my Full -- The Crescent dropped --
> Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
> With one small Diadem.
>
> My second Rank -- too small the first --
> Crowned -- Crowing -- on my Father's breast --
> A half unconscious Queen --
> But this time -- Adequate -- Erect,
> With Will to choose, or to reject,
> And I choose, just a Crown --

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The speaker contrasts her first traditional, liturgical baptism with a second more important one which she has willingly chosen. The "Diadem" of the second is another of her recurring figures of circularity as well as another of her royal images; she has been crowned, become royal. This second baptism is strikingly similar to a number of the nuptial poems. In both, the sacrament is formal acknowledgement of a new and elevated state, a title which is "Confirmed" (P-528). Although we cannot be certain of what event or rite de passage she speaks, the similarity between the baptism poems and many of the nuptial ones suggests that their subject, too, is the same. Both refer to a transcendent event which elevates the persona and cuts her off forever from her previous child's life. This event probably is her elevation to the rank of sacred poet.

* * * * * * * * * *

A reading of the nuptial group in context of the Jesus cluster and particularly in light of the other sacramental poems illuminates in a new way these much debated poems. I propose that they are not, as is often thought, metaphorical accounts of an imagined marriage to a married lover to whom she considered herself wed. Rather, they are about her sacramental marriage to poetry in this life, a marriage which is a means of grace and prefigures her heavenly marriage to Jesus in the next.[30]

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The language of this nuptial or matrimonial group is sometimes sacramental and solemn, at others, erotic, colloquial, or even humorous. Always, however, the language is that of sacred parody, nuptial and erotic terms used to express religious meanings. It should be noted that sacred parody is as old in the devotional tradition as the Song of Solomon, which is written in the language of erotic and nuptial love but interpreted as having religious meaning: God's love for mankind or, typologically, Christ's love for the church or the human soul. Similarly, in many medieval lyrics, such as "Maiden in the mor lay," religious and erotic meanings are so intertwined that often one is not sure whether the poet writes of the Virgin or of the lady. The seventeenth-century devotional poets, too, use erotic language to express religious meanings and religious language to express sexual meanings. John Donne, for example, uses religious language for sexual love in "The Canonization"; conversely, he uses erotic language in addressing God in "Holy Sonnet XIV":

> . . . for I
> Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.

Donne's Elegie XIX, "To his Mistris going to Bed," is interpreted by one critic as pornography and by another as about Christian-Platonic mystical experience.[31]

ED, like others writing in the devotional tradition, uses religious language in love poems as well as erotic and nuptial language in religious ones. Sometimes one cannot be

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sure if she writes of Deity or of a beloved. In 456, she seems to address the beloved in religious terms, as a means of hyperbolic compliment:

> So well that I can live without --
> I love thee -- then How well is that?
> As well as Jesus?
> Prove it me
> That He -- loved Men --
> As I -- love thee --

The speaker playfully responds to an "other" who seems to have asked, "How much do you love me?" She answers, "Well enough to live without you." The other seems then to ask, "Do you love me as well as Jesus loves men?" To which she says, "More." You'll have to prove to me that Jesus "loved Men -- / As I -- love thee." In 640, the persona compares the beloved to Jesus. She begins:

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

In the sixth and seventh stanzas, she continues:

> Nor could I rise -- with You --
> Because Your Face
> Would put out Jesus' --
> That New Grace
>
> Grow plain -- and foreign
> On my homesick Eye
> Except that You than He
> Shone closer by --

Again, the speaker praises the beloved by saying that it is impossible even for her to go to heaven with him or her because

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Jesus' face would be dim by comparison. In still another poem, the persona says that

> . . . The "Life that is to be," to me,
> A Residence too plain
> Unless in my Redeemer's Face
> I recognize your own -- . . .
> (1260)

Here she goes beyond the hyperbolic compliment of the previous poems to suggest that the Redeemer's face must be that of the beloved, otherwise heaven will be a disappointment.

As ED is like other devotional poets in her use of religious language to praise the beloved, she is like them, too, in her use of nuptial and erotic language in writing of religious subjects. In 357, God's courtship of the soul is compared to Miles Standish's courtship of Priscilla:

> God is a 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 --

The analogy between God-Jesus-Soul and Miles Standish-John Alden-Priscilla is a rather outrageous example of ED's contemporizing Christian tradition by means of American humor. Here the difference between God and Jesus is made quite clear: God, although a "Lover" is "distant." Jesus, on the other hand, is the <u>Logos</u> in that he is God's "Envoy," the go-between who tells

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the soul of God as John Alden told Priscilla of Miles Standish. The irreverent suggestion that the soul might choose Jesus rather than God, just as Priscilla chose the young and appealing Alden rather than the remote and unknown Standish, is implicit in the analogy.

The poem is also an excellent instance of ED's use of nuptial language to present a religious idea, here Deity's courtship of the soul. One is particularly reminded of Herbert's "Mattens," found among ED's papers after her death, in which God is one who "eye[s]" and "woo[s]" the "heart." One is reminded, too, of The Imitation: "Come then, faithful soul: prepare your heart for your Divine Spouse. . . ."[32]

In a late unfinished worksheet draft, ED again uses the language of sacred parody:

All that I do
Is in review
To his enamored mind
I know his eye
Where e'er I ply
Is pushing close behind

Not any Port
Nor any flight
But he doth there preside
What omnipresence lies in wait
For her to be a Bride
(1496)

The bridegroom here is abductor as well as potential spouse, for he is "enamoured" and "lies in wait" for the "Bride." Obviously, the bridegroom is Deity, for he is "omnipresence," defined by Webster as "an attribute peculiar to God." Also, for whom other

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than Deity could one's life be an ongoing performance? The "her" whom "omnipresence" pursues seems to be the speaker's soul, archetypally and often for ED, female. Christ's or God's love for the soul, then, is here expressed in the language of the <u>raptus</u>. The poem is a strikingly original version both of the devotional trope of the soul as bride of Christ and of the irresistible, inescapable God as in the Book of Jonah and Thompson's "Hound of Heaven."

A possible poetic meaning is suggested as well in the word, "ply," one of whose meanings is "To work steadily" (Webster). Since ED refers to her poetry as her "business" (L-269), perhaps this speaker suggests that as she writes, the Deity-bridegroom constantly harasses her; she cannot write other than devotional poetry. Such possible conflation of poetic and religious meanings is even more evident in the group of nuptial poems in which sacramental language is used. In 817, the speaker is bride of the Trinity and probably of poetry as well:

> Given in Marriage unto Thee
> Oh thou Celestial Host --
> Bride of the Father and the Son
> Bride of the Holy Ghost.
>
> Other Betrothal shall dissolve --
> Wedlock of Will, decay --
> Only the Keeper of this Ring
> Conquer Mortality --

The bride-persona in her direct address to the bridegroom almost might be repeating her vows as the sacrament of matrimony is taking place. She might even be one who is taking holy

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orders, for a nun is said to be the bride of Christ and, by extension, of the Trinity. Certainly, there is no indication that she addresses an earthly married lover. Rather, in the second stanza, ED contrasts the traditional marriage between a man and woman with hers to Deity. The former is chosen and is not permanent, probably a reference to Jesus' saying that there is no marriage in heaven (Matthew xxii.30). Although such earthly marriages are not eternal, the persona's marriage is and assures immortality to the bride who wears the ring commemorating the union. The ring here is another circular image, which, like the "Crown" of P-508, is concrete symbol of the persona's elevation. That the bride "Conquer[s] Morality" by her marriage suggests that the bridegroom is both Deity and poetry, for in the canon "immortality" is often a pun meaning both eschatological and poetic immortality (e.g., 406). This suggestion is reinforced by her addressing the bridegroom as "Host," the consecrated wafer which represents the body of Christ in the Roman Catholic eucharist (Webster), for as previously discussed, ED often equates the traditional eucharist with poetry. One conquers "Mortality," then, by a marriage to the eternal rather than the transient, to Jesus and to poetry rather than to "the present moment" (P-1380). Here ED uses the traditional language of sacred parody; through pun she fuses Deity with poetry.

In several nuptial poems, ED refers to a marriage which took place in summer. She might mean the season in which she

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finally committed herself to her poetic vocation or to the time of life, her twenties, when she made this commitment. The summer wedding, especially the "solstice" of P-322, might even mean the birth of her life as dedicated poet, for in P-569 she equates poet with "Summer." In 631, she contrasts her summer marriage to poety with that of another who contracted a human marriage:

> Ourselves were wed one summer -- dear --
> Your Vision -- was in June --
> And when Your little Lifetime failed,
> I wearied -- too -- of mine --
>
> And overtaken in the Dark --
> Where You had put me down --
> By Some one carrying a Light --
> I -- too -- received the Sign.
>
> 'Tis true -- Our Futures different lay --
> Your Cottage -- faced the sun --
> While Oceans -- and the North must be --
> On every side of mine
>
> 'Tis true, Your Garden led the Bloom,
> For mine -- in Frosts -- was sown --
> And yet, one Summer, we were Queens --
> But You -- were crowned in June --

Not one of her best poems, at least to twentieth-century tastes, perhaps its failure is due to the fact that she seems to write too specifically of particular events and that the poem, therefore, lacks the universality of her greatest ones. The speaker addresses another female person who contracted a warm, human marriage which "faced the sun" at approximately the same time that the speaker contracted a solitary one which was surrounded by "Oceans" and the "North," both images suggesting

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the "polar privacy" necessary for writing poetry (P-1695). It is interesting to recall that Sue was married on July 1, 1856, and that ED began to assemble the fascicles in 1858. One is tempted to interpret the poem as referring to Sue's summer wedding to Austin, or perhaps to her decision to marry him, and to ED's wedding to her future, poetry. As usual, the marriage of the speaker, like that of the other, is an event which cuts her off from her previous "little Lifetime." As in many of the nuptial group, there are images of "Dark" and "Light" as well as of coronation. The "Garden" in the fourth stanza reminds one of the devotional trope of the garden as soul. The garden or soul of the person addressed "Bloom[ed]" first with the fruit of human love, that of the speaker with a different form of love, probably her poems, for elsewhere in the canon poems are flowers of the brain or soul (e.g., 945). The concluding two lines recall P-1543 and others: each woman is queen of her own particular realm or sphere.

Another summer marriage takes place in 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 --

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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 --

Here the marriage is like a "Sacrament" in which the two "commune," emphasizing the sacramental nature of ED's matrimonial poems. Further, the earthly marriage is a preparation for a heavenly one, the "Supper of the Lamb" of Revelation xix.9. That the earthly marriage prefigures a heavenly one is evidence that ED does not refer to an earthly lover, for ED does not dispute Jesus' words, and he said there is no marriage (in the human sense) in heaven. I propose, rather, that the earthly marriage is a metaphor for ED's dedication to poetry, Jesus' earthly emblem, a marriage in this life which prefigures her ultimate union with Jesus in eternity. Like Dante, ED sees a typological relationship between this life and the next; this life is prefigurement, the next fulfillment.[33] Her soul's dedication to the eternal in the form of poetry prefigures her ultimate union with Divinity in eternity.

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The painful parting of this poem appears in other matrimonial poems as well as in the third Master letter. It is the conclusion of the earthly wedding, the transcendent event which marks the beginning of her poetic vocation, only bearable because of the anticipated reunion with Jesus in heaven. Number 625 begins with this "long Parting":

> 'Twas a long Parting -- but the time
> For Interview -- had Come --
> Before the Judgment Seat of God --
> The Last -- and second time
>
> These Fleshless Lovers met --
> A Heaven in a Gaze --
> A Heaven of Heavens -- the Privilege
> Of one another's Eyes --
>
> No Lifetime set -- on Them --
> Appareled as the new
> Unborn -- except They had beheld --
> Born infiniter -- now --
>
> Was Bridal -- e'er like This?
> A Paradise -- the Host --
> And Cherubim -- and Seraphim --
> The unobtrusive Guest --

The perspective of this poem is like a mirror image of the previous one: the former is an earthly marriage in which the heavenly one is anticipated; the latter is the marriage in heaven, the earthly one merely recalled. In the second, both marriages are specifically described as being between "Fleshless Lovers." Again, the wedding is not to a human lover, but rather that of the poet's soul to poetry on this earth and to Jesus in the next.

Number 461 is still another account of the persona's heavenly marriage. Once more, she speaks of having "seen the

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face -- before!":

> A Wife -- at Daybreak I shall be --
> Sunrise -- Hast thou a Flag for me?
> At Midnight, I am but a Maid,
> How short it takes to make it Bride --
> Then -- Midnight, I have passed from thee
> Unto the East, and Victory --
>
> Midnight -- Good Night! I hear them call,
> The Angels bustle in the Hall --
> Softly my Future climbs the Stair,
> I fumble at my Childhood's prayer
> So soon to be a Child no more --
> Eternity, I'm coming -- Sir,
> Savior -- I've seen the face -- before!

The bride-persona's language is not sacramental or solemn. Rather, she speaks colloquially, even breathlessly, describing the action as it is taking place. One recalls that another variant for "warbling" in P-1545 is "breathless." This persona, then, is a "breathless Teller" of Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins of Matthew xxv. The "Maid" of Stanza 1, like the wise virgin, is prepared for the approach of the bridegroom. In Stanza 2, the language particularly echoes that of Matthew xxv.6, " . . . at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh. . . . " Since "East" and "Morning" in the canon often mean eternity and resurrection (e.g., 1573 and 300), the marriage of this poem is that in heaven. Such an interpretation is reinforced by the poem's resemblance to the biblical parable which is about the kingdom of heaven and by her telling "Eternity" that she is "coming." The persona upon finally meeting the bridegroom addresses him as "Savior," "Jesus Christ the Redeemer," according to Webster, and says

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that she has "seen the face -- before!" The poem, then, is about the heavenly union in which she is bride of the Lamb whom she has wed previously in his earthly manifestation, poetry.

This poem and the others in the sacramental group present further convincing evidence that ED is indeed a devotional poet, for like other religious poets she uses sacramental and liturgical language as well as that of sacred parody. In the eucharistic poems, often through pun, she equates poetry with the Host: both are a means of communing with Jesus. In the holy orders poems she speaks metaphorically of her vocation as sacred poet. The nuptial group can then be understood as sacramental: they are not about an imagined marriage to an earthly lover, but rather about her soul's earthly marriage to poetry which prefigures her ultimate union with Jesus in eternity. Once more, ED has contemporized Christian tradition and adapted it to her own purposes.

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IV. The Master Poems and Letters

An important connecting link between the nuptial and Master poems is 461 discussed above, for in the final line "Master" is the alternate word for "Savior." Further, although "Savior" appears in the fair copy, perhaps sent to a friend, "Master" is the word in both draft and packet copies (461n). Since ED chose "Master" for the fascicle version, it might even be considered to be her preferred word.[34] Certainly, there is reason to assign the poem to either or both groups. In the packet version, then, it is "Master" who is Jesus the heavenly bridegroom and whose face the persona has seen before in the form of his earthly emblem, poetry.

Although "Master" is not necessarily used in precisely the same way in each of the seven poems and three mysterious letters addressed to him (L-187, 233, and 248), it seems absurd to suppose that there is no consistency of meaning, especially since all are believed to have been written in a relatively short period of time, between 1858 and 1863.[35] Since in 461 "Master" is virtually interchangeable with "Savior," one may suppose that in other poems and letters, too, "Master" refers both to Jesus and to his earthly emblem, poetry. "Master" is, of course, the name by which Jesus' disciples refer to him in the Gospels. The word is also

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defined by Webster as "Owner, teacher, preceptor." It is in both these ways that ED uses the term in poems and probably in the letters as well. "Master," then, is sometimes Jesus and at other times poetry, but most often both Jesus and poetry, the Master and owner of the poet's earthly and heavenly life.

Both are suggested in 336. The speaker addresses the Master directly, again recalling the dialogue between Christ the Beloved and his Disciple in Books Three and Four of the Imitation as well as Herbert's many poems addressed to Jesus:

> The face I carry with me -- last --
> When I go out of Time --
> To take my Rank -- by -- in the West
> That face -- will just be thine --
>
> I'll hand it to the Angel --
> That -- Sir -- was my Degree --
> In Kingdoms -- you have heard the Raised --
> Refer to -- possibly.
>
> He'll take it -- scan it -- step aside --
> Return -- with such a crown
> As Gabriel -- never capered at --
> And beg me put it on --
>
> And then -- he'll turn me round and round --
> To an admiring sky --
> As one that bore her Master's name --
> Sufficient Royalty!

Although its tone is fanciful, the poem's Christian meaning is clear. "Face," a word which appears frequently in the canon, is defined by Webster both as "countenance" and "In Scripture. . . [God's] favor." The "face" of this poem, then, is the Master's favor which will be all she needs to collect her crown in heaven. That others of the "Raised" have

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mentioned this face suggests that they are the Elect in the Christian sense, for they, like her, have borne the "Master's name," a direct reference to Revelation xiv.1. Those who bore the Master's name might also be those few chosen to be poets. However, here the Christian rather than poetic meaning predominates. The word which most specifically suggests a poetic meaning as well is "scan," defined by Webster both as "scrutinize" and "examine a verse." This pun, which appears elsewhere (e.g., P-178), suggests that the angel will scrutinize the Master's face or favor which is synonymous with scanning the poetry. It is the Master's favor on earth, her verse, which will guarantee her being crowned in heaven.

Obviously, this poem is similar in meaning to many of the nuptial group. The imagined heavenly crowning is the equivalent of the heavenly marriage, the persona's having borne "her Master's name" the equivalent of her earthly marriage to poetry. Also, as in the nuptial group, the persona's life on earth prefigures that in eternity.

An earlier poem about the Master has been interpreted as being a commemoration of the death of her earliest "Preceptor," B. F. Newton.[36] However, when read in context of the Master group, it seems quite possible that the poem is a dramatization of Mary Magdalene's visit to Christ's tomb on Easter morning as well:

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

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That when the snow creeps slowly
From off his chamber door --
Daisies point the way there --
And the Troubador.
(96)

Mary Magdalene is a favorite subject for devotional poets. Crashaw, for example, wrote of her great sorrow at her past life, Herbert of her washing Christ's feet.[37] ED's poem, too, might be about the Magdalene, for it reminds one of John xx.1-18, in which she is portrayed as the first to go to Christ's tomb on Easter morning. It will be remembered that the Magdalene does not recognize the risen Jesus and, thinking him the gardener, asks him where her Master has been buried. ED's sexton is quite possibly the anachronistic equivalent of the Gospel gardener. If so, then, the Magdalene persona, like the biblical Magdalene, searches for her Master's grave and unknowingly asks Jesus himself where he is buried. The dramatic irony would then be heightened by the persona's wish to prepare her Master's grave for spring, suggesting rebirth, for the rebirth has already taken place.

If the poem is understood in this way, its Gospel meaning is clear. If it is also a commemoration of Newton, it has poetic meaning as well, for Newton was her earliest poetic preceptor. Quite possibly the elegy for Newton is fused with the story from St. John, suggesting through pun that Newton was her earthly master as Jesus is the divine Master. It also suggests that Newton, like Christ, will gain immortality. This possible fusion of an elegy with Christ's death and resurrection is not

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unlike P-1543, used as elegy for the Reverend Wadsworth (see pp. 86-89 above). In that poem, ED likens the individual life to that of Christ and suggests that the person commemorated, like Christ, will achieve immortality.

In the other Master poems, too, poetic and/or religious meanings are implied. In 415, the persona addresses the Master directly, chiding him for unpredicted natural phenomena which undermine "Jehovah's" credibility; here the Master is Jesus as "Envoy" between herself and God. In 151, an unfinished penciled draft, the speaker again addresses Master, referring to his "Mute" coronation on earth which she applauds and to a projected later meeting after "the pageant" when she once more will acknowledge her allegiance to him; these two meetings resemble the earthly and heavenly meetings of the nuptial group.

In 462, the speaker also addresses the Master. However, here he is source of poetry:

> Why make it doubt -- it hurts it so --
> So sick -- to guess --
> So strong -- to know --
> So brave -- upon it's little Bed
> To tell the very last They said
> Unto Itself -- and smile -- And shake --
> For that dear -- distant -- dangerous -- Sake --
> But -- the Instead -- the Pinching fear
> That Something -- it did do -- or dare --
> Offend the Vision -- and it flee --
> And They no more remember me --
> Nor ever turn to tell me why --
> Oh, Master, This is Misery --

A decompression of the poem helps to clarify its meaning:

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(Master,) Why (do you) make it (the poet) doubt (?) It (doubting)
hurts it so(.)
(It makes it) So sick -- to (have to) guess(.)
(It wants) So strong(ly) -- to know --(.)
(It lies) So brave(ly) -- upon it's little Bed(.)
(It tries so hard) To tell the very last They said
Unto Itself(.) -- (It tries to) smile -- And shake --
For that dear -- distant -- dangerous -- Sake -- (the Master's.)
But -- (the) Instead -- the Pinching fear
That Something -- it did do -- or dare --
(Did) Offend the Vision -- and (that) it (the Vision) (did) flee --
And They (will) no more remember me --
Nor ever (re)turn to tell me why --
Oh, Master, This is Misery --

The difficulty of this highly compressed poem is compounded by ED's use of the neuter singular pronoun: "it" refers to the speaker, to "doubt[ing]," and to "Vision," perhaps suggesting that poet, poetic vision, and its loss are so closely related as to be almost one (cf. P-1721). The speaker is suffering a kind of poetic dark night of the soul.[38] She is in pain because of doubt, the difficulty of presenting the original "Vision" in poetic form, and the fear that she has "Offend[ed]" the "Vision" and that "it" (or "They") never will return. Her difficulty in translating the original "Vision" into poetic form and her fear that it will vanish in the process of trying to recreate it recalls Orpheus and his unsuccessful attempt to bring Euridice from the underworld into the light of day. The "dangerous" aspect of dealing with the material of which poetry is made reminds one of Orpheus, too, and his hazardous descent into the underworld.

The speaker, then, is the Orphic "Teller" of P-1545. She addresses the Master who is the poetic "Vision" or its

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source. Further, the persona writes "For that dear -- distant -- dangerous -- Sake --." Master is not only the source of poetry; he is also the one for whom it is written, a recurring concept in the ED canon and in the devotional tradition. This relationship between Orphic poet and Master is that of Daisy and Master in the Master letters; it is also probably the subject of the much discussed 754:

> My Life had stood -- a Loaded Gun --
> In Corners -- till a Day
> The Owner passed -- identified --
> And carried Me away --
>
> And now We roam in Sovreign Woods --
> And now We hunt the Doe --
> And every time I speak for Him --
> The Mountains straight reply --
>
> And do I smile, such cordial light
> Upon the Valley glow --
> It is as a Vesuvian face
> Had let it's pleasure through --
>
> And when at Night -- Our good Day done --
> I guard My Master's Head --
> 'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
> Deep Pillow -- to have shared --
>
> To foe of His -- I'm deadly foe --
> None stir a second time --
> On whom I lay a Yellow Eye --
> Or an emphatic Thumb --
>
> Though I than He may -- longer live
> He longer must -- than I --
> For I have but the power to kill,
> Without -- the power to die --

This emblematic poem, like the matrimonial group, is sometimes interpreted as a love poem.[39] More recently, it has been suggested that the partnership between Gun and Master is a

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grim and loveless one in which the Gun is dehumanized by her dedication to the Master.[40] Certainly, the language is sometimes erotic, and the relationship one in which the Master dominates, for after the Master-Owner abducts the Gun-persona, the two form a sort of marriage in which the Gun-persona is totally in the service of the Master-Owner. However, I propose that the nuptial and erotic language as well as the Master's abduction and subsequent control over the Gun-persona are forms of sacred parody and the raptus. In fact, the poem is probably a description of the poet-persona's earthly marriage to poetry and to Jesus. The Gun is the poet, the Orphic warbler who "speak[s]" for her Master-Owner; the Master-Owner is poetry and Jesus, her earthly and heavenly spouse. It is here that ED describes most specifically the earthly marriage of her soul to Jesus and poetry.

The baroque hieroglyph of the Loaded Gun suggests ED's recurring volcanic image for the poetic self (e.g., 1677) as well as Sue's for her in the obituary, the "'soul of fire in a shell of pearl'": the Gun-poet is outwardly impassive, here even inanimate, but inwardly powerful. Still another version of the drastic change which took place in her life is the contrast between the persona's quiet indoor life in "Corners" and her later adventurous poetic life in which she and the Master roam the "Sovreign Woods." "Sovereign" is defined by Webster as "royal" or "God-like"; "Woods" is the archetypal image of the unknown. The "Doe" which the two hunt in the

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"Sovreign Woods" is a beautiful, elusive, female animal, suggesting the soul, archetypally and often in the ED vocabulary, female. Such a reading is supported by P-565 in which the "single Doe" refers unmistakably to the soul, that "Being -- impotent to end -- / When once it has begun." The two must hunt the secret soul, then, in order to write poetry.

Although the cruelty of the hunt has been suggested as an underlying meaning of the poem,[41] the hunt is more probably ED's image of killing as metaphor for capturing in language. For example, she wrote to T. W. Higginson, "Today, I slew a Mushroom," meaning that she had captured its essence in her poem (P-1298n). Such an interpretation is reinforced by her alternate word "art" for "power" in the sixth stanza. Gun and Master hunt the secret soul, then, meaning that they attempt to capture it in language. As will be discussed in Part Four, the ED canon includes many poems dealing specifically with the soul and many others of self-exploration. In these poems, ED might be said to act as a gun in that in collaboration with Deity she attempts to capture in language the soul and its drama.

The response of the mountains and valley to the Gun-poet speaking for the Master-owner once more suggests Orpheus to whose music the natural world, even trees and stones, respond. The mountain's echo to the Gun-poet's report suggests such a response as does the valley's glow. The "Vesuvian face" perhaps means that God is the potent soul of nature (to be

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discussed in Part Three). The smile of nature, then, shows the pleasure of God.

That the Orphic poet and Master-Owner spend the night together indicates their intimacy, even their marriage. However, now the Gun-poet is the strong one who takes charge and guards her Master's "Head," reminding one of the first Master letter in which Daisy writes because she is "stronger" than the ailing Master. The Gun-poet continues to be the strong member of the pair, killing with the power of words the Master's foes with a "Yellow Eye," suggesting both the blazing Gun's muzzle and the poet's "prejudiced" eye (Webster). "Emphatic Thumb," too, applies both to poet and Gun, the butt of the latter and the thumbs down of the former. That she kills the Master's foes suggests once more that she is in his service and therefore writes poetry for his "Sake" as in P-462.

The final stanza is particularly difficult, stressing the paradoxical separateness yet interdependence of the Gun-poet and Master-Owner (cf. P-1721). In the first line, the persona suggests that she as person may outlive the Master, her divine poetic inspiration. In the second line, she asserts that the poetic gift or poetry will live at least for someone beyond her single mortal life, reminding one of the relationship between Prospero and Ariel.[42] In the third line, she reaffirms her power to kill in the sense of capturing in language. The Gun-poet has such power "Without the power to die," probably a reference to the human soul of the Gun-poet which is immortal,

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"that Being -- impotent to end -- / When once it has begun --" (P-565).

The Loaded Gun poem, then, is about the Gun-poet's earthly marriage to poetry and Jesus. The Gun is the Orphic poet, the "warbling Teller" of P-1545, who speaks for Jesus and poetry, the Master-Owner of her earthly and heavenly life. Poetry is once more the "Word made Flesh" for it is the divine incarnated, the result of a collaboration between the human poet and the divine Master. The poem is about the poet's divine poetic gift, its ownership of her life, and herself as devotional poet.

* * * * * * * * * *

The Master letters (187, 233, and 248) are thought to have been written in 1858, 1861, and 1862, the Master poems from 1859 to 1863. These years are particularly important because during this time ED had begun to take herself seriously as poet and to dedicate herself wholeheartedly to her vocation. In 1858, she started to assemble the fascicles, and her subsequent productivity was prodigious; in 1862 alone she is believed to have written 366 poems.[43] The correlation of probable dates of composition of poems and letters suggests that there are other similarities between them as well. And, indeed, a reading of the letters in context of the poems reveals that they are often strikingly alike in language and image as

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well as in the use of the term, "Master." In fact, it is probable that the letters, like the poems, are addressed to Jesus and to poetry, her earthly and heavenly Master. Since all were written during the early productive period, such an interpretation should not be surprising.

Certainly, "Master" and its synonyms are terms ED uses for ordinary mortals as well. As noted before, she describes B. F. Newton as her "Preceptor." Sometimes, too, she refers to T. W. Higginson as "Master," herself as his "Scholar" (e.g., L-381 and 458). However, it must be noted that in both instances ED uses the terms to refer to men who were of some importance to her poetic development.[44] Therefore, as in the Master poems and letters, her earthly masters have to do with poetry. In her secular use of the term, she seems once more, through pun, to fuse the finite and infinite as she does, for example, in her use of "immortality" to mean both poetic immortality and that of the soul. Higginson and Newton as Master and Preceptor, then, are merely earthly versions of her heavenly Master.

In considering the Master letters, it is important to note that in many ways they resemble ED's poems rather than her letters to particular people and therefore are probably literary rather than personal.[45] The projected persona in all three is Daisy, Jesus' follower in many of the Jesus poems; her identity is implied in the first letter and specifically stated in the second and third. The language is also like that of the poems, for it is enormously compressed and invites

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a metaphorical reading. The form of the letters, too, might be that of the dramatic monologue she frequently uses in poems, for they are but one side of an ongoing dialogue between Daisy and Master. Like some of the poems, too, the tone of the letters is one of despair; obviously, Daisy is experiencing a dark night of the soul.

The dark night of the soul is, of course, a recurring trope in the devotional tradition. Even the Psalmist of the Old Testament sometimes laments God's absence: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more?" (Psalms lxxvii.7). The Temple also includes poems in which Herbert expresses anguish at God's silence:

When my Devotions could not pierce
Thy silent eares;
Then was my heart broken, as was my verse:
My breast was full of fears
And disorder:

My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,
Did fly asunder:
Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
Some to the warres and thunder
Of alarms.

As good go any where, they say,
As to benumme
Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
Come, Come, my God, O Come,
But no hearing.

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
To crie to thee,
And then not heare it crying! all day long
My heart was in my knee,
But no hearing.

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
Untun'd, unstrung:
My feeble spirit, unable to look right,
Like a nipt blossome, hung
Discontented.

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O cheer and tune my heartlesse breast,
Deferre no time;
That so they favours granting my request,
They and my minde may chime,
And mend my rime.

In "The Deniall," as in the Master letters, loss of contact with Deity means loss of poetry as well: Herbert's "verse" is "broken" as well as his heart. Only renewed communication with Deity can comfort him and "mend" his "rime." Herbert stresses the disharmony between his soul and God in the unrhymed final line of each stanza but the last; ED probably expresses this disharmony in the prose form of the Master letters. Her venture into prose is the result of her loss of Jesus and therefore of poetry.

In other poems, Herbert, like ED in the first Master letter, speaks of his loss of Jesus in terms of illness, which is not surprising since in the devotional tradition the sick soul is often metaphor for the absence of God:

With sick and famisht eyes,
With doubling knees and weary bones
To thee my cries,
To thee my grones,
To thee my sighs, my tears ascend . . .

("Longing")

Come Lord, my head doth burn, my heart is sick . . .

("Home")

In his despairing poems, Herbert, like ED, sometimes addresses Deity as the beloved:

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. . . My Love, my sweetnesse, heare!
("Longing")

Whither, O, whither art thou fled,
My Lord, my Love?
("The Search")

Although Herbert in these poems does not address Jesus as "Master," in others he does. In fact, "The Odour. 2 Cor. ii. 15" is a meditation on the sweetness of the name: Herbert begins, "How sweetly doth My Master sound! My Master!" and goes on to address Jesus and to long for his love.[46]

The Master letters must be read in context of the devotional tradition of the dark night of the soul, especially as it is expressed by Herbert. Also, they must be read in light of the Jesus cluster, particularly of the seven Master poems. Although such a reading does not unravel all the puzzling language and images of the letters, it does clarify a number of passages. It also indicates that the Master letters were not written to an earthly married lover who spurned her as is often thought, but rather to Jesus and poetry, the Master-Owner of her life.[47] The letters are psalmodic rather than confessional.

The first Master letter probably was written in 1858, the year ED began to put together the fascicles. It begins with a direct address to "Master," telling him that she is ill, but even more concerned that he is. Quite probably their sickness, like Herbert's, is a metaphor for the loss of contact

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between them, for she concludes the letter by urging him to tell her as soon as he is well. That he has at some time "spoke[n] again" suggests that this is but one segment of an ongoing correspondence or dialogue between them. That she writes because her hand is "stronger" recalls the exchange of strength and weakness of the Loaded Gun poem: first the Master-Owner takes command of the Gun, then the Gun-poet guards the Master's head. In the letter, although the recipient is her Master, the speaker writes to him because she is for the present "stronger."

The season is spring, time of rebirth. She declares the world to be "God's house," suggesting ED's view of the natural world as a second Scripture from which one can learn of God, to be discussed in Part Three. Her reference to "Mr. Michael Angelo" indicates that this is a letter about the artist or poet. Her wish to paint like Michael Angelo for the Master recalls P-462 in which she tries to recreate the "Vision" for the Master's "dear. . . dangerous -- Sake." Her flowers probably are her poems as they so often are in the canon (e.g., P-945). Since the Master has to ask for their meaning, obviously they are imperfect, "disobedient," as she says; as in P-462, she is experiencing difficulty in translating her "Vision" into poetic form. She explains that "They said what the lips in the West, say, when the sun goes down, and so says the Dawn." "West" in her poetic vocabulary is sunset and death which in turn suggests rebirth as does

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"Dawn." Her poems, then, speak the same immortal message as nature (cf. P-441).

The speaker tells Master that today is the "Sabbath," that day outside time in which one experiences an equivalent of the eternal life. Again, both poetic and religious meanings are suggested for both poetry and religion have to do with the eternal. Sunday is also dedicated to Jesus' resurrection, the day in which "heavens gate stands ope," as Herbert says in "Sunday."[48] "Each Sabbath on the Sea" recalls her recurring image of this life as a sea as in P-1113: "To walk on seas requires cedar Feet." "Sailors" are, of course, life's pilgrims. The anticipated reunion with Master "on shore" resembles the heavenly marriage prefigured by the earthly one of so many nuptial poems and 461 to Master.

The speaker concludes her letter because the pain she feels from the Master's silence, the dark night of the soul she is experiencing, prohibits her from "talk[ing]" further. The closing paragraph might have been written in poetic form:

> How strong when weak to recollect
> And easy, quite, to love.

In these imabic tetrameter and trimeter lines, the speaker says that when she is weak or ill as she is at the time of writing the letter, it makes her strong to recollect previous contact with the Master. One is reminded of P-256 about the "Savior['s]" banishing her:

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If I'm lost -- now --
That I was found --
Shall still my transport be --
That once -- on me -- those Jasper Gates
Blazed open -- suddenly -- . . .

(First stanza)

In the letter, as in the poem, although the speaker is in despair because the Master's face is turned away, the memory of his favor is her one "transport" in the poem, her strength in the letter.

The second Master letter, 233, is far less restrained than the first and the most difficult of the three. The speaker begins with another reference to pain. The "Bird," her figure for poet or soul, has been wounded and is suffering. She identifies herself as Daisy, Christ's follower/flower, and tries to convince the Master of her anguish, suggesting that he has somehow doubted like "Thomas" of the Gospels who would not believe Christ's resurrection until he felt the wounds. Here, Daisy chides the Master as Jesus admonished Thomas in John xx.29. This somewhat irreverent turning the tables on Deity, imagining herself as Deity and Deity as the supplicant, is a comic device which appears often in the canon.[49] Her assertion that God made her, "built the heart in me," suggests the inevitablity of her poetic vocation, her marriage to poetry and Deity, which she herself did not "Will" (P-817). That he "built the heart in me" suggests, too, that God is the source of her poetic vocation. That the heart "Bye and bye . . . outgrew me" recalls a prayer-poem addressed to "Savior,"

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in which she brings her "imperial Heart" to him because it has grown too heavy for her (217).

Daisy then says that although she asked him for "'Redemption,'" "deliverance in a theological sense" (Webster), he "gave [her] something else" which "altered" her and which was so valuable that she would gladly give her life for it. The "something else" is probably her sacred poetic gift. According to Prof. Sewall, markings in the original manuscript indicate that ED wished the couplet which concludes the letter in the Johnson edition to be inserted here:[50]

> No Rose, yet felt myself a 'bloom,
> No Bird -- yet rode in Ether.

The couplet seems to be a metaphorical description of the transport felt by Daisy at her redemption-like gift. Since this event, she is "older," again suggesting that she has achieved a new state, having left behind the "little Lifetime" (P-631). However, her love for Master is the same.

Daisy's language next becomes erotic as she longs to share the Master's bed at night as the Gun-poet did the Master-Owner's. She yearns for the "Queen's place," recalling the royal images of the nuptial poems, especially of herself as queen of the poetic realm (631). She goes on in the language of sacred parody playfully to describe her love for the Master, interspersing religious and erotic metaphors: she wishes to be as close to him as the coat is to the body or as are the hearts of two lovers; she longs to "come nearer than

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presbyteries," defined by Webster as "A body of elders in the Christian church." However, such closeness is "forbidden."

She then addresses Master as teacher: "You make me say it over." Again, she protests the difficulty of expressing the "Vision" (P-462) in poetic form. She fears that "you laugh -- when I do not see," adding that "'Chillon' is not funny." "'Chillon'" probably means the prison of the body, her humanity, which interferes with her achieving precise expression. Her reproach is similar to that of Herbert in "Complaining" which is addressed to Jesus:

> . . . Put me not to shame,
> Because I am
> Thy clay that weeps, thy dust that calls.[51]

Her question to the Master about his Heart and its position might refer to the humanity of Jesus, so often stressed in the poems as in 225 in which she reminds him that he once had a human face like "our's." She further questions him about his humanity; does he too awaken in the night with misgivings? Does he, too, sing to himself, meaning write poetry, to alleviate his fears?

"These things" which "are [reverent] holy" perhaps refers to her sacred poems, the "tune" and "timbrel" of the previous paragraph. The timbrel is an ancient musical instrument mentioned more than once in the Book of Psalms (e.g., lxviii.25) and suggests the psalmodic nature of her poetry; one recalls that ED sometimes refers to her poems as psalms (e.g., P-261). Daisy next seems to compare the poems with traditional prayers such

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as the "[our] 'Father.'" "You say I do not tell you all" reminds one of P-462 addressed to Master in which the persona says she did her best "To tell the very last They said." Again, Daisy is sorry that she as Orphic poet is unable to recreate completely the "Vision" for her Master.

Her references to "Vesuvius" and "Etna" are obscure. However, often these words and other volcanic images suggest the inwardly potent soul, especially the poet's. In this paragraph and the next, Daisy seems to answer a direct question, the Master's request for her to tell him how he can help. She wonders what would become of Master "if I had the Beard on my cheek -- like you -- and you -- had Daisy's petals -- and you cared so for me." As usual, Master's masculinity and Daisy's femininity are stressed. Also, once more, she changes places with Deity as she often does. She assures him that if their roles were reversed, she would be with him always, presumably as "omnipresence" always followed the persona in P-1496. Her reference to once believing she could see the Master after she died recalls the heavenly meetings and marriages of the nuptial poems. Her having "died as fast as I could" suggests that at least sometimes the deaths in her poetry are metaphorical. One recalls the Christian trope of dying to this life in order to achieve sanctity.

Daisy assures the Master that she can wait for a meeting with him until both are old. She then asks what he would do if she "came 'in white.'" White here as in the poems and in ED's

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life recalls the traditional white worn by one receiving the sacraments of baptism, marriage, and sometimes holy orders, as well as the white of the burial shroud. In all these sacraments, white signifies the passage into a new and elevated state. Certainly, ED's wearing of white in her lifetime as well as her use of the word in poems suggests that she commemorates the transcendent event described in her sacramental poems, probably her elevation to the rank of sacred poet. White also is a symbol for purity, sanctity, and the eternal; in her life as in her poetry, white is figure for the purity and sanctity of her dedication to the eternal in the form of poetry, one of Deity's earthly manifestations. It is significant, too, that white is worn by the saved and the Bride of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation (vii.9-17 and xix.8). Daisy's question to the Master about going to him in white particularly resembles P-709 in which the persona rejects "Publication" as the "Auction of the Mind of Man," preferring to go "White . . . Unto the White Creator." In this poem, and probably in the letter as well, she suggests once more that she writes for the Master, who is source of the poems, rather than for earthly fame or recognition.

In the final paragraph of this letter, Daisy says, "you did'nt come to me 'in white,' nor ever told me why." That she reproaches the Master for not coming in white indicates that she longs for a union or marriage with him. Such a marriage recalls the nuptial poems and especially the Loaded Gun poem. Certainly, such a marriage can hardly be to an earthly lover,

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for it is lucicrous to suppose that she might wish either Wadsworth or Bowles to come to her in white. Rather, such a union is like that described in the Loaded Gun poem, between Gun-poet and Jesus as source of poetry, the Master-Owner of her life.

The question, "Have you the little chest to put the Alive -- in?" recalls the chest where she kept her poems, about which she asked of Higginson, are they "alive"? Do they breathe? (L-260). That she wishes to see the Master "in this world" and has the same wish "altered a little" for the "skies" or eternity suggests again that she wishes only marriage to poetry in this world and marriage to the source of poetry, Jesus, in the next. Both her request that the Master come to New England and the rejected "this summer" remind one of the summer wedding of the nuptial poems. The rejected "we both fear God" is odd, but perhaps means that the letter is addressed to the human and loving second person of the Trinity rather than to the first. Her desire that they might look into one another's faces again recalls the earthly marriage in the nuptial poems. Daisy's concluding words, "you did'nt come to me . . . nor ever told me why" echo almost exactly 462, the Orphic poem to Master in which she expresses the fear that she might "Offend the Vision -- and it flee -- / And They no more remember me -- Nor ever turn to tell me why." It seems, therefore, that the letter like the poem is an expression of despair at the loss of poetic inspiration or vision. Daisy is the Orphic poet

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who has lost contact with the sacred Muse. As in Herbert's "Deniall," loss of Jesus means loss of poetry.

The speaker in the third Master letter (248) is again Daisy. Here, as in the second, she specifically identifies herself. The tone, like that of the others, is one of intense despair. Once more, she fears that she has offended "it." This odd use of the neuter singular pronoun is that of P-462 where "it" refers to "Vision," poet, and doubt. Here "it" seems to refer to the vision and to Master. As in the poem, she fears that she has offended "it." Daisy says she "bends her smaller life to his," recalling the words of à Kempis in the Imitation: "Whoever desires to understand and take delight in the words of Christ must strive to conform his whole life to Him."[52] Her words also recall P-754 in which the Gun-poet lives only to serve the Master-Owner.

The awful parting with the Master is that so often described in the nuptial group. The Master as her heart's "Guest" is astonishingly like the soul-guest poems to be discussed in Part Four. Certainly, the devotional trope of the pure heart as dwelling for Christ is suggested in both letter and poems, a trope which appears frequently in the Imitation[53] and in the title and poems of Herbert's Temple.

Her fear that her "Backwoodsman ways" might have "teased ("Vexed, irritated, annoyed"--Webster) his finer nature" is still further evidence that she is not addressing Bowles or Wadsworth; can one possibly suppose that ED the Amherst woman

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might be so crude as to disgust either? Rather, the words are similar to those about God in 338:

> I know that He exists
> Somewhere -- in Silence --
> He has hid his rare life
> From our gross eyes. . . .

She is "gross" only as humanity is "awkward" (P-256) when compared to Deity. Her plea that the "preceptor . . . teach her majesty" again recalls the teacher-scholar relationship of Christ the Beloved and the Disciple in the Imitation as well as that of the second letter.

In my reading of the Master letters, Daisy's reference to being once borne on the Master's knee is not, as is sometimes thought, a recollection of a previous romantic encounter with Wadsworth, Bowles, or Lord.[54] Rather, it is still another reference in the language of sacred parody to the transcendent experience described as a marriage in the nuptial group. She pleads with the Master not to "banish" her permanently, which again reminds one of the banishment of P-256 and 462 when the Master or Savior's face is turned away. Daisy tells the Master that if he will "forgive -- sometime --" she "will not mind" her present punishment. She then adds that she "will awake in . . . your likeness," a phrase strikingly similar to Psalms xvii.15: ". . . I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Psalms xvii, like the Master letters, is a lament in which the Psalmist protests God's absence and longs for

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dawn, the time when he will be reunited with God. This biblical analogue is further convincing evidence of the psalmodic nature of the letters.

In the final paragraph, Daisy begs the Master to "open your life wide, and take me in forever," reminding one of Christ's saying to his Disciple in Book Three of the Imitation: " . . . you will be able to enter into Me in so far as you are prepared to forsake yourself."[55] That "nobody else will see me, but you" may suggest her dedication to the secluded life and her vocation as private rather than published poet. It also again implies that she writes for the Master rather than for earthly fame or recognition. The phrase reminds one, too, of the Imitation in which those seeking a holy life are repeatedly advised to avoid the company of others.[56] If he will take her into his life, Daisy assures him that even Heaven will be a disappointment by comparison. This hyperbolic compliment is similar to that in several poems (e.g., 1260 discussed on p. 110 above) and suggests that at least some of the poems in which she pays such a compliment to an earthly lover are about poetry rather than about a person. In the letter, at least, Daisy guesses that communion with poetry on earth might well be superior to the anticipated marriage with Jesus in heaven.

Although my reading of the mysterious Master letters does not explain all the meanings of this and other passages, such a reading in context of the Jesus cluster and especially of the

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nuptial and Master poems shows that there are striking similarities between poems and letters in image, language, subject, and form. There are also impressive parallels between the letters and conventional devotional tropes, particularly as expressed by the Old Testament Psalmist, à Kempis, and Herbert. It seems clear that the Master letters are literary rather than personal, psalmodic rather than confessional. Therefore, attempts to discover from them the man or men she might have loved or even the man who might have served as meditational focus are as fruitless as a search for historical information about Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy* or about Elizabeth Drury in *The Anniversary Poems*. If ED had such a man in mind, he was only an *imago Christi*. Like the Master and nuptial poems, the letters are about Jesus and poetry, her true lover and Master.

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V. ED's Christology

The impressive number of poems to and about Jesus provides convincing evidence that ED is a devotional poet, for certainly no secular poet would write so many Christocentric poems. Further, ED's portrait of Jesus, although similar to that of other devotional poets, is uniquely her own. He is a varied yet consistent figure: friend, teacher, type of the lives of subsequent pilgrims, ideal model for his followers to imitate, conqueror of death, willing sacrifice for his "little Fellowmen," sympathetic Deity to whom to pray, and, in the nuptial poems and often in the Master poems and letters, her soul's lover and husband as well as sacred Muse. In all his roles, however, Jesus is loving and lovable, the most human, approachable member of the Trinity, and, therefore, the Logos, intermediary between a distant God and human beings.

In the Jesus cluster, ED revitalizes the Gospels and Christian tradition, indicating not that they were sources of imagery for her, but rather that they were important enough to be reworked and retold in a fresh new way. ED contemporizes these stories, characters, and traditions by expressing them in her own unique voice, acting as Orphic poet for the Christian message. In the life of Christ poems, she is Jesus' "little 'John'" (P-497), a modern Gospel-writer who emphasizes the loving

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nature of Jesus and the modern significance of his life. In the prayer-poems addressed to him, ED creates original and varied prayers to replace the "vain repetitions" intoned by her contemporary "christians." In the sacramental group, ED fuses poetic with religious meanings: the poem is the private eucharist, Christ's earthly emblem; she herself is the sacred poet whose elevation to this rank is expressed in the baptism and nuptial poems and whose vocation is described in the holy orders and nuptial poems. In the Master poems and letters, too, poetry and Jesus are often equated. Master is both Jesus of the Gospels and source of poetry. It is in these Master poems and letters that ED speaks most explicitly of her role as Orphic poet who speaks for her divine Master. However, in all the Jesus cluster, poetry and religion are intrinsically intertwined, because for ED the creative act is a reverential one, the dedicated sacred poet one who speaks for Jesus.

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PART TWO: NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] The poems in which Jesus is named specifically are listed in R. P. Rosenbaum, A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964). Although one cannot always prove that less direct references are to Jesus, in preparing Part Two of this study I have considered more than 150 poems in which Jesus is named or strongly suggested. They are the following: 23, 62, 85, 96, 106, 117, 127, 130, 132, 140, 151, 153, 158, 171, 190, 193, 199, 203, 206, 217, 225, 233, 234, 236, 246, 249, 256, 271, 273, 275, 279, 286, 295, 300, 313, 315, 317, 322, 333, 336, 339, 341, 348, 356, 357, 364, 394, 401, 405, 415, 420, 432, 433, 456, 460, 461, 462, 463, 473, 487, 488, 491, 493, 497, 502, 506, 508, 527, 528, 538, 553, 555, 561, 567, 571, 573, 580, 587, 603, 616, 625, 626, 631, 640, 674, 698, 715, 740, 751, 754, 788, 817, 833, 861, 918, 961, 964, 968, 1028, 1033, 1055, 1065, 1072, 1096, 1111, 1113, 1121, 1123, 1166, 1180, 1207, 1237, 1241, 1258, 1260, 1262, 1274, 1305, 1321, 1347, 1375, 1411, 1432, 1433, 1439, 1452, 1467, 1487, 1491, 1492, 1496, 1522, 1530, 1539, 1543, 1545, 1556, 1560, 1567, 1574, 1586, 1587, 1589, 1612, 1620, 1651, 1661, 1664, 1672, 1681, 1721, 1725, 1735, 1736, 1737, 1743.

[2] ED's way of expecting the reader to supply the context for biblical references is described by Capps, p. 44.

[3] Others have noted that ED is the Orphic teller of the Bible: e.g., Anderson, p. 19; Kher, p. 36.

[4] A. C. Charity, Events and Their After-Life: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1966), p. 1 and passim, gives these two definitions of Christian typology.

[5] Ursula Brumm, "The Poetic Use of Religious Imagery," Typology and Early American Literature, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 204.

[6] See John Donne's "Breake of day," spoken by a woman, Poems of JD, p. 23, and Herbert's "The Sacrifice," spoken by Jesus, Works of GH, p. 26.

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[7] "The Sacrifice," Works of GH, p. 26.

[8] Tuve discusses the origins of Herbert's poem in the Holy Week Liturgy and in the medieval poetic genre of the Complaints of Christ, pp. 19-111.

[9] In John xx.29, Jesus chides Thomas for wishing concrete proof and calls "blessed" those who "have not seen, and yet have believed." Sir Thomas Browne declares himself "thankefull" not to have lived "in the dayes of miracles" and glad that he "never saw Christ nor his Disciples" for "then had my faith been thrust upon me. . . . " "Religio Medici," The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Norman Endicott (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 15.

[10] As suggested on p. 56, either or both these possibilities seem implicit in ED's cryptic letter to Mrs. Todd, "Or Figs of Thistles?"

[11] Mudge, p. 19.

[12] Imitation, p. 70; p. 121; Psalms cxix.141; "H. Baptisme (II)," Works of GH, p. 44.

[13] Imitation, p. 64.

[14] Freeman, p. 149 and passim.

[15] Martz, Poetry of Meditation, pp. 25-39, describes the three-fold Ignatian form for meditation.

[16] Sherwood, p. 161.

[17] Bergson, pp. 67-103.

[18] Miller, p. 162, stresses the importance of knowing what inspired an ED poem; Sherwood, p. 76, also believes such information to be "useful."

[19] Johnson, Letters, III, 944, 947, and 941.

[20] Miller, p. 391.

[21] Susan Gilbert Dickinson, unsigned obituary.

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[22] Although ED wrote some fine satirical poems, she more often looks inward, naming and analyzing elements of her own soul. Such inner exploration is discussed at length in Part Four.

[23] Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor," The Brothers Karamazov, The Constance Garnett Translation, revised by Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: Norton, 1976), pp. 227-245.

[24] Sister Mary James Power, In the Name of the Bee: the Significance of ED (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1944), pp. 78-79.

[25] cf. Browne, p. 21.

[26] All seven sacraments except penance appear in my discussion. However, although ED, unlike many devotional poets, is not notably penitent, the speaker of P-237 refers to herself as "unshriven," meaning unconfessed (Webster).

[27] Imitation, pp. 188,191.

[28] Imitation, p. 210.

[29] Power, pp. 57-59.

[30] Sherwood, pp. 149-150, interprets the nuptial poems as being about her 1862 Puritan conversion.

[31] "Maiden in the mor lay," Middle English Lyrics, eds. Maxwell Luria and Richard L. Hoffman (New York: Norton, 1974), pp. 128-129; "The Canonization," p. 14, "Holy Sonnet XIV," p. 328, The Poems of JD; C. S. Lewis, "Donne and Seventeenth Century Love Poetry," pp. 153-154, Clay Hunt, "Elegy 19: To His Mistress Going to Bed," pp. 186-201, John Donne's Poetry, ed. A. L. Clements (New York: Norton, 1966).

[32] Works of GH, p. 62; Imitation, p. 67.

[33] Charity, p. 202. See Mother Mary Anthony in 14 by Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas M. Davis (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1964), pp. 45-48, for a detailed explication of the poem and its religious imagery.

[34] Although fascicle copies are sometimes regarded as semi-final drafts, Miller, p. 26, is probably correct in

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believing them to be "in a finished state." Sometimes packet poems seem to be general versions, fair copies particular ones applicable to a single person or circumstance (e.g., P-446).

35 See probable dates for each in Johnson, Poems and Letters. Johnson stresses that dates for all undated poems and letters are conjectural.

36 ED refers to B. F. Newton as her "Preceptor" in L-153. The poem is "almost certainly" written for Newton, according to Higgins, p. 79.

37 Richard Crashaw, "The Weeper," Poems, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 79-83; George Herbert, "Marie Magdalene," Works of GH, p. 173. A lesser known seventeenth-century poet, Rowland Watkyns, wrote in "The Gardener" of the Magdalene's mistaking Jesus for the gardener on Easter morning. Watkyns stresses the irony of such a mistake, for Jesus is in fact "the paragon of gardeners"; see Stanley Stewart, The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and Image in Seventeenth Century Poetry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 116.

38 Bogan, p. 28.

39 Anderson, pp. 172-176.

40 Weisbuch, pp. 24-39.

41 Weisbuch, p. 182.

42 William Shakespeare, The Tempest, passim.

43 Johnson, Poems, III, 1201. Although the poems are believed to have been assembled during this year, it is possible that they were written previously.

44 ED did not, I think, merely use Higginson as "a foil for her wit," as Anderson, p. 6, and Miller, p. 86, believe. Sherwood, pp. 205-209, is more correct in his evaluation of her attitude toward him. Although readers of today might not find his critical theories as expressed, for example, in "Letter to a Young Contributor," The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. IX, April 1862, pp. 401-411, to be of value, it seems possible that she did. Whether or not she was actually infuenced by him, as Sherwood believes, is not clear.

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[45] Albert Gelpi, Tenth Muse, p. 257, believes the "diction and imagery" of the Master letters to be "so much an expression of the poetry that these letters are best read (as are many of Dickinson's letters) as prose poems or free verse. . . . "

[46] Works of GH, pp. 79, 148, 107, 148, 162, 174.

[47] See Sewall, Life, II, 512-531, for a detailed discussion of the Master letters as written to a human lover. See Gelpi, Tenth Muse, pp. 228-268, for the most convincing interpretation of the letters so far. Professor Gelpi argues that the Master as well as the beloved of the poems is ED's animus in the Jungian sense, with whom she desires union in order to achieve wholeness as person and poet. Such a psychological interpretation is closer to my own religious reading than the married lover theories; one of the many meanings for Jesus or Master in the canon might be that of her animus or masculine aspect.

[48] Works of GH, p. 75.

[49] Bergson, pp. 121-123.

[50] Sewall, Life, II, 514n.

[51] Works of GH, p. 143.

[52] Imitation, p. 27.

[53] See, for example, p. 67: "Christ will come to you and impart his consolations to you, if you prepare a worthy dwelling for Him in your heart."

[54] Sewall, Life, II, 527-528.

[55] Imitation, p. 174.

[56] See, for example, Imitation, p. 50: ". . . whoever is resolved to live an inward and spiritual life must, with Jesus, withdraw from the crowd."

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PART THREE

THE GOD CLUSTER: "distant -- stately Lover"

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ED, like Herbert, sometimes refers to her poems as hymns or psalms.[1] For example, she writes to the Norcross cousins in L-307, "I must close with a little hymn" and concludes with P-995. In L-674 to Higginson, she explains that she has "promised three Hymns to a charity, but without your approval could not give them." She includes her own P-1398 in L-515 to Samuel Bowles, calling it "the Psalmist's sonnet to God." Her projected speaker is likened to David in P-540, her poem a "psalm" in P-261. Since her tone in these poems and letters is serious rather than ironic, one concludes that, according to ED herself, the canon is psalmodic. Although many poems, like the Psalms of the Old Testament and the poems of Herbert, are meditations on specifically sacred subjects and/or colloquies with God, Jesus, her soul, and her readers, she seems to consider all to be sacred songs on divine subjects in honor of God (Webster's definition of "hymn" and "psalm"). Such a reading should alter considerably one's understanding of the canon. It also disputes the usual explanation of ED's use of hymn meter: rather than the ironic juxtaposition of religious form with secular or skeptical thought, her use of hymn meter is appropriate for poems synonymous with hymns and psalms.[2]

Although the entire canon is in this sense in honor of God, there are some poems which are specifically to and about

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the first person of the Trinity. These poems are particularly important in understanding ED's concept of God as distinct from Jesus and in defining her particular religious voice. There are at least 190 poems in which God is addressed or referred to specifically or by implication.[3] They include those expressing belief in his existence, love, and mercy as well as some expressing fear and doubt about the reality of the after-life; poems about death, a Christian experience for ED as for other devotional poets; poems about prayer to God as well as prayer-poems addressed to him; and poems about nature, the soul, and poetry as divine manifestations by which one can come to know something of a divinity who "dwells under seal" (662).

Professor Anderson's cluster method of reading the ED canon is particularly valid for these poems specifically to and about God because ED's portrait of God the Father is not only less clear than that of Jesus; it is also less consistent. Since God is portrayed in such diverse roles as "noted Clergyman" (324), "Old Neighbor" (623), "Vagabond from Genesis" (1569), "Mastiff" (1317), "Burglar! Banker -- Father!" (49), showman (595), poet (569), and "distant -- stately Lover" (357), one cannot isolate a single poem and interpret it as characteristic of ED's God. Unfortunately, all too often one or several of ED's poems based on Old Testament characters and stories are quoted as evidence that she is a non-believer or skeptic. However, these poems in which God is "Mastiff" or bully (597, 1317) are not typical of the entire cluster. Further,

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her sometimes scathing criticism seems to be of the "condemn[ing]" Old Testament "Tellers" rather than of God. Although Jesus of the New Testament is the Logos, a means of coming to know something of God, for ED the Old Testament is less important than nature, poetry, and the human soul in learning of the "Force illegible" (P-820).

A close reading of the God cluster reveals that for ED he shines forth in all his creation. The "Atheist" is one who is blind to these divine manifestations, living only for the present moment while "Torrents of Eternity" swirl about his feet, even threatening to overwhelm him (1380). Although she sometimes expresses doubt, particularly about the truth of the after-life (338), such poems are often over-emphasized. They must be read in context of the many others in which she expresses faith and belief; those in which she portrays death as going to God; and those in which the natural world, poetry, and the soul provide ways of learning of God's existence and love.

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I. Poems of Belief and Doubt

It is misleading to describe ED as both believer and skeptic, implying that she is so in equal proportions, for although she sometimes expresses doubt, she is more consistently a believer.[4] Probably the word "skeptic" is not even an appropriate one for the poet, at least as it is defined by Webster; "a person who doubts the existence and perfections of God, or the truth of revelation; one who disbelieves the divine original [sic] of the Christian religion." As Sue pointed out in the obituary and as ED's own writings confirm, she had "no creed, no formulated Faith, hardly [knew] the names of dogmas." Therefore, she did doubt the validity of nineteenth-century Christian dogma and church practices, which is probably why she stopped going to church before she was thirty. However, although ED sometimes doubts that she will achieve immortality, she does not doubt God's existence. Nor does she doubt the truth of Christ's revelation, although she does sometimes question the validity of some Old Testament stories. Above all, ED is not skeptical about "the divine original of the Christian religion." Although critical of contemporary "christians," the loving portrait of Jesus and the Christocentric nature of so many of the poems disprove that she was a skeptic in this sense. Rather than believer and skeptic,

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then, ED might better be described as a believer who sometimes suffers from doubt as have many other religious poets and thinkers.

A penciled worksheet draft reveals ED to be believer rather than skeptic:

> How much the present moment means
> To those who've nothing more --
> The Fop -- the Carp -- the Atheist --
> Stake an entire store
> Upon a Moment's shallow Rim
> While their commuted Feet
> The Torrents of Eternity
> Do all but inundate --
> (1380)

"Atheist" is defined by Webster as one who "disbelieves the existence of God." Obviously, the speaker has scathing contempt for such a disbeliever, classifying him with the "Fop" and "Carp." The poem is visual, even emblematic, in its vivid portrait of the three who ignorantly live the dry-land life as the "Torrents" of the eternal lap about their feet and threaten to sweep over them. One of the meanings for "commute" is "atone," according to Webster, suggesting that although they are oblivious to their blessed state, even these three have been saved by Jesus. The speaker's scorn for the fop, carp, and atheist is unusual for ED, for more often she seems to follow Jesus' advice, stressed by à Kempis in <u>The Imitation</u>: "Judge yourself, and beware of passing judgment on others."[5] However, although her poem seems to violate these words, it might almost be a variation on Christ's words to his Disciple

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in Book Three of The Imitation:

> . . . how short-lived and false, how disorderly and base are all these pleasures! Yet so besotted and blind are such persons that, like dumb beasts, they bring death to their souls for the trivial enjoyments of this corruptible life![6]

ED in this poem is hardly a skeptic of non-believer; rather, like à Kempis, she is highly critical of those who are dedicated to the here and now, including the ignorant atheist.

Among other poems in which ED voices belief in God and unwavering faith in his constancy and love is 1599:

> Though the great Waters sleep,
> That they are still the Deep,
> We cannot doubt --
> No vacillating God
> Ignited this Abode
> To put it out --

One of ED's many elegies, this late poem exists in five copies, one sent as elegy for Judge Lord, another sent to Sue in memory of Samuel Bowles (1599n). As in the previous poem, "Waters" suggests eternity and here that state entered by the soul after death. The word also provides an analogy in nature which proves the immortality of the soul: just as sleeping waters are still waters, so the sleeping or dead person is yet a living soul. ED unequivocally voices belief that the creator did not "Ignite[d]" the world or human beings only to put them out.

Other poems expressing firm belief in God's existence include 1052:

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I never saw a Moor --
I never saw the Sea --
Yet know I how the Heather looks
And what a Billow be.

I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the Checks were given --

ED again uses an analogy from nature to express her belief in the existence of God: just as "I" knows what the "Moor" and the "Sea" are like although she has never seen them, she knows of God's existence as surely as if she had in her hand the railroad tickets to Heaven. Poem 1163 is still another statement of belief, this time in the purpose inherent in God's world:

God made no act without a cause,
Nor heart without an aim,
Our inference is premature,
Our premises to blame.

Similarly, she expresses faith in God's mercy:

Not what We did, shall be the test
When Act and Will are done
But what Our Lord infers We would
Had we diviner been --
(823)

Here as elsewhere ED acknowledges the fallibility and even sinfulness of human beings. Although she is not notably penitent as are some devotional poets, she does not ignore human imperfection. Another significant aspect of the poem is that God has access to the inner workings of the individual mind or soul and knows its intentions, a concept which appears in other poems as well (e.g., 1216). Certainly, all the above poems are

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expressions of belief in God's perfection and love.

These poems of belief, like so many seventeenth-century devotional poems, are both meditations on God and sermons of comfort to readers. Number 871, too, is both a meditation on Revelation xxi.23 and a message addressed directly to the reader:

> The Sun and Moon must make their haste --
> The Stars express around
> For in the Zones of Paradise
> The Lord alone is burned --
>
> His Eye, it is the East and West --
> The North and South when He
> Do concentrate His Countenance
> Like Glow Worms, flee away --
>
> Oh Poor and Far --
> Oh Hindered Eye
> That hunted for the Day --
> The Lord a Candle entertains
> Entirely for Thee --

As usual, the biblical analogue is less immediate and dramatic than ED's variation:

> And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb _is_ the light thereof.

In the scriptural version, both God and the Lamb provide the only light necessary for the holy city. In the poem, however, since the "Lord" is described in terms of power rather than of humanity, especially in the second stanza, "Lord" seems to mean the first person of the Trinity rather than the second. The "East" and "West" of the second stanza are vividly described as

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God's "Eye[s]." Since East and West are sunrise and sunset, death and resurrection in the ED poetic vocabulary, it is at death that one meets God, a recurring concept in the ED canon. This ultimately significant encounter causes the "North" and "South" of human life in the finite world (cf. P-631) to be unimportant, "Glow Worms" in relation to the sun. In the final stanza, the speaker addresses the reader directly and perhaps herself as well: the obstructed vision of this world will be lighted for "Thee" by the Lord's "Candle." Interestingly, "Candle" is defined by Webster not only as the common one of wax and wick, but also as "the candle of the Lord, . . . divine favor and blessing." Here as elsewhere, ED assures the reader and perhaps herself as well of God's special concern for each individual; he can "summon every face / On his Repealless -- List" (P-409).

Another poem expressing God's regard for each soul is 548:

> Death is potential to that Man
> Who dies -- and to his friend --
> Beyond that -- unconspicuous
> To Anyone but God --
>
> Of these Two -- God remembers
> The longest -- for the friend --
> Is integral -- and therefore
> Itself dissolved -- of God --

"Potential" is defined by Webster as "powerful, efficacious." Only he who dies, his friend, and God are deeply affected by a particular death. God remembers longer, however, because the friend too is "integral" (Webster--"a whole"), therefore an

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individual), and his finite life, "Itself," will eventually be "dissolved --of God." Although here and elsewhere he is responsible for the existence of death in his creation, God is eternally concerned with the individual life.

In this and the other poems discussed so far, ED expresses belief in the existence of a distant but loving and merciful Divinity. However, there are others in which she voices doubt and fear about the ultimate destiny of her soul. In 338, sublime trust is expressed in the first two stanzas, haunting doubt in the last two:

> I know that He exists.
> Somewhere -- in Silence --
> He has hid his rare life
> From our gross eyes.
>
> 'Tis an instant's play.
> 'Tis a fond Ambush --
> Just to make Bliss
> Earn her own surprise!
>
> 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 first and second halves of the poem might almost be spoken by two distinct personae. However, the poem is better read as a single persona's thought process as her faith is assaulted by doubt. She begins by uttering firm, confident belief in a God who exists but is silent. In Stanza 2, the

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speaker's thoughts continue: God's silence is only a game or joke so that the glorious surprise after this life will be heightened. In the third stanza, doubt overtakes her. She images what it would be like if God's silence continues into eternity. Surrealistically, her laugh at God's little joke congeals into the grin of the death's head: her "glee -- glaze[s]," her eyes become those of a corpse and nothing more. In the final stanza, she concludes that if this were the outcome, if she will not meet God after death, then his silence in this life would have been a cruel practical joke. This stanza recalls Sue's note to the poet in their exchange concerning P-216, "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers": "Did it ever occur to you that is all there is here after all --" (L-238). However, although the poet, like other religious figures expresses doubts, this poem if read in context of those of belief is hardly proof of her skepticism. Rather, it suggests the way in which doubts creep into the mind of a believer. One recalls Christ's words to the Disciple in Book Four of The Imitation: ". . . the Devil does not tempt unbelievers" with doubt, for they "are already his own."[7] It should be noted, too, that the poet does not question the existence of God, but rather the existence of the after-life, at least for herself.

In 1551, ED again voices doubt about the after-life:

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Those -- dying then,
Knew where they went --
They went to God's Right Hand --
That Hand is amputated now
And God cannot be found --

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

Once more, doubt is expressed in baroque terms: "God's Right Hand," reserved for the saved at the Judgment (Matthew xv.33), is rather gruesomely "amputated." Although modern in its expression of pain at the loss of certain belief in heaven and of a longing for earlier, simpler days, the poem also recalls Donne's, "And new Philosophy calls all in doubt."[8] Again, ED is hardly the first religious poet to suffer from doubt. In the second stanza, the speaker reflects that if there is no God to observe and judge one's actions, human life loses its significance. Obviously, the ideal life is that lived in the presence of Deity (cf. P-1496). Her concluding two lines provide a grimly ironic solution: better a false belief than no belief.

To deny ED's doubt in these two poems would be mistaken. However, to describe her as equally believing and skeptical is also incorrect, for it must be remembered that ED herself refers to her poems as hymns and that more often she voices firm belief. Rather than being equally skeptical and believing, then, ED sometimes doubts as have other religious figures and poets. Doubt is a "Codicil" or "supplement" (Webster) to her belief

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rather than an equally important attitude (P-1012).

Number 820 is a more representative poem about God as he is seen in all the events of this world:

> All Circumstances are the Frame
> In which His Face is set --
> All Latitudes exist for His
> Sufficient Continent --
>
> The Light His Action, and the Dark
> The Leisure of His Will --
> In Him Existence serve or set
> A Force illegible.

The first two lines present a startling near-visual image. The poem is emblematic in a baroque sense: its hieroglyph might be a frame decorated with various worldly and natural objects, containing, however, no picture or at best an "illegible" one. It is important in reading the poem to keep in mind the emblem of "Frame" and "Face" because although it is not mentioned specifically again, it is the controlling figure throughout: As "All Circumstances . . . Frame . . . His Face," so "All Latitudes" frame or contain him; "Light" frames or contains "His Action," "Dark," his "Leisure." Finally, all "Existence" frames or contains, works for or provides the "set[ting]" for his mighty "Force" which is, ultimately, "illegible."

One's delight in the visual conceit is enhanced by witty language and play on words. "Circumstance" is defined by Webster as "Literally that which stands around. . . . " The word, then, is a pun, for a picture frame is that which "stands around" a picture. Similarly, "Latitude" is defined both as

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"breadth" and "In geography the distance of any place on the globe north or south of the equator"; "Continent" as "That which contains anything" as well as "In geography a great extent of land." The sense of the two lines, then, is that the whole breadth of the world exists only in order to be sufficient to contain God and to frame his face. The geographical meanings for the two words underscore the world-wide or global application of the face-frame image and increase the visual impact of the poem. In the final two lines, the speaker concludes that all "Existence" either "serves" or is a "set[ting]" for his "Force" which is finally, alas, unknowable. The similarity between "Face" and "Force" suggests that although we cannot see God's visage, we can feel his power and in this way know he exists. As in P-1380, the manifestations of the eternal are all-pervasive. We have but to look around us to find proof of his existence; as à Kempis says in The Imitation, "all things tell of him."[9]

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II. Death as a Christian Experience

Many reasons have been given for the preponderance of poems about death in the ED canon: she lived next to a cemetery; one witnessed death more often and more immediately in the nineteenth century; hers was a morbid personality. However, if ED is considered as a devotional poet, it is not surprising that she writes frequently of death, for death is a central focus of religion; the concerns of the devotional poet are therefore eschatological. A reading of the group in which ED specifically links God with death reveals that although she assumes many attitudes toward death and projects various personae who present diverse perspectives on the subject, death is always going to God.

However, ED sometimes wonders if the infinite life with God can equal the finite life on this earth:

> God is indeed a jealous God --
> He cannot bear to see
> That we had rather not with Him
> But with each other play.
> (1719)

In other poems, ED projects the opposing view:

> In thy long Paradise of Light
> No moment will there be
> When I shall long for Earthly Play
> And mortal Company --
> (1145)

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The debate between the joys of this life and the next seems never to have been resolved, for one or the other view appears often in the canon. Obviously, reading one of these poems out of context of the others gives a false impression of ED's views, a good instance of the validity of the cluster method.

In other poems specifically linking God with death, ED looks forward to death, for it means she will at last see God:

> The Stimulus, beyond the Grave
> His Countenance to see
> Supports me like imperial Drams
> Afforded Day by Day.
> (1001)

The speaker's curiosity is more specifically and playfully expressed in 1689:

> The look of thee, what is it like
> Hast thou a hand or Foot
> Or Mansion of Identity
> And what is thy Pursuit
>
> Thy fellows are they realms or Themes
> Hast thou Delight or Fear
> Or Longing -- and is that for us
> Or values more severe --
>
> Let change transfuse all other Traits
> Enact all other Blame
> But deign this least certificate
> That thou shalt be the same --

Although God is not named in either poem, obviously he is the subject of the first and directly addressed in the second, in which she asks many somewhat irreverent questions as to his appearance and concerns. She is interested in the degree to which he possesses human characteristics and especially curious

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about his "Longing[s]": are they "for us" human beings or for more serious matters? Presumably, her questions will be answered at death when "Eternity" raises the "White Flag" of surrender to human curiosity (P-615). Death is the time when one at last meets God.

Still another attitude toward death is that it is much more ominous in anticipation than in reality:

> It's Coming -- the postponeless Creature --
> It gains the Block -- and now -- it gains the Door --
> Chooses it's latch, from all the other fastenings --
> Enters -- with a "You know Me -- Sir"?
>
> Simple Salute -- and Certain Recognition --
> Bold -- were it Enemy -- Brief -- were it friend --
> Dresses each House in Crape, and Icicle --
> And Carries one -- out of it -- to God --
>
> (390)

In the first three lines, death is a ghastly, surreal "Creature," moving inexorably toward one. The "o's" and "oo's" of these lines increase the ominous quality of the inevitable meeting with death. Surprisingly, once death arrives, he is quite civil. Further, although he is perhaps "Enemy" to those bereaved, dressing their houses in "Crape, and Icicle," he is "friend" to the dead person in that he "Carries one . . . to God." Similarly, death is personified and described as being like a servant who kindly makes possible one's entrance into heaven or eternity:

> Afraid! Of whom am I afraid?
> Not Death -- for who is He?
> The Porter of my Father's Lodge
> As much abasheth me!
>
> (608, first stanza)

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In 1701, death is once more a means of going to God, for only he has access to the grave:

> To their apartment deep
> No ribaldry may creep
> Untumbled this abode
> By any man but God --

This epigrammatic quatrain is baroque in its juxtaposition of the mundane words "apartment," "ribaldry," and "untumbled" with the solemnity of the grave and God. There is even the hint of the salacious and the raptus of sacred parody in the word "ribaldry" and in the suggestion that only God can tumble the grave. Again, however, death is a means of going to God.

Although in this and the other death poems discussed so far ED explores the meaning of death, sometimes playfully and irreverently, there is another group in which she protests the pain of losing one's loved ones through death. She refers to God as "that Bold Person" who has taken them (900). She describes herself as "a beggar / Before the door of God" because of death, concluding by calling God names: "Burglar!" and "Banker," but ultimately "Father" (49), reminding one of Herbert's "The Collar" in which he begins by defying God, but finally addresses him as "my Lord."[10] In 882's prayer closure, she straightforwardly addresses him:

> . . . Oh God
> Why give if Thou must take away
> The Loved?

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Similarly, ED juxtaposes the suffering imposed upon human beings by death with God's seeming indifference:

> It's easy to invent a Life --
> God does it -- every Day --
> Creation -- but the Gambol
> Of His Authority --
>
> It's easy to efface it --
> The thrifty Deity
> Could scarce afford Eternity
> To Spontaneity --
>
> The Perished Patterns murmur --
> But His Perturbless Plan
> Proceed -- inserting Here -- a Sun --
> There -- leaving out a Man --
>
> (724)

In a strongly ironic tone, the speaker seems to defend God. Obviously, however, she reproaches him for the pain of one's own death and of losing one's loved ones through death. She speaks of the ease with which he can "invent" and "efface" a life. All "Creation," after all, is but a game he plays in his spare time. In the second stanza, God is referred to as "thrifty," a virtue she frequently attributes to him but one not admired by the poet who favors "Idleness and Spring" to "Industry and Morals" (P-1522). In the final stanza, she juxtaposes the "murmurs" of the poor "Perished Patterns" with the "Perturbless Plan" of God, the alliteration emphasizing the tension between the two opposing wills. God's plan proceeds in an unruffled way as he casually adds and subtracts natural objects and creatures from his creation while the poor "Patterns" vainly murmur their pain and protest.

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Number 1624 is another ironic criticism of God's sublime indifference to human suffering at death:

> 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.

"Flower" and "Frost" are images from the natural world which appear often and with consistent meaning in the canon: the first suggests person, the second death. Once more, God's spirit of play in death is stressed. Nature does not alter an inch in the face of individual death. And God looks on approvingly--and indifferently.

Perhaps most interesting among the death poems are those in which ED meditates on her own death and on the existential position of human beings as they approach their inevitable ends. One recalls that the seventeenth-century poets were urged to reflect on death, especially their own, by the influential meditation books. À Kempis, too, declares "Blessed . . . the man who keeps the hour of his death always in mind. . . ."[11] "I heard a Fly buzz -- when I died" (465) seems almost a response to the advice of à Kempis. Further, it bears obvious similarities to such seventeenth-century poems as John Donne's vividly described death in <u>The Second Anniversarie</u>:

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> Thinke then, My soule, that death is but a Groome,
> Which brings a Taper to the outward roome,
> Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,
> For such approaches doth Heaven make in death.
> Thinke thy selfe laboring now with broken breath,
>
> . . .
>
> Thinke thee laid on thy death bed, loose and slacke
>
> . . .
>
> Thinke thy selfe parch'd with fevers violence
>
> . . .
>
> Thinke Satans Sergeants round about thee bee,
> And thinke that but for Legacies they thrust;
> Give one thy Pride, to'another give thy Lust:
> Give them those sinnes which they gave thee before,
>
> . . .
>
> Thinke thy frinds weeping round
>
> . . .
>
> Thinke that they shroud thee up,
>
> . . .
>
> Thinke that thy body rots . . . [12]

In ED's poem she projects a similar circumstance and tone:

> I heard a Fly buzz -- when I died --
> The Stillness in the Room
> Was like the Stillness in the Air --
> Between the Heaves of Storm --
>
> The Eyes around -- had wrung them dry --
> And Breaths were gathering firm
> For that last Onset -- when the King
> Be witnessed -- in the Room --
>
> I willed my Keepsakes -- Signed away
> What portion of me be
> Assignable -- and then it was
> There interposed a Fly --
>
> With Blue -- uncertain stumbling Buzz --
> Between the light -- and me --
> And then the Windows failed -- and then
> I could not see to see --

In each death scene, the poet imagines vividly, even gruesomely, his/her own death. Further, such similarities as weeping friends, the personification of death, and the willing of "Keepsakes"

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and "Legacies" are striking. In both poems, too, the final corruption of the body is stressed: Donne advises his soul to "Thinke that thy body rots"; similarly, ED's "Fly" signals the imminent decay of the body after death. Certainly, here ED is like Donne and other seventeeenth-century poets in vividly imagining her own death.

In other death poems, it seems possible that the figure of the theta is emblematically suggested:

> The Admirations -- and Contempts -- of time --
> Show justest -- through an Open Tomb --
> The Dying -- as it were a Hight
> Reorganizes Estimate
> And what We saw not
> We distinguish clear --
> And mostly -- see not
> What We saw before --
>
> 'Tis Compound Vision --
> Light -- enabling Light --
> The Finite -- furnished
> With the Infinite --
> Convex -- and Concave Witness --
> Back -- toward -- Time --
> And forward --
> Toward the God of Him --
>
> (906)

The theta is typical of the devotional tradition and an image she might have met in the writings of Sir Thomas Browne as well as in those of the seventeenth-century poets. It is figure for the way in which human life is born into time where the diameter bisects the circle on the left and then at death borne out of time into eternity where the line bisects the circle on the right:

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Sphere of God
Infinity

Birth X | X Death

Sphere of Human Life
Finity
Time
Thanatos

Subject of poem:
When one has
both convex vision
from outside finite
circle and concave
vision from within

The theta is composed of two perpendicular circles or spheres. One represents the thanatos, the "Finite" life of the soul or its "circumference" as ED calls it (to be discussed in Part Four). The other is the "Infinite" circle or sphere of God, for since she refers to God as "the Ultimate -- of Wheels" (633) and as possessing "Diameters" (802), it seems probable that ED's God too is circular or spherical. The definition of God as a "circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" is one she might have encountered in Browne as well as in Emerson and elsewhere. At birth and death, these two circles intersect.[13]

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If the theta is understood as its suggested hieroglyph, the meaning of 906 is clarified. The subject is the moment of death, one's rebirth back into eternity. At this time, one has "Compound Vision," that of both "Finite" and "Infinite" spheres. The hieroglyph further clarifies the mysterious "Convex -- and Concave Witness." "Convex" is defined by Webster as "Rising or swelling on the exterior surface into a spherical or round form; opposed to concave which expresses a round form of the interior surface." At the moment of death, then, one sees in a "Compound" manner; both convexly, from outside the finite circle, "Back -- toward Time," and concavely from within, "forward -- Toward the God of Him."

Another poem which might be headed by the hieroglyph of the theta is 615:

> Our journey had advanced --
> Our feet were almost come
> To that odd Fork in Being's Road --
> Eternity -- by Term --
>
> Our pace took sudden awe --
> Our feet -- reluctant -- led --
> Before -- were Cities -- but Between --
> The Forest of the Dead --
>
> Retreat -- was out of Hope --
> Behind -- a Sealed Route --
> Eternity's White Flag -- Before --
> And God -- at every Gate --

As in the previous poem, the first person plural suggests a multiple self, body and soul and/or a psyche broken into its component parts, both recurring ED themes. The action of the

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poem is dramatic, for events are described as they are in the process of taking place. In the first stanza, the persona progresses on the circle representing the finite life. The movement of "were almost come" slows with the stanza's final word, "Term," a pun meaning both "word" and "limit," especially of time, according to Webster. It is the end of her finite life, her soul's life in time.

The "Fork in Being's Road" is where time and eternity divide into two paths, where the finite and infinite circles meet. A similar idea is expressed in P-622: death is the point at which "Love that was -- and Love too best to be -- / Meet -- and the Junction be Eternity." "Junction," like "Fork," suggests the moment when the finite and infinite circles bisect one another.

The tone of the second stanza contrasts with that of the first. The speaker feels "sudden awe" so that her feet mechanically lead her "reluctant" self forward. "Awe," a recurring word in the ED canon, is defined by Webster as "reverential fear" and indicates the persona's feelings as she contemplates the "Cities" before her, presumably those of God and eternity, the holy city of Revelation. However, the "Forest of the Dead" lies between her and her ultimate destiny; here as elsewhere ED expresses dread of that time spent in the grave when one is neither in time nor in eternity.

In Stanza 3, the movement of the first stanza in which the persona "advanced," and the slower progress of the second

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in which her "reluctant" feet led her forward, stops altogether. She stands, looking behind her at the "Sealed Route" of her finite life, then forward where to her relief and joy she sees the "White Flags" of eternity and "God -- at every Gate." The poem ends in triumph with this variation on Revelation xxi.12, in which the holy city is described as having twelve gates "and at the gates twelve angels." ED's version, however, is rather more baroque than that of Revelation. Since an "angel" is God's messenger (Webster), ED translates the messengers into God himself, creating the odd visual image of many identical Gods peering from "every Gate."

Here "White" clearly suggests the eternal, one of the meanings of white in her poetry as in her life. She wore white because she had dedicated her life to the eternal rather than to the temporal, to God and poetry rather than to the pleasures of this world as had the "Fop -- the Carp -- the Atheist" of P-1380. Further, the "White Flag" is the sign of eternity's surrender at last to the earthly traveller who has longed to know the secrets of the after-life.

The poem which most clearly seems to suggest the figure of the theta is 802:

> Time feels so vast that were it not
> For an Eternity --
> I fear me this Circumference
> Engross my Finity --
>
> To His exclusion, who prepare
> By Processes of Size
> For the Stupendous Vision
> Of His Diameters

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The speaker finds the soul's sphere in this world, its "Circumference," the thanatos, so engrossing that she fears she might almost forget God and the infinite sphere. Here God is one who aids the soul to grow, increases its circumference, "By Processes of Size" for the final vision of "His Diameters." The alternate word for "Vision" is "Volume," defined by Webster as "book" and as "compass; a spherical body." God's circularity is stressed even more in the second version; however, in both death is the moment when the soul's circumference meets the sphere of God.

As in the other poems discussed in this section, death is once more going to God. Although ED portrays death in a number of ways, projecting various attitudes toward it, death is a Christian experience. In some poems ED reproaches God for the pain resulting from death; in others, she questions whether life with God will be as sublime as life in this world; in still others, she vividly imagines what it will be like to die. Always, however, death is going to God. All the many poems on death must be read in this context. All are meditations and comments on this central concern of religion.

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III. God and Uses of the Comic

In many of the God poems discussed so far, ED's tone is far from solemn. In others to and about God, the speaker's attitude is comic, sometimes even outrageously humorous. Although in the Jesus poems she frequently uses wit, especially pun, to explore meanings and to stress similarities between the Gospels and present times or between the finite and infinite worlds, she more often uses broad American humor in her treatment of God. The speaker in some is the dead-pan teller of the tall tale. In others, she is the child, a stock comic figure, perhaps suggested by the biblical admonition that one should become as a little child in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.[14] Further, she sometimes uses breathtakingly irreverent language to refer to Deity, often turning the tables on God as though they were equals or even as though she were he and he were a somewhat recalcitrant supplicant. Sometimes she is even bitterly satirical, describing him, for example, as a supercilious salesperson. ED's various comic poses provide still other vantage points from which to view God and, often, from which to criticize such unappealing traits as his silence and his character as portrayed in the Old Testament. It also suggests an intimacy with God; she does not hesitate to address him or speak of him in familiar, even highly critical terms.

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It must be remembered that (as discussed on pp. 19-20 above) the comic is compatible with Christian thought. Also, that comic irreverence loses its impact for the non-believer. Perhaps the best example of Christian comic inversion is the medieval Feast of Fools in which an Ass rather than a Mass was celebrated by an urchin rather than a priest; the priest in turn behaved as a ragamuffin; sausages were burned rather than incense; parishioners urinated into holy water founts. This shocking festival was held yearly by religious people in a religious age, only discontinued as the world became increasingly secular.[15] ED's sometimes audacious lampooning of God must be understood in such a context; it suggests her religious rather than irreligious nature.

In 116, she irreverently presumes to bring suit against God himself:

> I had some things that I called mine --
> And God, that he called his,
> Till, recently a rival Claim
> Disturbed these amities.
>
> The property, my garden,
> Which having sown with care,
> He claims the pretty acre,
> And sends a Bailiff there.
>
> The station of the parties
> Forbids publicity,
> But Justice is sublimer
> Than arms, or pedigree.
>
> I'll institute an "Action" --
> I'll vindicate the law --
> Jove! Choose your counsel --
> I retain "Shaw"!

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This speaker is the irreverent Yankee who seems unaware of the absurdity of her proposed suit. Obviously, a section of her garden has grown in a way unplanned by her, and she is challenging God on the matter. Her concluding line is a pun, for "Shaw" is both the gardener who worked as a day-laborer on her father's property (116n) and the thicket or grove (Webster) under dispute. The speaker "retain[s] Shaw" both in the sense that she hires him as "counsel" or gardener and that she is determined to keep possession of her garden.

Although humorous, its meaning, like that of other comic poems, is not necessarily less serious than that of more solemn ones. It is possible that the garden is metaphorically the speaker's soul, for the trope of garden as soul is common in the devotional tradition and suggested elsewhere in the ED canon (e.g., 631). Are God and she then arguing about the ownership of her soul as well as about a piece of property?

In other God poems, humorous effects are achieved when ED projects the child-persona. As noted, it seems possible that this pose was inspired by the biblical advice that one must be as a little child in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Certainly, it is one she assumes elsewhere in the God cluster (e.g., 61):

> Why -- do they shut Me out of Heaven?
> Did I sing -- too loud?
> But -- I can say a little "Minor"
> Timid as a Bird!

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Would'nt the Angels try me --
Just -- once -- more --
Just -- see -- if I troubled them --
But dont -- shut the door!

Oh, if I -- were the Gentleman
In the "White Robe" --
And they -- were the little Hand -- that knocked --
Could -- I -- forbid?
(248)

The speaker is the typical child who is being punished for something she does not quite understand and who is wheedling to be given another chance. We smile because the child, a recurring type in comedy, has the naive temerity to reproach God and his angels. The concluding paragraph is the classic comic device of inversion as described by Bergson.[16] Just as we laugh at the policeman who is jailed and the teacher who must stand in the corner wearing a dunce cap, we smile at the thought of the child-persona as playing God and God and his angels pleading for admission to heaven. And yet, although the tone of the poem is comic, the subject, banishment from heaven, is one she treats more solemnly elsewhere (e.g., P-256). Once more, the comic pose provides another means of stating a serious theme. It also is a way of addressing God in intimate, critical terms.

In poems based on the Old Testament, ED often uses humor both as a means of retelling solemn biblical tales and of criticizing the God portrayed by the "condemn[ing]" Old Testament Tellers (1545). In 597 (discussed on pp. 21-22 above), the persona is once more the irreverent Yankee, a frequent figure

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in American humor, who applies the rules of plain common sense to a consideration and evaluation of serious, even hallowed subjects. A similar poem is 1317, a response to the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis xxii):

> Abraham to kill him
> Was distinctly told --
> Isaac was an Urchin --
> Abraham was old --
>
> Not a hestitation --
> Abraham complied --
> Flattered by Obeisance
> Tyranny demurred --
>
> Isaac -- to his children
> Lived to tell the tale --
> Moral -- with a Mastiff
> Manners may prevail.

Here God is perhaps even less attractive than in the Moses poem. In the former he is a bully; in the latter he is "Tyranny," a "Mastiff" who must be flattered if one wishes to survive. Unfortunately, these two poems are all too often quoted as summarizing ED's attitude to God. However, this portrait of God is only one among many others. Further, it is probable that rather than satirizing Deity, ED criticizes the Old Testament version of his character. As always, the Old Testament God of power and vengeance is less to ED's taste than the New Testament God of love and mercy. One is reminded of Herbert's "Justice (II)" in which he contrasts the Old Testament God of justice with the loving and merciful God Jesus "presents."[17]

In 621, ED bitterly satirizes God's failure to answer

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her prayer:

> I asked no other thing --
> No other -- was denied --
> I offered Being -- for it --
> The Mighty Merchant sneered --
>
> Brazil? He twirled a Button --
> Without a glance my way --
> "But -- Madam -- is there nothing else --
> That We can show -- Today?"

The speaker asked only one thing, and that one thing was denied. She even offered in exchange her very existence. To her anguished plea, God merely "sneered," indifferently twirling a "Button," not even looking at the poor supplicant, his supposed customer. The poem is decidedly visual, really a caricature or "political" cartoon in which ED outrageously portrays God as a haughty "Merchant."

The final comic God poem to be considered is in an entirely different tone. Whereas the former is bitterly satirical, 1321 is playful. However, again the theme is a serious and recurring one, forgiveness:

> Elizabeth told Essex
> That she could not forgive
> The clemency of Deity
> However -- might survive --
> That secondary succor
> We trust that she partook
> When suing -- like her Essex
> For a reprieving Look --

A comic version of the Christian commandment to forgive one another if one wishes to be forgiven, the poem criticizes not

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God, but human failure to accept Jesus' new testament. Because Elizabeth refused mercy to Essex, she cannot be sure of receiving it from God. The poem is comic for a number of reasons. For one, the deflating of august persons is always amusing. Just as the reader delighted in the idea of God being called a bully, he/she enjoys having the great Queen Elizabeth cut down to size. Another comic device is the extreme compression of the poem. Still another is inversion: Elizabeth who showed no mercy as Queen finds herself in the role of Essex, pleading for mercy from a sovereign still mightier than herself.

This poem, as well as the others in which ED treats God and sacred subjects humorously, is decidedly irreverent. The speakers are sometimes shockingly familiar, addressing God or commenting on him as though they were equals. Sometimes ED satirically criticizes God's aloofness or his character as portrayed in the Old Testament. However, all suggest that ED is on intimate terms with God and that she can therefore criticize him as one friend might another. Also, all are in the Christian tradition of irreverence and comic inversion.

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IV. God and Prayer

In a letter of sympathy sent to one of the Norcross cousins at the death of her father, ED writes, "Let Emily sing for you because she cannot pray" and concludes with a meditation on death (L-278). Here she suggests that her poem is a substitute for conventional prayer. It even seems possible that ED considered many of her poems to be prayer-like "addresses to the Supreme Being" (Webster), for she often addresses him directly. However, although many poems might be considered in this sense to be prayers, there are some which are specifically about God and prayer. They include a few in the form of prayer and others in which she comments on prayer, laments unanswered prayer, and reflects on the comfort prayer brings.

In 437, she defines prayer:

> Prayer is the little implement
> Through which Men reach
> Where Presence -- is denied them.
> They fling their Speech
>
> By means of it -- in God's Ear --
> If then He hear --
> This sums the Apparatus
> Comprised in Prayer --

In several ways, this poem resembles George Herbert's "Prayer (I)" which is composed of various phrases describing prayer.[18]

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ED's poem, like Herbert's, is in the definition form. Also, both poets liken prayer to a mechanical device: one of Herbert's descriptive phrases is "Engine against th' Almighty"; similarly, ED defines prayer as an "implement" and an "Apparatus." A further way in which the poems resemble one another is in the surprisingly dynamic language used. Herbert's "Engine against th' Almighty" suggests that one besieges God with prayer. ED's language, too, is aggressive: one "fling[s]" one's prayer "in God's Ear." There is still another possible similarity between the two poems. Herbert concludes that prayer is "something understood," meaning that prayer is finally indefinable. A second meaning might be that God has "understood" the prayer or heard it. Such an interpretation would again link Herbert's poem with ED's, for according to her, unless God hears the prayer, the "Apparatus / Comprised in Prayer --" is not complete.

Although such resemblances of form, language, image, and thought might be coincidence, it seems possible that ED's poem is a response to Herbert's. One recalls that Sue owned an 1857 edition of Herbert's Poetical Works and that since the two were literary confidantes, ED probably read it. The definition form of both poems, the engine and implement conceits, the concept of prayer as a kind of assault on God, and perhaps the importance of God's hearing the prayer to its very definition give evidence of possible influence. Such evidence is only one of a number of similarities between the two which are cited

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throughout this study and which will be discussed more fully in Part Four.

It is significant that Herbert's "something understood," if it does mean God's hearing the prayer, does not doubt that God hears. ED, on the other hand, uses the conditional: _If_ God hears, _then_ the "Apparatus" is complete. Although Herbert, too, sometimes laments losing contact with God, ED in some poems is indignantly critical of his exasperating silence:

> Of Course -- I prayed --
> And did God Care?
> He cared as much as on the Air
> A Bird -- had stamped her foot --
> And cried "Give Me" --
> My Reason -- Life --
> I had not had -- but for Yourself
> 'Twere better Charity
> To leave me in the Atom's Tomb --
> Merry, and Nought, and gay, and numb --
> Than this smart Misery.
> (376)

In the first five lines, the persona responds to an unknown other, perhaps another aspect of herself, who has asked if she has prayed. In the last six lines, she seems to address God directly, explaining the reason for her prayer. It was for the precious "Life" she would not have had in the first place if he had not given it to her. She then reproaches him: it would have been kinder to have left her in "the Atom's Tomb," probably a play on words for "Adam's Tomb," meaning the "Merry" but "numb" life she led before her new and elevated "Life." Having known the value of this new life, presumably her life

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as poet, she is miserable without it. This poem is like others in which she protests having been banished after having once received grace (e.g., 256). Probably all concern poetic inspiration.

An even bitterer poem about unanswered prayer is 476. Here not only is the prayer unanswered, but God and the saints and angels laugh in the supplicant's face for even believing Jesus' assurance that "'Whatsoever Ye shall ask -- / Itself be given you'" (John xiv.13). Humiliation is added to the persona's anguish at the unanswered prayer. She has been duped, swindled, and thereafter is no longer so naive as to believe that prayers are answered. Poem 1751 is also about the disappointment of unanswered prayer; however, the speaker is resigned rather than angry. It is significant that although the persona regrets God's silence, she still regards herself as his "Disciple."

Although in some poems God fails to answer prayer, there are others in which he responds. In 1152, a narrative version of the legend of William Tell, his prayer was heard, for Tell successfully avoids killing his son. In 623, too, the persona reflects on the comfort prayer provides:

> It was too late for Man --
> But early, yet, for God --
> Creation -- impotent to help --
> But Prayer -- remained -- Our Side --
>
> How excellent the Heaven --
> When Earth -- cannot be had --
> How hospitable -- then -- the face
> Of Our Old Neighbor -- God --

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The first two lines suggest that the poem is about the reaction of the speaker to her own imagined death or to the death of a loved one. The dying person is beyond man's help but has not yet reached God. Only "Prayer" remained as a solace to the speaker who remains on the finite side of the "Vail," a word ED often uses to refer to the barrier between the finite and the eternal. One is reminded of Vaughan's similar use of the word as in "Cock-crowing" which is addressed to God: "This veyle, I say, is all the cloke / And cloud which shadows thee from me."[19] In the second stanza, ED praises prayer as a kind of "Heaven" and the benevolent hospitality of God when "Earth -- cannot be had." Her reference to Deity as an "Old Neighbor" is in startling contrast to her portrait of him in P-476 as one who not only does not answer prayer, but laughs in the face of one who prays.

In 564, the speaker's prayer is once more answered:

My period had come for Prayer --
No other Art -- would do --
My Tactics missed a rudiment --
Creator -- Was it you?

God grows above -- so those who pray
Horizons -- must ascend --
And so I stepped upon the North
To see this Curious Friend --

His House was not -- no sign had He --
By Chimney -- nor by Door
Could I infer his Residence --
Vast Prairies of Air

Unbroken by a Settler --
Were all that I could see --
Infinitude -- Had'st Thou no Face
That I might look on Thee?

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The Silence condescended --
Creation stopped -- for Me --
But awed beyond my errand --
I worshipped -- did not "pray" --

This poem, like many others about prayer seems to be about poetry as well. Prayer is described as one of the "Art[s]." Also, "Tactics" is a word she uses elsewhere to speak of poetry (P-320). "Rudiment," too, might suggest poetry, for Webster's definition of the word includes examples having to do with language and art. That the "Creator" is the missing "rudiment" then suggests as she often does that God is a necessary participant in the creation of poetry. That "pray" in the last line is in quotation marks perhaps suggests, too, that the word means poetry as well.

Here prayer is a journey in search of "this Curious Friend." The poem is developed by means of a narrative in which language of the frontier is used. After making her prayer-journey, the speaker finds neither "House" nor "Chimney," only empty "Prairies" with not a "Settler." She then protests to "Infinitude" that "Thou [has] no Face / That I might look on Thee," reminding one of Moses' request that God show him his "glory" (Exodus xxxiii.18). In response, "The Silence condescended" and seemingly in some way showed his face, answered her prayer. So "awed" is the persona that her prayer becomes one of praise rather than of supplication. The poem seems to refer to a transcendent experience, quite possibly poetic inspiration.

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In addition to the above poems which define and comment on prayer, there are some in the form of prayer. It is not surprising that there are fewer prayer-poems to God than to Jesus, for ED's Jesus is, after all, the Logos, the human/divine mediator between God and humankind. The prayers to God are decidedly less personal than those to Jesus, and the speaker seems far less certain of a receptive ear. Number 1461 is an ironic prayer, addressed to God:

> "Heavenly Father" -- take to thee
> The supreme iniquity
> Fashioned by thy candid Hand
> In a moment contraband --
> Though to trust us -- seem to us
> More respectful -- "We are Dust" --
> We apologize to thee
> For thine own Duplicity --

In this poem, probably sent to Ned, the persona assumed is the usual gruff, humorous one in those sent to him. She irreverently points out to God that since he in fact created sin, he must take responsibility for human fallibility. She admits that we are only "Dust," concluding that when we are penitent we are indeed expressing regret for God's "Duplicity." Such an address to God is shocking until one remember's Herbert's "Judgment" in which he imagines that on that awful day he will respond to God's request for his "peculiar Booke" of life by thrusting " . . . a Testament into thy hand: / Let that be scand. / There thou shalt find, my faults are thine."[20] ED is by no means the first devotional poet to use a decidedly

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direct tone in addressing the Almighty.

Certainly, this prayer-poem is by no means representative of all those concerning prayers to God, for this group represents an unusually wide variety of attitudes toward him. He is sometimes a contemptuous mocker, at others an old neighbor. In some instances the persona reproaches God for unanswered prayer; in others she is grateful for the comfort prayer brings. As usual, reading one of the poems out of context of the others is misleading. Once more, the cluster method is appropriate for reading the ED canon.

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V. Nature as Second Scripture

Although ED's God is sometimes maddeningly silent and unresponsive to prayers, he always speaks through nature: "Omnipotence -- had not a Tongue -- / His lisp is Lightning --" (P-420). Further, God is the creator of nature. He is the "Merchant of the Picturesque" (P-1131), the "Showman" whose theatrical production is nature (P-628). Even the "little Ether Hood" of the dandelion is the "millinery supple / Of the sagacious God" (P-1501). For ED as for Sir Thomas Browne, then, nature is a second Scripture through which one can learn of God. ED is like Browne, too, in his belief that "The world was made to be inhabited by beasts but studied and contemplated by man: 'tis the debt of our reason wee owe unto God, and the homage we pay for not being beasts."[21] ED describes such "Apprehensions" ("contemplations"--Webster) of natural objects as "God's introductions -- / To be hallowed -- accordingly" (797). In the same poem, natural objects even prefigure the immortal life after death as does poetry in the nuptial group. Nature, then, is "the Maker's Girl" (P-873) and proves his existence: "The Star's Etruscan Argument / Substantiate a God --" (P-1528). Natural objects and creatures speak for God, prefigure heaven, and provide emblems for religious meditation.

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Even the lowliest of God's creatures are worthy of contemplation and inspire praise for their "adroit Creator":

> The Bat is dun, with wrinkled Wings --
> Like fallow Article --
> And not a song pervade his Lips --
> Or none perceptible.
>
> His small Umbrella quaintly halved
> Describing in the Air
> An Arc alike inscrutable
> Elate Philosopher.
>
> Deputed from what Firmament --
> Of what Astute Abode --
> Empowered with what Malignity
> Auspiciously withheld --
>
> To his adroit Creator
> Ascribe no less the praise --
> Beneficent, believe me,
> His Eccentricities --
> (1575)

After minutely capturing the essence of the bat's appearance, the speaker reflects on his origins. He is sent from some unknown "Firmament," a word meaning the heavens and used in Scripture, according to Webster. Further, "with what Malignity" he is "Empowered" is "Auspiciously withheld." Here and in other poems and letters ED expressed pleasure at the mystery of God's universe (L-586). She concludes that God must be praised even for this lowly animal, for even his "Eccentricites" are "Beneficent."

In 885, ED again acknowledges the significance of even the smallest of God's creatures:

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Our little Kinsmen -- after Rain
In plenty may be seen,
A Pink and Pulpy multitude
The tepid Ground upon.

A needless life, it seemed to me
Until a little Bird
As to a Hospitality
Advanced and breakfasted.

As I of He, so God of Me
I pondered, may have judged,
And left the little Angle Worm
With Modesties enlarged.

Like so many of her nature poems, this one is emblematic, the somewhat baroque hieroglyph a single little "Pink and Pulpy" angle worm or a "multitude" of them. The form is also that of many seventeenth-century devotional poems, the three-fold meditation in which memory is addressed, then understanding, then will, the three functions of the intellect corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity. The first stanza is the composition of place in which memory is addressed; one is visually presented with the scene for meditation, the worm or worms. "Kinsmen" suggests the brotherhood not only between human beings, but among all God's creatures, a relationship also assumed by the seventeenth-century devotional poets.[22] In Stanza 2, the understanding is addressed; the persona reflects that although she had always thought the worm an unnecessary creature, she discovers that "He" is in fact quite necessary for the bird's breakfast. In the third stanza, the will is addressed; the meaning of the little nature

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parable is summed up by means of her frequently used ratio: I : Worm=God : Me. Just as the speaker had thought the worm "needless," so God may have thought her unnecessary. However, she concludes by thinking more seriously of the little worm and hopes that God will think more seriously of her as well. Here again is her frequently expressed idea that one will be treated by God as one has treated the least of his creatures.

Other poems in which ED specifically portrays nature as a second Scripture in which one finds religious meanings include 932, in which the persona describes her attitude toward the stars as "reverential":

> My best Acquaintances are those
> With Whom I spoke no Word --
> The Stars that stated come to Town
> Esteemed Me never rude
> Although to their Celestial Call
> I failed to make reply --
> My constant -- reverential Face
> Sufficient Courtesy.

"Acquaintance" is defined by Webster as "A person or persons well known; usually persons we have been accustomed to see and converse with, but not standing on the more intimate relation of <u>friendship</u>." Here ED describes phenomena of nature as well known, yet not so intimate as to be friends. As usual in the canon, the human being is part of nature, yet stands outside it. She is the observer, one who, like Browne, studies and contemplates the natural world; therefore, although the stars and by implication all nature "Call" on her, in return she can

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only gaze "reverential[ly]" upon them. Since "reverence" is a word most often used in a sacred sense, the speaker feels "veneration" or "awe" (Webster) before nature as a manifestation of Deity.

In 1672, ED once more describes her reverence for the stars and acknowledges them to be God's creations:

> Lightly stepped a yellow star
> To it's lofty place
> Loosed the Moon her silver hat
> From her lustral Face
> All of Evening softly lit
> As an Astral Hall
> Father I observed to Heaven
> You are punctual --

Like so many nature poems, this one is emblematic, the suggested hieroglyph a star and the moon. Further, ED personifies both as she often does natural creatures and objects. The scene is dramatically visual, almost like a theatrical production. In the concluding couplet, the speaker directly addresses the benevolent Father in Heaven who is responsible for the spectacular show: "Father . . . You are punctual." This punctuality of nature is elsewhere admired by the poet; that she gives credit to God for such punctuality once more indicates that for her nature is the work of God.

ED's God, then, is to be found in nature rather than in church:

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

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

God preaches, a noted Clergyman --
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last --
I'm going, all along.
(324)

Beginning with the first two lines, ED sets up a tension between "I" and they or "Some." Like Thoreau, she is a majority of one, a dissenter who keeps the Sabbath in her own way. As usual, her criticism is of "christians" and the institutionalized church, not of God or the religious sentiment. She divorces herself from those who "keep the Sabbath [hypocritically?] going to Church," who keep the Sabbath in (traditional) "Surplice," and who sit and listen to long and boring sermons. "I," on the other hand, stays "at Home," keeping the Sabbath in her garden with the birds as choristers, trees as cathedral dome, and God as the preacher of a brief sermon. Again, God preaches or speaks through the natural world.

As in all the nature poems just considered, a devotional meaning is explicit. However, these poems inform the entire nature group. Just as the poems in which death is portrayed specifically as a Christian experience illuminate the others about death, those in which nature is specifically a second Scripture affect the reading of all the nature poems. All, if read in light of those discussed, invite a metaphorical devotional reading. ED's nature poems are not merely descriptive, but rather hymns of joy and praise to God for his creation.

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VI. God and Poetry

Often in the canon, ED conflates God or Jesus with poetry. In the sacramental and Master groups, the poem is the private eucharist, a means of communing with Jesus; to be wed to poetry is to be wed to Jesus; Jesus is the source of poetic inspiration. Similarly in the God cluster, God is the divine "Artist" or "Poet[s]" (155, 569); the poetic experience is like seeing God (1247); God is the source of poetry and therefore the one to whom it belongs:

> Publication -- is the Auction
> Of the Mind of Man --
> Poverty -- be justifying
> For so foul a thing
>
> Possibly -- but We -- would rather
> From Our Garret go
> White -- Unto the White Creator --
> Than invest -- Our Snow --
>
> Thought belong to Him who gave it --
> Then -- to Him Who bear
> It's Corporeal illustration -- Sell
> The Royal Air --
>
> In the Parcel -- Be the Merchant
> Of the Heavenly Grace --
> But reduce no Human Spirit
> To Disgrace of Price --
>
> (709)

Publication is a degrading mercenary act, only "Possibly" (emphasis mine) justified to assuage "Poverty." Her firm initial

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sentence supports Sue's belief expressed in the obituary that ED never wished to publish. Although some have argued that she longed to, this poem certainly suggests the contrary as do many letters.[23] The speaker of 709 does not wish to publish and even explains why: poetic "Thought" comes from God and therefore belongs first to him and only second to the poet who clothes the sacred thought in words, gives it "Corporeal illustration."

That poetry is a gift from God and therefore should be dedicated to him is not an usual idea in the devotional tradition. Caedmon, for example, was not able to sing or to compose poetry until God miraculously appeared and bequeathed to him the poetic gift. After this transcendent experience, Caedmon devoted the rest of his life to singing of God's glory. Similarly, George Herbert in his "Dedication" to The Temple names God as both source of poetry and the one for whom it is written:

> Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
> Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
> And must return . . .[24]

ED, like Herbert, says that she writes poetry not for fame, but for the "White Creator" who gave the poetic gift and to whom it belongs. As in so many poems, she writes for "that dear -- distant -- dangerous -- Sake --" (462).

"White" describes the "Creator." It is also worn by the unpublished speaker. Further, the "Snow" which is emblem

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for her poetry is white. White, again, in ED's poetry as in her life, represents the eternal, God, and poetry. That both poet and Creator wear white suggests, too, the marriage between Deity and poet necessary for the creation of poetry, here "Snow." One is reminded of the second Master letter: "What would you do with me if I came 'in white?'" and ". . . you did'nt come to me 'in white,' nor ever told me why. . . . " One also is reminded of the partnership or marriage between Gun and Master of 754. In both poems and letter, a marriage between divine thought or vision and the human poet's word is necessary in order that great poetry may be written. Poetry is the "Word" of God "made Flesh" by the poet.

Since for ED God is the source of poetic thought as he is the creator of the natural universe, poetry is still another means of proving God's existence and love. God himself is a poet or artist; the poetic experience is like seeing God; to be a dedicated poet is to be wed to God, the poem the result of the union between sacred inspiration and human skill. Since God is the origin of ED's poems and the one for whom they are written, certainly it is not surprising that she speaks of them as hymns and psalms.

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VII. God and the Soul: The Paradise Within

The seventeenth-century meditation books, so influential to the devotional poets of that century, especially encouraged introspection because a seed of God was thought to be within each soul, a seed perhaps tarnished by the original sin of Adam and Eve, but able to be uncovered by arduous self-exploration. Looking within, therefore, was not a narcissistic act, but rather a religious exercise.[25] ED, like these poets and especially like Herbert, unflinchingly looks within, exhorting her readers to do the same: "Soto! Explore thyself!" (P-832). The results of the poet's relentless self-examination are the many poems in which she defines and meditates emblematically on the nature of the soul and on various states of mind. These poems, to be discussed in Part Four, are, then, religious in seventeenth-century terms as well as psychological in twentieth-century terms. In the group to be considered in this section, ED specifically suggests a close relationship between God and the soul: God is the "Maker" of the soul as he is of nature and poetry; he is the goal, "the Frontier," of the ever-expanding soul or self. To understand one's soul, then, is a means of coming to know something of God.

God and the brain are compared in 632:

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> The Brain -- is wider than the Sky --
> For -- put them side by side --
> The one the other will contain
> With ease -- and You -- beside --
>
> The Brain is deeper than the sea --
> For -- hold them -- Blue to Blue --
> The one the other will absorb --
> As Sponges -- Buckets -- do --
>
> The Brain is just the weight of God --
> For -- Heft them -- Pound for Pound --
> And they will differ -- if they do --
> As Syllable from Sound --

The poem is emblematic, again in a baroque sense; a clinical picture of the brain might be its hieroglyph, announcing that it is to be a meditation on this most complex of human organs. "Brain" in her Lexicon is scientifically defined, but other definitions include "understanding" and "imagination." In the first stanza, the width of the brain is compared to the sky and found to be wider, for it can contain the sky and "You -- beside." In the second, the depth of the brain is compared to the sea and found to be deeper; the two are similar, yet the brain is greater because it can absorb the sea like a sponge, a delightful visual pun since the brain looks like the marine animal. The third stanza compares God with the brain. Here the two are described as being equal in weight. If one "Hefts" the mind, then God, "they will differ -- _if_ they do" (emphasis mine) as "Syllable" differs from "Sound." The reader's first reaction is that syllable and sound are the same; therefore, God and the mind are too. However, upon more careful reflection, it becomes apparent that sound is different from syllable. The

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first is defined by Webster as "Noise; report; the object of hearing; that which strikes the ear." "Sound" can be human, or it can be other than human. "Syllable," however, is distinctly human, having to do specifically with language: "A letter, or a combination of letters, uttered together." The implication is that the brain is the weight of God, but different from him, for the brain transforms God's sounds, poetic inspiration, into words. One is reminded of the previous poem in which the speaker gives "Corporeal illustration," language and form, to the "Thought" or inspiration which comes from God. One is reminded, too, of the Loaded Gun poem: the Master-Owner speaks through the Gun-poet as here God speaks through the poet. In all three, God's "Sound" or "Thought" becomes "Syllable" or poetry through the alembic of the human mind.

Another poem in which the relationship between God and the soul is explored is 483:

> A Solemn thing within the Soul
> To feel itself get ripe --
> And golden hang -- while farther up --
> The Maker's Ladders stop
> And in the Orchard far below --
> You hear a Being -- drop --
>
> A Wonderful -- to feel the Sun
> Still toiling at the Cheek
> You thought was finished --
> Cool of eye, and critical of Work --
> He shifts the stem -- a little --
> To give your Core -- a look --
>
> But solemnest -- to know
> Your chance in Harvest moves
> A little nearer -- Every Sun
> The Single -- to some lives.

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An emblem poem, like so many in the canon, the hieroglyph might be a luscious golden apple, or perhaps a tree bearing golden apples, complete with "Ladders" reaching into the farthest heights of the tree. However, this emblem poem is different from those discussed so far because the word "apple" is never mentioned. It is, therefore, a "riddle" poem, a common seventeenth-century form, in which the persona's developing soul by implication is likened to a ripening apple. The spherical shape of the apple is that of the soul in the ED canon, to be discussed in Part Four. That the soul-apple is golden suggests its great value. The "Ladders" extending into the tree are those of the "Maker," defined by Webster as "The Creator," meaning God. The third meaning is "poet." Once more, God is the poet or artist, here the creator of human souls as human souls create poems. The "Ladders" may suggest that of Plato's "Symposium," the ladder into the realm of pure being. Such a meaning is further implied by "You hear a Being -- drop." Whether or not Plato's ladder is suggested, certainly Jacob's leading to God and heaven is.[26]

There is probably a further religious meaning in the "Sun" who also works at perfecting the soul, for "Sun" suggests the traditional sun-son pun as it often does in the ED canon. The ripening of the soul, then, is a "Solemn" or sacred process, one that is ongoing as in P-1543, and one that leads to "Harvest." In defining "Harvest," Webster relates the term to the day of Judgment, a day ED looks forward to and puzzles over in many

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poems (e.g., 625). This poem, then, is another on the theme of her goal as poet and as person. Rather than the temporal goals of fame and the pleasures of this world, the goals of "the Fop -- the Carp -- the Atheist," she has chosen the eternal sacred goals of personal growth and poetry.

Not only is God the "Maker" of the soul, he is also author of its precious uniqueness. In L-457 to Higginson, ED describes each "Mind" as being "like a distinct Bird --." Similarly, Higginson reports her as saying that "there is always one thing to be grateful for -- that one is one's self and not someone else." In 442, she specifically names God as author of these marvelous differences:

> God made a little Gentian --
> It tried -- to be a Rose --
> And failed -- and all the Summer laughed --
> But just before the Snows
>
> There rose a Purple Creature --
> That ravished all the Hill --
> And Summer hid her Forehead --
> And Mockery -- was still --
>
> The Frosts were her condition --
> The Tyrian would not come
> Until the North -- invoke it --
> Creator -- Shall I -- bloom?

She begins playfully with her usual figure of flower as person or soul. Here, however, one flower is carefully distinguished from the other. The poor "Gentian" makes the mistake of trying to be a "Rose," causing all of nature to laugh at her. The nature parable of the "little Gentian"

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recalls the fairy tale of the ugly duckling: as the duckling finally becomes a beautiful sawn, the little gentian blooms at the time and in the way suitable for herself. The gentian is purple, recalling the many poems about being crowned or becoming royal as metaphor for becoming poet. Further, she needs the cold, the "North" and the "Frost," in order to bloom, probably still another reference to the solitude, the "polar privacy" (P-1695) necessary for her poetic vocation. The final direct address to God the Creator reveals the meaning of the nature parable: the speaker is herself the gentian. Further, it was God who made her a gentian rather than a rose. God is therefore responsible for her difference, an idea expressed in the second Master letter, "God made me -- Master -- I did'nt be -- myself," and in P-155, "Artist -- who drew me so / Must tell!" The gift of her poetic soul, then, is from God.

In 1090, ED again stresses the close bond between God and the self or soul. In fact, God is both the source of human life and its goal:

> I am afraid to own a Body --
> I am afraid to own a Soul --
> Profound -- precarious Property --
> Possession, not optional --
>
> Double Estate -- entailed at pleasure
> Upon an unsuspecting Heir --
> Duke in a moment of Deathlessness
> And God, for a Frontier.

Once more, the theta emblem may be implied: to be born into life is to be "Heir" or son of God; the diameter of the circle is the sphere of the finite life, the royal "moment of

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Deathlessness"; death is one's birth back into eternity, as always going to God. The poet separates "Body" and "Soul" as she often does: to be alive is to inherit a "Double Estate." Further, such inheritance is "precarious," an idea that appears often in the canon as well as in the Imitation: "Never promise yourself security in this life."[27] Nor is its "Possession . . . optional," another idea which appears frequently in the canon (e.g., 754). To be alive, then, is to be royal and to be an "Heir" or son of God. Further, the goal of life is God; one goes to God at death, for he is the "Frontier."

In these poems which specifically link God with the soul, God is its "Maker." Moreover, the soul speaks for God by transforming divine inspiration into poetic language. Finally, God is the goal of the soul, its "Frontier" at death, the rebirth of the soul back into eternity.

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VIII. ED's God

A reading of the God cluster reveals that ED is believer rather than skeptic. Although in some poems she voices doubt and fear about the reality of the after-life at least for herself, such poems must be read in context of the many in which she expresses faith and belief. ED's God is unknowable, "a distant -- stately Lover," whom ED sometimes audaciously berates for his silence. ED also irreverently criticizes the powerful and vengeful God of the Old Testament. However, God is to be found in all the "Circumstances" of this world. He speaks through his creations: nature, the human soul, and poetry. All things tell of God and prefigure the ultimate union with him at death, the soul's rebirth into eternity. The poems, then, are hymns to God, creator of the universe, and to the "Circumstances" of this world which tell of him.

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PART THREE: NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] See, for example, "A true Hymne," p. 168, and "Providence," pp. 116-121, Lines 147-48 and 151-52, Works of GH.

[2] For ED's use of hymn meters, see Johnson, Biography, Chapter IV, pp. 84-102, and Porter, ED's Early Poetry, Chapter IV, pp. 55-74. Porter describes her use of hymn meters as a "constant occasion for irony"; Robert T. Sherwood, Circumference and Circumstance, p. 7, speaks of her use of hymn meters as "one of protest within convention."

[3] They are: 28, 48, 49, 53, 59, 61, 65, 70, 78, 97, 103, 105, 114, 116, 128, 131, 141, 147, 150, 155, 157, 168, 178, 184, 191, 194, 196, 201, 215, 226, 231, 237, 248, 251, 261, 271, 275, 293, 296, 324, 338, 357, 367, 376, 390, 396, 409, 412, 413, 414, 420, 437, 442, 455, 458, 475, 476, 487, 516, 540, 545, 548, 564, 569, 576, 586, 588, 595, 597, 608, 615, 621, 622, 623, 626, 628, 632, 633, 636, 643, 662, 677, 690, 709, 716, 717, 721, 724, 728, 736, 742, 744, 783, 789, 791, 792, 797, 802, 809, 817, 820, 823, 827, 835, 836, 844, 865, 867, 871, 873, 882, 885, 894, 900, 906, 917, 924, 932, 945, 982, 1001, 1002, 1012, 1021, 1044, 1046, 1052, 1062, 1072, 1076, 1088, 1090, 1115, 1126, 1131, 1145, 1152, 1163, 1173, 1178, 1201, 1204, 1216, 1225, 1231, 1247, 1258, 1260, 1262, 1282, 1286, 1288, 1317, 1321, 1326, 1333, 1334, 1342, 1371, 1380, 1401, 1403, 1433, 1436, 1439, 1459, 1461, 1462, 1465, 1480, 1496, 1501, 1528, 1545, 1551, 1569, 1575, 1584, 1591, 1598, 1599, 1601, 1620, 1624, 1664, 1672, 1681, 1689, 1701, 1718, 1719, 1730, 1733, 1748, 1751, 1769.

[4] Anderson, p. 257, believes that the "tensions between faith and doubt remained constant from an early age down to her death"; Weisbuch, p. 3, says that there are two EDs: the "visionary celebrant" and the "skeptical sufferer, who live together in the poems."

[5] In Matthew vii.1, Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged." À Kempis repeats this admonition throughout the Imitation, e.g., p. 42.

[6] Imitation, p. 109.

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[7] Imitation, p. 217.

[8] "The First Anniversary," Poems of JD, p. 237, Line 205.

[9] Imitation, p. 30.

[10] Works of GH, pp. 153-154.

[11] Martz, Poetry of Meditation, p. 136 and passim; Imitation, p. 58.

[12] Poems of JD, pp. 251-252, Lines 85-115.

[13] This definition of God appears not only in Emerson's "Circles," as Gelpi points out in Tenth Muse, p. 273. It also can be found in the writings of Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, St. Augustine, and many seventeenth-century poets and writers. See, for example, Sir Thomas Browne in "Religio Medici," The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne, p. 15. See also Frank Livingstone Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne: A Biographical and Critical Study (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 207-208 and pp. 218-220, for a discussion of the figure of the theta and its use by Browne as unifying emblem for "Urn Burial" and "The Garden of Cyrus." See too Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 47-48 and 77-80, for a discussion of God as a circle, the theta, and Donne's and other seventeenth-century poets' use of this figure.

[14] Bergson, pp. 156-157, notes that comic characters are always "types"; the child is one of these recurring types. In Matthew xviii.3, Jesus says, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

[15] Cox, Feast of Fools, p. 7; Wylie Sypher, "Appendix: The Meanings of Comedy," Comedy (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 221; Walter Kerr, Tragedy and Comedy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), pp. 27-28.

[16] Bergson, pp. 121-123.

[17] Works of GH, p. 141.

[18] Works of GH, p. 51.

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[19] The Works of Henry Vaughan, ed. L. C. Martin, vol. 2 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1914), p. 488.

[20] Works of GH, pp. 187-188.

[21] Browne, p. 21; p. 19.

[22] Banzer, p. 433.

[23] Ruth Miller, pp. 39-144, is among those who argue that ED longed to publish. The letters in which ED rejects this idea include 265 to Higginson in which she says that the thought of publication is as "foreign" to her "as Firmament to Fin" and 316 in which she writes that the snake poem published by Bowles in The Springfield Republican was "robbed of" her. She repeatedly refused the offers of Niles (e.g., L-813b) and the pleas of Helen Hunt Jackson (L-937a) to publish, only reluctantly agreeing to follow "Success is Counted Sweetest" (P-67) to appear anonymously in The Masque of Poets in 1878; in fact, there is doubt as to whether she ever did consent to publish the poem (see Sewall, Life, II, 582-583).

[24] Works of GH, p. 5.

[25] Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, pp. 150, 206, and passim.

[26] Plato, The Symposium, trans. Walter Hamilton (Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1951), p. 94; Genesis xxviii.10-22.

[27] Imitation, p. 51.

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PART FOUR

THE SOUL CLUSTER: a "'soul of fire in a shell of pearl'"

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The soul is hardly a new subject in this study. In fact, it figures prominently throughout. In the Jesus cluster, Daisy is Jesus' modern disciple, his faithful soul; the poet's soul is bride of poetry in this world and of Christ in the next; the sick soul longs for union with the Master in the form of poetic inspiration. The God cluster, too, includes many poems about the soul: God is its maker and author of its divine uniqueness; the soul is a means of learning of a distant God; a union between Deity and the soul of the poet is necessary for poetic creation. Rather than introducing a new topic, then, this chapter is a further consideration of ED's all-pervasive concern with the soul. It is a close reading of those poems in which she contemplates its nature and destiny.

There are 121 poems specifically to and about the soul as well as many others in which it is referred to less directly or by such terms as spirit, mind, or heart. "Soul" is defined in her Lexicon as "The spiritual, rational, and immortal substance in man . . . that part . . . which enables him to think and reason. . . ." Other definitions include "The understanding . . . Vital principle . . . Spirit . . . Life . . . internal power . . . Heart." One may assume, then, that often in the canon mind, brain, spirit, life, internal power, and heart also refer to the soul.[1]

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The impressive number of soul poems is significant for several reasons. First, since the existence of the immortal soul is a central Christian concept, ED's soul poems are further convincing evidence of her religious sensibility. Second, a reading of the cluster reveals that her ideas, forms, and images often recall those of other devotional poets, particularly those of the seventeenth century. Finally, their number and nature strongly suggest that the subject of the canon, like George Herbert's Temple and Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ, is the poet's soul.

Although the poems are spoken in ED's unique voice, some recurring concepts and themes are typical of Christian thinkers and poets. For example, body and soul are always separate and distinct; sometimes the two even debate with one another as in the devotional tradition beginning with medieval times. Like other devotional poets, too, ED sometimes directly addresses her soul. Further, although ED puzzles over the precise way in which the soul can exist in eternity, she consistently expresses belief in its immortality, value, and sanctity. Solitude is essential for ED's soul, for it must be self-sufficient and self-judging as well as brave and adventurous in order to grow. Solitude is important, too, so that the soul is always prepared to receive an unnamed divine "Guest." This last group of poems in which the soul longs to be or is "Host" to a "Guest" recalls both the Christian trope of Christ's knocking at the heart's door and that of the pure

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soul as temple or bride of Christ. ED's use of these tropes once more links her to the devotional tradition, particularly to Herbert and à Kempis.

ED, like the seventeenth-century poets, sometimes refers to Paradise as being within (e.g., PF-99). Self-scruitny for her as for them is therefore a religious act. It is probably significant that one of the few markings thought to be by ED in Sue's copy of Herbert's Poetical Works notes a passage in the didactic "Church Porch" section:

> Dare to look in thy chest, for tis thine own:
> And tumble up and down what thou find'st there.[2]

ED does just this in her numerous poems of self-exploration; further, like Herbert, she advises readers, "Soto! Explore thyself!" (P-832). Among ED's poems of unsparing self-examination are those in which she defines inner states of mind. Some resemble the metaphysical style in their definition form. Others, like many metaphysical poems, are emblematic: ED first reifies the abstract concept by means of a conceit, then meditates on the figure.

ED's images, too, are often similar to those of other devotional poets and include metaphors of light, fire, and crowns. Her figures for the soul include the bird, the star, and the inner power of the volcano. Perhaps the most all-pervasive images in the cluster are those of circularity. The soul itself is spherical, sometimes an apple or a balloon. Also, each soul is described as possessing a unique center or

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goal as well as a particular "circumference" or sphere of earthly experience. Further, the growth of the soul is described as a series of increasingly larger circumferences, culminating at death in "the Stupendous Vision of His Diameters" (P-802), meaning that God, too, is spherical. As discussed on pp. 176-181 above, the suggested hieroglyph for the progress of the soul through this world may be the theta, a figure typical of the seventeenth-century poets, including Sir Thomas Browne. The spherical soul's journey is the diameter of the theta, bisecting at birth and death the sphere of God, "a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

The much-debated key word, "circumference," then, is often ED's emblematic figure for the soul's sphere on earth. When she writes to Higginson that her "Business is Circumference" (L-268), she means that her task as poet is to explore her soul's inner and outer experiences as it progresses through this world. She further clarifies her "business" in L-269 written at about the same time to Mrs. Holland: it is "to <u>sing</u>" and "to love," to write of her soul's adventures because of love, again stressing the Christ-like nature of her poetic vocation (see pp. 100-101 above).

A summary of several of the many interpretations of circumference is necessarily to oversimplify them but seems essential since my own definition is indebted to theirs. Charles Anderson is tentative in his discussion, for he believes the word is not used consistently. He suggests that it might mean "all

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that is outside," that her "center is the inquiring mind whose business is circumference, intent upon exploring the whole infinity of the universe that lies before her."[3] Robert Sherwood defines the word as "an area of comprehension" whether that of mortal consciousness, the immortal soul, the totality of the poem, or God himself. More specifically, he posits that the poet's mortal consciousness is at the center of the circle, the extent of perception its radius, the area of comprehension its circumference.[4] In Tenth Muse, Albert Gelpi argues convincingly that the word is a metaphor for "the activity of consciousness exploring itself and its place in the world." His interpretation is different from previous ones in that he stresses its psychological meaning: ED is "a pioneer of 'inner space'" and her poems the results of her explorations.[5]

My definition differs from these three chiefly in that I find particular religious meanings in the term, that I stress the emblematic nature of the geometric figure, and that I suggest it sometimes might refer to one of the two perpendicular circles of the theta. "Circumference" is defined by Webster as

> 1. The line that goes around or encompasses a figure; a periphery; applied particularly to the line that goes round a circle, sphere, or other figures approaching these in form.
> 2. The space included in a circle.

Generally the term simply means an enclosed sphere or circular area. Often it is ED's emblem for the individual soul's sphere

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of experiences as it progresses through this world. These experiences include inner and outer ones as well as effects on the soul of the exterior world, for like Donne she sometimes is more concerned with the effects of outer stimuli upon herself than with describing the event. The soul's experiences also include awesome "omen[s]" of the eternal (P-1370); one can see the face of God in nature, poetry, the soul, and the life of Jesus (P-1733). They are the "Messenger[s]" which "Bisect[ing]" the earthly sphere and tell us "All we know" of the existence of the eternal (P-1411). As she says in P-1620, one's circumference must be the "Bride of Awe" in order to create the work of art and probably by extension for any soul to live in a complete sense. Her "business," then, is to live fully, courageously, and meditatively the life of her soul in this world, in the presence of "awe," God and his earthly manifestations, and, because of love, to sing about her soul's joys and sufferings. The poems, therefore, are almost synonymous with her soul's earthly life. As she wrote to Mrs. Holland, "a book is only the Heart's Portrait -- every Page a Pulse --" (L-794). Similarly, she wrote to Higginson that "Two Editors of Journals . . . asked me for my Mind," meaning her poems (L-261). Sometimes, then, circumference refers to her poems. At others, it is the sphere of God.

Although several circumference poems are explicated at length in other places in this study, a brief summary of ED's use of the word seems necessary to illustrate my interpretation

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of the term which appears in sixteen poems, as variant in one rough draft, and in several letters. Sometimes she reflects on the uniqueness of every earthly soul's sphere: "His mind of man, a secret makes" for "He carries a circumference / In which I have no part" (1663). Similarly, she says that sunset, probably a metaphor for death, obliterates such individual differences as "Territory -- Color -- / Circumference -- Decay" (552). The butterfly is metaphor for the soul in 354; it lends a life of "purposeless Circumference" until it is "Extinguished -- in the Sea," often her word for eternity. Webster's third meaning for "extinguish" is "To obscure by superior splendor"; the fourth is "To put an end to, by union or consolidation." In context of the other poems, these definitions may be the ones she intended. If so, then the butterfly-soul is extinguished in that it finally meets the "superior splendor" of the eternal sphere. In 515, to be discussed fully later, ED more specifically describes the soul's final meeting with God: "Resurrection" is that time when "Circumference be full." The finite life has come full circle and is concluded; the soul is now ready to be judged.

In some poems, she stresses the almost limitless possibilities of the soul's circumference. The death of a friend causes one to experience "Circumference without Relief -- Or Estimate -- or End --" (943), infinite reverberations in the soul. In 967, "Ages coil within / The minute Circumference / Of a single Brain --"; again, the soul

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or brain's possible experiences, here of pain, are vast.

Ed sometimes acknowledges the hazards of the brave soul's exploration of its inner sphere. The speaker of 378 "Went out upon Circumference -- / Beyond the Dip of Bell"; she has perilously ventured to the farthest limits of human experience. "Bell" is a circular figure; that she is beyond its "Dip" may suggest that she has transcended her earthly circumference and perhaps touched the infinite sphere. In 798, the soul is a bird who daringly "stake[s]" her feathers, at first gains only an "Arc," then tries again, and is finally as "At home -- among the Billows" of "Circumference" as she had once been on the "Bough where she was born." The bee of 1343, here also a figure for the soul, is at first only saved from "sinking in the sky" by a "single Clover Plank"; however, it is at last destroyed by the hazardous "Billows of Circumference." In these last two poems, the sky is image for circumference, suggesting the soaring of the soul in its inner sphere (cf. P-1431). In 889, too, the perils of the soul's adventures are stressed: if "a Circle hesitate / In Circumference," death, a premature meeting with "Eternity," may result. Here "Circle" seems to be the soul, "Circumference" its sphere.

Since ED's own sphere is that of poet, she sometimes writes of her poetic vocation and her poems as circumference. In 313, she contrasts the "Circuit" of her "little Lifetime" with the "new Circumference" of her life as poet. In 883,

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"Each Age" is a "Lens / Disseminating" the "Circumference" of the "Lamp[s]" originally stimulated by the poet; subsequent generations extend or propagate (Webster's definition for "disseminate") the original life of the poet as expressed in the poems.[6] Similarly, the bird-poet of 1084 vanishes, leaving only "Circumference," his song, where the bird himself had been. In 1620, to be discussed at length later, the poet addresses her soul's earthly sphere as "Circumference"; only by possessing "Awe," Deity and his earthly "omen[s]," can art be created. Once more, a union between soul and divinity is necessary for the creative act.

The hieroglyph of the theta seems almost certainly suggested in two poems. The final lines of 633, a quatrain, are: "When Cogs -- stop -- that's Circumference -- / The Ultimate -- of Wheels." Since in other poems, the earthly life is described as a "Clock" and "The Dial life" (e.g., 287), the time when "Cogs -- stop --" means the conclusion of this life, the thanatos. Here "Circumference" refers to God's sphere; he is the "Ultimate -- of Wheels." When the earthly sphere is concluded, the eternal one begins. Similarly in 802 (discussed on pp. 180-181 above), she fears that her life in time, her "Circumference" is so engrossing that she is in danger of forgetting the eternal sphere, for which she is prepared by "Processes of Size," the growth of her soul's horizons, "For the Stupendous Vision / Of His Diameters." In both poems, death is a meeting with the infinite sphere of God.[7]

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Circumference, then, is not merely a key word in interpreting particular poems; the term explains the meaning of the canon and of ED's metaphoric life. Her "Business is Circumference," to live meditatively and bravely the life of the soul in this world and to present this life in the distilled form of the poems. Like The Temple, the ED canon is the account of a unique but representative life, lived in the presence of divinity or "awe," as it progresses through this world toward its final meeting with God. Like Herbert and à Kempis, she addresses the problem of how one may live such a life.

Again, it is necessary to recall that Sue owned an 1857 edition of Herbert's Poetical Works and that either Sue or ED owned an 1857 edition of The Imitation in which ED's name is inscribed in Sue's hand. Since Sue later presented ED with an 1876 edition of The Imitation, one assumes that she knew the book was of great significance for her friend. It is apparent, too, that ED admired Herbert, for as previously noted, two stanzas from his "Mattens," copied in her own hand, were found among her papers after her death. They were thought to be by her and were even published in an early edition of her poems:

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My God - what is a Heart,
Silver - or Gold - or
Precious Stone.
Or Star - or Rainbow -
or a part
Of all these things - or
all of them in one?
My God - what is a Heart.

Verso

That thou shouldst it so
eye and woo
Pouring upon it all thy
art
as if that thou hadst
nothing else to etc -

One can understand the editorial error, for Herbert's poem is not unlike many of ED's. Herbert, like ED, addresses God directly and somewhat familiarly. Also, he portrays God, as ED often does, as the soul's lover, one who "eye[s]" and "woo[s]" the heart or soul (cf. P-357, 1496). Such similarities are heightened by ED's having translated the Herbert poem into her own idiom, including dashes, capitals, and line arrangement.

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It has been suggested that ED left among her papers letters from Helen Hunt Jackson and Thomas Niles urging her to publish with an eye to her future possible poetic immortality; perhaps she wished to establish that her poems were admired by contemporaries and that she could have published had she wished.[8] It seems possible, too, that she left the stanzas from "Mattens," in her own hand, translated into her own idiom, as a kind of clue, perhaps to the meaning of the canon, perhaps even to acknowledge her debt to Herbert. Her markings in the 1876 edition of the Imitation also might have been intended as such a clue, for they were made long after the book had served as initial inspiration.[9]

Whether or not the poet had such motives, circumstantial and internal evidence indicate that ED read both The Temple and The Imitation and that she assimilated ideas and images from both, transforming them in the service of her own unique voice. ED, like Herbert and à Kempis, writes of her soul's variegated experiences on earth and its relationship to God. The ED canon, like The Temple, can best be read and understood holistically as the meditative autobiography of a soul, a soul exploring its sphere or "circumference" as it progresses toward its "divinely appointed destiny of union with God."[10]

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I. "Holy Ghosts in Cages" (P-184)

Throughout the ED canon, body and soul are separate and distinct. Although the body is not evil or despised, the life of the "superior spectre" (670) is the poet's chief concern. The body is merely the soul's earthly dwelling, its shrine, cage, temple, or house. The soul has moments of escape from the body, a freedom sometimes metaphorically described as that of a bird. The soul's ultimate freedom occurs at death when body and soul separate, "The Flesh -- Surrendered -- Cancelled -- / The Bodiless - begun" (524). The body is merely an "Overcoat of Clay" (976) which the soul casts off.

Often ED makes clear both the dichotomy between body and soul and the body's role as the soul's "Temple" (P-578):

> This dirty -- little -- Heart
> Is freely mine.
> I won it with a Bun --
> A Freckled shrine --
>
> But eligibly fair
> To him who sees
> The Visage of the Soul
> And not the knees.
> (1311)

Although in the ED canon "Heart" is not always synonymous with soul, here the two words are used interchangeably. The heart or soul is imperfect, "dirty" and "little." Further, the body

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is merely a "Bun" to encase the heart or soul. Obviously, the body, too, is sacred, for although "Freckled," it is a "shrine." However, God is concerned with the "Soul" rather than with the body's "knees," a thought similar to that of à Kempis who advises, ". . . while man looks on outward appearance, God looks into your heart. Man sees your actions but God your motives."[11]

In other instances, the body is the soul's prison, cage, or "Chillon" (P-1601, 184, L-233), another typical Christian concept. Quarles, for example, emblematically portrays the body as a cage: à Kempis speaks of it as a "prison-house."[12] Although ED's body is similarly a prison, it is a "magic Prison" (P-1601), a cage, perhaps, but an enchanted one. Life in this world is dear to ED, and (as discussed on pp. 169-170) she sometimes ponders whether or not that in eternity will be as sublime.

In still other poems, ED contemplates the mystery of the secret, passionate soul concealed within its seemingly impassive body. One recalls that "internal power" is one of Webster's definitions for soul:

> It's Hour with itself
> The Spirit never shows.
> What Terror would enthrall the Street
> Could Countenance disclose
>
> The Subterranean Freight
> The Cellars of the Soul --
> Thank God the loudest Place he made
> Is licensed to be still.
> (1225)

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The body is a house on a "Street," the soul the hidden "Cellars" where unperceived action takes place. This idea of the undetected, powerful soul once more recalls Sue's phrase describing the poet, a "'soul of fire in a shell of pearl.'" The concept also appears in other forms in the canon. In the volcano poems, for example, "Life" is "A still -- Volcano" (601), outwardly quiet, but possessing "internal power." Similarly, in 1663, the mind's unperceived activity, its "circumference," makes of another man a "secret."

Although the soul is in a sense the body's prisoner, it possesses great freedom as well: "No Rack can torture me -- / My Soul -- at Liberty -- / Behind this mortal Bone" (384). Sometimes ED compares the soul's freedom to that of a bird: one might as easily "lodge[d]a Bird / For Treason -- in the Pound --" as inhibit the soul's freedom; just as a bird "has but to will / And easy as a Star / Look down upon Captivity -- / And laugh," so it is with the soul (613). In 798, the soul's freedom is described as that of a bird, "At home -- among the Billows" of "Circumference." In 1431, too, the bird is figure for the soul:

> With Pinions of Disdain
> The soul can farther fly
> Than any feather specified
> in Ornithology --
> It wafts this sordid Flesh
> Beyond it's dull -- control
> And during it's electric gale --
> The body is a soul --
> instructing by the same --
> How little work it be --
> To put off filaments like this
> for immortality --

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This freedom of the soul even exhilarates the "sordid Flesh" so that it, too, is affected by the soul's freedom. The poem concludes with the "Disdain" of the first line: how simple it will be to put off the body for immortality.

This final separation of body and soul takes place at death when the "brief Tragedy of Flesh" is concluded (664). Death is the time when "Flesh and Spirit sunder" (1420), "The Flesh -- Surrendered -- Cancelled -- / The Bodiless -- begun --" (524). Not only is the body "Cancelled" at death; the soul triumphs, becomes an "Emperor" (980). One is reminded of Donne's Second Anniversarie in which the "soule" is "exalted" and made "Prince" as the body "rots." If read in such a context, P-465, "I heard a Fly buzz -- when I died," might be spoken by the soul as she observes the death of the body. The "King" arrives to claim the soul, a "Fly" to claim the body (see pp. 174-176).

Death, then, is a triumph for the soul but a dreaded event for the body:

> I read my sentence -- steadily --
> Reviewed it with my eyes,
> To see that I made no mistake
> In it's extremest clause --
> The Date, and manner, of the shame --
> And then the Pious Form
> That "God have mercy" on the Soul
> The Jury voted Him --
> I made my soul familiar -- with her extremity --
> That at the last, it should not be a novel Agony --
> But she, and Death, acquainted --
> Meet tranquilly, as friends --
> Salute, and pass, without a Hint --
> And there, the Matter ends --
> (412)

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Here body and soul are distinct, even engage in a dialogue as in the devotional tradition of the debate between body and soul. The difference between body and soul is underscored by the gender of the pronoun used for each: "I," the person or body, is "Him"; the soul is "her." Since the soul is archetypally female, it is not surprising that although in some poems the soul is "it" or "itself" (see pp. 124-125), ED's soul is often "she." In this poem, "she" and Death are friends. Although death is "Agony" for the body, it is "tranquilly" accepted by the soul.

Unlike most of the soul cluster, ED here projects a comic persona, the familiar lawyer who is somewhat ludicrous in his use of professional language (see pp. 83-85). The poem is also comic in the pun of the final line, "the Matter ends." More often the speaker of the soul cluster is recessed, even invisible, and her tone solemn; rather than a "supposed person," she seems almost to be the poet herself, as in 976, another dialogue between body and soul:

> Death is a Dialogue between
> The Spirit and the Dust.
> "Dissolve" says Death -- The Spirit "Sir
> I have another Trust["] --
>
> Death doubts it -- Argues from the Ground --
> The Spirit turns away
> Just laying off for evidence
> An Overcoat of Clay.

Since "Death" is defined as "a Dialogue between / The Spirit and the Dust," then described as a dialogue between "Death" and

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"Spirit," death and dust seem to be synonymous. Both might be the diameter of the theta figure, the "thanatos," the sphere of human life which at death meets the sphere of God. At this juncture, the imperious soul disdainfully casts off the flesh; in ED's dialogues between body and soul, the soul is finally victorious.

In a late poem, the soul longs for this victory and release from the "Dust":

> As from the earth the light Balloon
> Asks nothing but release --
> Ascension that for which it was,
> It's soaring Residence.
> The spirit looks upon the Dust
> That fastened it so long
> With indignation,
> As a Bird
> Defrauded of it's song.
> (1630)

The balloon as image for the spirit or soul is particularly apt. It is appropriate for a festive occasion and therefore suggests the soul's anticipated triumph. Also, the word lends itself to double-meaning: "Ascension" suggests both that of the balloon and that of the soul which will rise as did Christ; "soaring," too, applies both to balloon and soul. Finally, the balloon is one of the many circular images ED uses to describe the soul and its sphere. Just as the soul is an apple and possesses a circumference, it is also a spherical balloon.

This poem, a rough draft, is believed to have been written in about 1884, two years before the poet's death. It is even

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probable that she knew death was near, for her physician in his certificate of death notes that she had been ill for 2½ years.[13] However, this late poem is like her earliest: body and soul are distinct; the immortal soul is freed at death. These concepts, consistently conveyed throughout the canon, are certainly those of a religious poet.

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II. "The Spirit lasts -- but in what mode --"

Although ED's faith in the soul's victory over death is sometimes shadowed by a "Codicil of Doubt" (P-1012), she consistenty voices belief in its immortality. It is a "Repealless thing -- / A Being -- impotent to end -- / When once it has begun" (565). However, the poet puzzles over the form the after-life will take. Will the soul exist as "Costumeless Consciousness" (P-1454), or will it be reunited with the body?

ED ponders the "Riddle" of the after-life in 501:

> This world is not Conclusion.
> A Species stands beyond --
> Invisible, as Music --
> But positive, as Sound --
> It beckons, and it baffles --
> Philosophy -- dont know --
> And through a Riddle, at the last --
> Sagacity, must go --
> To guess it, puzzles scholars --
> To gain it, Men have borne
> Contempt of Generations
> And Crucifixion, shown --
> Faith slips -- and laughs, and rallies --
> Blushes, if any see --
> Plucks at a twig of Evidence --
> And asks a Vane, the way --
> Much Gesture, from the Pulpit --
> Strong Hallelujahs roll --
> Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
> That nibbles at the soul --

The soul exists after death, but how? "Gestures, from the Pulpit" and hymns sung by those in church are merely "Narcotics"

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and do not silence nagging questions about the eternal life. As usual, the traditional nineteenth-century church provides no solace for ED.

In 1576, too, she ponders the mystery of the way in which the soul will exist in eternity:

> The Spirit lasts -- but in what mode --
> Below, the Body speaks,
> But as the Spirit furnishes --
> Apart, it never talks --
> The Music in the Violin
> Does not emerge alone
> But Arm in Arm with Touch, yet Touch
> Alone -- is not a Tune --
> The Spirit lurks within the Flesh
> Like Tides within the Sea
> That make the Water live, estranged
> What would the Either be?
> Does that know -- now -- or does it cease --
> That which to this is done,
> Resuming at a mutual date
> With every future one?
> Instinct pursues the Adamant,
> Exacting this Reply --
> Adversity if it may be, or
> Wild Prosperity,
> The Rumor's Gate was shut so tight
> Before my Mind was sown,
> Not even a Prognostic's Push
> Could make a Dent thereon --

As in the previous poem, ED begins with a statement of firm belief in the soul's immortality. However, she wonders how the "Spirit" can exist without its "Flesh." Is the heart of the "Adamant" secret "Adversity" or "Wild Prosperity"? She concludes that the mystery of the way in which the soul exists in eternity is impenetrable.

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Other poems in which ED ponders this mystery include 1492 which she sent to her cousin, the Reverend Perez Dickinson Cowan, at the death of his daughter:

> "And with what body do they come?" --
> Then they <u>do</u> come -- Rejoice!
> What Door -- What Hour -- Run -- run -- My Soul!
> Illuminate the House!
>
> "Body!" Then real -- a Face and Eyes --
> To know that it is them! --
> Paul knew the Man that knew the News --
> He passed through Bethlehem --

The quotation is from 1 Corinthians xv.35. In this and the following verses, St. Paul gives assurance of the resurrection of the body, an assurance ED passes along to her bereaved cousin. On the other hand, in 1454, she considers the after-life as a state of "Costumeless Consciousness":

> Those not live yet
> Who doubt to live again --
> "Again" is of a twice
> But this -- is one --
> The Ship beneath the Draw
> Aground -- is he?
> Death -- so -- the Hyphen of the Sea --
> Deep is the Schedule
> Of the Disk to be --
> Costumeless Consciousness --
> That is he --

Once more, ED begins by asserting belief in the soul's immortality. In fact, such faith is essential for a full life on this earth. In this poem, probably sent to Sue at Easter (1454n), ED once more acknowledges the impossibility of precise knowledge concerning the after-life, for the "Schedule"

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is "Deep" or hidden. However, she concludes by positing that it might be a state in which "Consciousness" exists without the body. Although soul and consciousness are not always synonymous for ED, here they seem to be (cf. P-822, 894).

The after-life is one in which body and soul are reunited in 515:

> No Crowd that has occurred
> Exhibit -- I suppose
> That General Attendance
> That Resurrection -- does --
>
> Circumference be full --
> The long restricted Grave
> Assert her Vital Privilege --
> The Dust -- connect -- and live --
>
> On Atoms -- features place --
> All Multitudes that were
> Efface in the Comparison --
> As Suns -- dissolve a star --
>
> Solemnity -- prevail --
> It's Individual Doom
> Possess each separate Consciousness --
> August -- Absorbed -- Numb --
>
> What Duplicate -- exist --
> What Parallel can be --
> Of the Significance of This --
> To Universe -- and Me?

After wryly observing that no doubt the "Resurrection" will be well-attended, ED calls it the time when "Circumference be full," meaning that the "Dial Life" in which the soul has grown and created itself has come full circle and is concluded. The phrase may also refer to Proverbs xxvii.7. a verse quoted by Webster in his definition of soul: "In Scripture, appetite: as the full soul; the hungry soul." One's full circumference

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at death, then, might also mean that the soul's earthly hunger for experience is sated. In fact, ED's many poems about hunger may be about her soul's hunger.

Here, body and soul are reunited in eternity, "The Dust -- connect -- and live." Further, the individual consciousness has survived: each is "August -- Absorbed -- Numb --" in anticipation of "It's Individual Doom." The speaker concludes that the day of resurrection is of ultimate "Significance . . . To Universe -- and Me." Here as in P-483, the day of Judgment is the "Single" goal "to some lives"; it is the time when the soul's circumference meets the sphere of God.

Although ED projects opposing thoughts about the form the after-life will take, she does not consider oblivion as a possible destiny for the soul. Consistently, ED portrays the soul as immortal and death as a transit to God.

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III. "No coward soul"

At ED's funeral, which is described as having been "lovingly" and "tastefully" arranged by Sue, T. W. Higginson read Emily Brontë's "Last Lines":[14]

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere;
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life -- that in me has rest,
As I -- undying Life -- have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts -- unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity;
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void;
Thou -- Thou art Being and Breath,
And what that Thou art may never be destroyed.

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Although different in form, image, and language, ED's soul poems conceptually resemble "Last Lines" in several ways. First, ED, like Brontë, praises the daring, adventurous soul. Further, as Brontë suggests that the soul is "God within my breast," so ED sometimes speaks of "Heaven" as being "of the Mind" (P-370). ED's soul poems are like the Brontë poem, too, in that she criticizes "creeds" and expresses belief in the soul's immortality. Certainly, "Last Lines" is an appropriate commemoration of the life of a poet whose canon is an account of the pilgrimage of a brave and daring soul.

Among ED's poems praising the courageous soul is 1151:

> Soul, take thy risk,
> With Death to be
> Were better than be not
> With thee

Here, ED, like Brontë and the seventeenth-century poets, addresses her soul as she sometimes does. The poem might almost be a compressed response to Brontë as she advises her soul to take chances, for death is preferable to life without a venturesome life for the soul. Similarly, ED speaks of "Dread" as being a "Spur -- upon the Soul." Compared to "Danger -- Other impetus / Is numb -- and Vitalless --" (770). In 378, too, she describes her soul as precariously "alone -- / A Speck upon a Ball . . . out upon Circumference / Beyond the Dip of Bell." The Speaker seems to be the soul who has daringly ventured to the outer limits of its sphere, perhaps even meeting the infinite sphere

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of God.

Such hazardous exploration takes place when the soul is alone. In fact, ED finds solitude to be a necessary condition for the soul who is intent on experiencing life fully:

> . . . Garrisoned no Soul can be
> In the Front of Trouble --
> Love is one, not aggregate --
> Nor is Dying double --
> (1243)

Number 306 begins with a straightforward statement of the soul's need for solitude:

> The Soul's Superior instants
> Occur to Her -- alone --
> When friend -- and Earth's occasion
> Have infinite withdrawn --
>
> Or She -- Herself -- ascended
> To too remote a Hight
> For lower Recognition
> Than Her Omnipotent --
>
> This Mortal Abolition
> Is seldom -- but as fair
> As Apparition -- subject
> To Autocratic Air --
>
> Eternity's disclosure
> To favorites -- a few --
> Of the Colossal substance
> Of Immortality --

"Mortal Abolition" suggests that the soul when experiencing its "Superior instants" is set free from the slavery of the flesh. At such times, she is "Autocratic." Further, such "Superior instants" provide a glimpse of Eternity and are granted only to a few "favorites." Again, ED finds in events

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of this world awesome prefigurations of the infinite. Once more, too, she perceives herself as one of the Elect, presumably those few chosen to be poets (e.g., P-356), to live the life of the soul and to sing about it.

As ED's own "Business" is "Circumference," exploring her soul's essence and sphere and singing about it, so each life has a goal:

> Each Life Converges to some Centre --
> Expressed -- or still --
> Exists in every Human Nature
> A Goal --
>
> Embodied scarcely to itself -- it may be --
> Too fair
> For Credibility's presumption
> To mar --
>
> Adored with caution -- as a Brittle Heaven --
> To reach
> Were hopeless, as the Rainbow's Raiment
> To touch --
>
> Yet persevered toward -- surer -- for the Distance --
> How high --
> Unto the Saints' slow diligence --
> The Sky --
>
> Ungained -- it may be -- by a Life's low Venture --
> But then --
> Eternity enable the endeavoring
> Again.
>
> (680)

"Life," it will be remembered, is one synonym for "soul" in her Lexicon. Since the word is defined as "that state of being in which the soul and body are united" (Webster), life here refers to the soul's earthly existence, its circumference, its circular form suggested by its having a "Centre."

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God in other poems is the creator of the unique, individual soul (e.g., 442). Therefore, one may suppose that he is also related to its "Centre"; perhaps even he _is_ its centre. The earthly soul's centre or goal is both within and without, both its inner focal point and "high" as the "Rainbow" and the "Sky." Like God, one's goal is both the soul's centre and its ultimate destiny. ED's "Paradise" is both within and to be achieved after death.

In other poems, ED describes the nature and life of the brave and solitary soul. The soul is a severe critic of itself. Further, no other criticism is of value:

> My Soul -- accused me -- And I quailed --
> As Tongues of Diamond had reviled
> All else accused me -- and I smiled --
> My Soul -- that Morning -- was My friend --
>
> (753, first stanza)

The soul is self-sufficient:

> On a Columnar Self --
> How ample to rely
> In Tumult -- or Extremity -- . . .
>
> (789)

The soul is once more circular, here "Columnar," and it "Suffice Us -- for a Crowd --." Finally, the significant events in life are those which occur within:

> The Battle fought between the Soul
> And No Man -- is the One
> Of all the Battles prevalent --
> By far the Greater One --
>
> (594, first stanza)

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One is reminded of à Kempis: "Who has a fiercer struggle than he who strives to conquer himself?"[15]

ED's ideal soul, then, takes risks. Sometimes it "has Bandaged moments" (P-512), but such daring increases the soul's horizons, enabling it to grow. Such risks must be taken by the solitary, self-reliant, and self-judging soul, for "The soul must go by Death alone, so, it must by life, if it is a soul" (L-321). Finally, each soul has a unique goal, a God-given purpose in life which it must strive to achieve. ED's significant experiences in life are those of the brave, adventurous soul, the drama "enacted / In the Human Heart -- / Only Theatre recorded / Owner cannot shut --" (741).

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IV. "The Undiscovered Continent" (P-832)

Among ED's poems of self-exploration is a group in which she defines and meditates upon inner states of mind. These poems are about such abstract concepts as "Remorse" (744), "Renunciation" (745), "Faith" (915), "Hope" (254), "Thought" (701), and "Pain" (650). Many are definition poems, a favorite seventeenth-century form. Often ED deals with these subjects in a concrete manner: sometimes the mind is a place in which an event occurs; other poems are emblematic, the abstract concept reified by means of a conceit. As is so often the case, one cannot discover the personal experience which inspired a particular poem. She does not disclose why she feels remorse, what she renounced, or why she feels pain. Rather, the poems possess universal meanings.

Among ED's definition poems on states of mind is 744:

Remorse -- is Memory -- awake --
Her Parties all astir --
A Presence of Departed Acts --
At window -- and at Door --

It's Past -- set down before the Soul
And lighted with a Match --
Perusal -- to facilitate --
And help Belief to stretch --

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

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After an initial somewhat abstract definition of "Remorse," ED proceeds concretely. In the first stanza, remorse takes place in the house of the mind or soul which is awakened and "astir"; "Departed Acts" present themselves for recognition "At window -- and at Door." In the second stanza, the soul is a "Theatre" (cf. P-741); the soul sits before its own illuminated stage to observe "It's Past." In the third stanza, this examination of the nature of remorse once more becomes abstract; it is "cureless" and the equivalent of "Hell." This likening of remorse to hell is reminiscent of P-1735 (discussed on pp. 85-86) in which Pontius Pilate's memory of the crucifixion is his hell. In both poems, hell, like Paradise in P-370 and PF 99, is within.

Number 915 is emblematic, the suggested hieroglyph a bridge:

> Faith -- is the Pierless Bridge
> Supporting what We see
> Unto the Scene that We do not --
> Too slender for the eye
>
> It bears the Soul as bold
> As it were rocked in Steel
> With Arms of Steel at either side --
> It joins -- behind the Vail
>
> To what, could We presume
> The Bridge would cease to be
> To Our far, vascillating Feet
> A first Nescessity.

It begins with a conceit typical of the metaphysical style. In the faith-bridge analogy, as in Herbert's comparison of God's attraction for human beings with a pulley, an abstract concept is likened to a concrete object.[16] ED then develops

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the poem as do the metaphysical poets by explaining exactly how it is that faith is like a bridge.

In still other poems, the soul is described as a place in which a concrete event is metaphor for an abstract one occurring in the mind or soul. In 550, the mind is a landscape:

> I cross till I am weary
> A Mountain -- in my mind --
> More Mountains -- then a Sea --
> More Seas -- And then
> A Desert -- find --
> (First stanza)

Similarly, in 747, the mind is a room with a stone floor on which an unworthy thought is shattered. In 280, the "Brain" is a place in which a traumatic event, a "Funeral," is taking place; the speaker hears and feels "Mourners" "treading," the "Service" "beating," "Boots of Lead," and "a Box . . . creak[ing] across [her] Soul."

In these and other poems in which she concretely explores abstract inner states, ED achieves baroque effects as well as universality of meaning. Although the poems resemble the seventeenth-century poets in their self-examination and in some poetic strategies, they are, as usual, expressed in ED's unique voice. Finally, they represent the poet's concern with the soul's drama; she explores her soul's circumference and sings about what she finds.

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V. The Soul and its Guest

Among the most significant and revealing poems in the cluster are those in which the soul is a host who longs for or receives a guest. In this group, solitude is praised, for the soul must always be ready to receive her guest. The poems are sometimes emblematic, the suggested hieroglyph the traditional figure of Christ knocking at the heart. Since one of the meanings for The Temple is the pure heart as Christ's dwelling, the poems once more link the ED canon with Herbert. Also, the soul-guest poems are often strikingly similar in image and idea to the Imitation. The following are only a few of à Kempis' many references to Jesus as the pure heart's guest:

> "Christ will come to you, and impart his consolations to you, if you prepare a worthy dwelling for Him in your heart."
>
> "Come then, faithful soul: prepare your heart for your Divine Spouse, that He may deign to come to you and dwell with you."
>
> "If you could empty your heart of all creatures, Jesus would delight to dwell with you."[17]

The soul-guest poems also recall ED's own nuptial poems as well as the Master letters and poems, for the language is sometimes that of sacred parody and often suggests poetic as well as religious meanings. The guest, like the bridegroom and the Master, is described in royal, religious, and nuptial terms.

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Sometimes in the soul-guest group the language is that of the medieval knightly code: host and guest suggest this code as does the "Courtesy" characteristic of their treatment of one another. One is reminded of P-1305 in which Jesus is addressed as "Paragon of Chivalry."

Although not typical of the soul-guest group, 317 is of interest because the hieroglyph of Jesus as knocking at the heart's door is obviously suggested:

> Just so -- Jesus -- raps --
> He -- does'nt weary --
> Last -- at the Knocker --
> And first -- at the Bell.
> Then -- on divinest tiptoe -- standing --
> Might He but spy the lady's soul --
> When He -- retires --
> Chilled -- or weary --
> It will be ample time for -- me --
> Patient -- upon the steps -- until then --
> Heart! I am knocking -- low at thee.

The speaker's tone is somewhat playful as she describes Jesus as persistently rapping, even standing "on divinest tiptoe" to try to gain a glimpse of the "lady's soul." The speaker goes on to compare herself to Jesus. When he finally gives up, she will follow him and continue his work. In the final line, she startlingly addresses the reader directly: as in the eucharistic poems, she as poet is performing Jesus' work, here attempting to arouse the reader's hard heart (see pp. 100-101).

In this poem as elsewhere, a didactic purpose is suggested for the canon. It seems significant that one of the passages believed to have been marked by ED in the "Church-porch" section

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of The Temple is, "A verse may find him, who a sermon flies. . . ."[18] The soul-guest group may then be understood not only as descriptive of the union of the poet's soul with Deity in order to create the work of art; they are also instructive: every soul must be wed to the divine in order to achieve its particular goal.

In 674, the guest is specifically defined as divine and "The Emperor of Men"; obviously, Jesus is suggested:

> The Soul that hath a Guest
> Doth seldom go abroad --
> Diviner Crowd at Home --
> Obliterate the need --
>
> And Courtesy forbid
> A Host's departure when
> Upon Himself be visiting
> The Emperor of Men --

Here ED uses language of the medieval host-guest code. The "Soul" or "Host" is bound by the rules of "Courtesy" not to leave when the divine "Guest" is visiting. In 1055, too, the courtesy of both host and guest is stressed: "The Soul should always stand ajar" so that the guest, "the Heaven," will not be obliged to "wait" or leave because he is courteously "shy of troubling Her."

The speaker is concerned that she might not be worthy of her divine guest in 751:

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

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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 guest of this poem is "Deity." Once more Deity "stoop[s]," recalling both P-833 and the Imitation (see pp. 100-101). In the final stanza, the speaker's soul, like a church, is the dwelling for "Deity." As the central spiritual and architectural focus of a church is the "Sacrament," the central focus of the speaker's soul is her guest. The soul, like the church, is a temple for Deity, once more recalling Herbert. This final stanza also is similar to the Imitation:

> "Whoever desires to understand and take delight in the words of Christ must strive to conform his whole life to him." [emphasis mine]
>
> "Bless and hallow my soul with Your heavenly blessing, that it may become Your holy dwelling and the seat of Your eternal glory."[19]

The language is also strikingly like that of other ED poems and letters. As usual, poems specifically linking ED to the devotional tradition illuminate others which are then understood to be less directly so. In 405, for example, the speaker fears that "the little Room -- [is] / Too scant by Cubits -- to contain /

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the Sacrament -- of Him." Probably this poem is about the soul and its guest although the words are never used. In the third Master letter, too, Daisy says that she "bends her smaller life to his," a phrase very like "Conform." She also says that she "would have sheltered him in her childish bosom (Heart) -- only it was'nt big eno' for a Guest so large." Such similarity of language indicates that the soul-guest poems, like the Master letters, are about Jesus and poetry, the soul's guest and spouse; by extension they are also about every soul's need for union with divinity.

The hint of the erotic in the soul-guest poems also links them to the Master poems and letters as well as to the nuptial poems. The soul is almost always feminine, the guest masculine just as Daisy and bride are feminine and Master and bridegroom masculine. Further, they are similar in that sexual union or marriage is longed for or takes place. One is reminded especially of the Loaded Gun poem in which union between Gun-poet and Master-Owner is necessary in order that sacred poetry may be written.

In 1721, the guest is not identified as divine, but their union is stressed:

> He was my host -- he was my guest,
> I never to this day
> If I invited him could tell,
> Or he invited me.
>
> So infinite our intercourse
> So intimate, indeed,
> Analysis as capsule seemed
> To keeper of the seed.

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In the first stanza, host and guest are so interchangeable that the speaker cannot be sure whether she is host or guest and who invited whom. In the second, a sexual meaning is suggested, for although "intercourse" is defined merely as "communication" in her Lexicon, the Oxford English Dictionary cites its use in the sexual sense as early as 1798. The words "intimate" and "seed" seem to extend the sexual meaning of "intercourse." Host and guest, then, are a wedded pair, or at least a sexually intimate pair. They are one flesh so that an attempt at "Analysis," the consideration of them as separate parts, discloses only a "capsule," a single seed-vessel (both definitions Webster's). The speaker herself is "keeper of the seed," the female soul of the poet in whom the divine "italic Seed" grows into a poem, the "Flower of the Soul" (P-945).

The soul-guest poems, like the nuptial group and the Master poems and letters, are about the marriage of the soul to Deity, a union necessary for the creation of poetry, and more generally for living the life of integrity. All three subclusters are reflected in 1620:

> Circumference thou Bride of Awe
> Possessing thou shalt be
> Possessed by every hallowed Knight
> That dares to covet thee

"Awe," like "Circumference," is a much-debated word appearing in its various forms only 23 times in the canon, yet one of great significance in the ED vocabulary. It is defined

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by Webster as "reverential fear" and refers to God and earthly "omen[s]" (1370) of the divine which are found in this world. In 287, a look of "awe" came on the face of one who has just died; he has left the "Dial Life" behind and gotten his first glimpse of the eternal. The "Hemlock" of 525 "satisfies an awe / That men must slake in Wilderness"; again, natural objects are "God's introductions" (797) and prefigure the infinite. In 683, "The Soul should stand in Awe" of itself, for the soul, too, is an earthly manifestation of Deity. The meaning of the word is most clearly expressed in 1733: it is God's "physiognomy" as seen by Moses. "Awe," then, is the face of God, prefigurations of him in his creation, and the reverential fear inspired by them.

A decompression of this difficult poem helps to clarify its meaning:

> Circumference (the soul's sphere on earth) thou (must be)
> Bride of Awe (the divine sphere)
> (For it is only by) Possessing (Awe that) thou (the work of art)
> shalt be
> Possessed by every hallowed Knight
> That dares to covet thee

"Thou" in the first line refers to the soul's circumference, its earthly sphere; in the second, to the work of art, the union between human and divine of the first line. The soul's sphere must be "Bride" of the divine in order that the work of art may be created. It is only then that the "Knight" or artist can possess the artistic creation.

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"Knight" suggests the knightly code of the soul-guest poems. The word is defined by Webster both as a "pupil" and as one dubbed by the king. The artist is therefore the "hallowed" pupil of the divine Master and one who has been chosen by him. The knight can possess the work of art only through the union of his soul's sphere with the divine and only if he or she "desire[s]" it "earnestly" (Webster's definition for "covet"). Although it has been pointed out that covet is a sin according to the ten commandments,[20] this definition and biblical reference is Webster's second meaning; his first defines the word "in a good sense" and cites I Corinthians xii.31: "Covet earnestly the best gifts."

An alternate for the final line in the worksheet draft has been written and crossed out: "That bends a Knee to thee." Although this version reinforces the consecration and code of the "hallowed Knight," the "dare" of the final version suggests the hazards of the Orphic mission (see pp. 124-126) and "covet" the strength of dedication necessary for the artist. The poem not only illuminates and fuses the nuptial, Master, circumference, and soul-guest poems, it is also ED's *ars poetica* as well as her definition of the life of integrity: one's earthly sphere must be bride of the divine in order to achieve its particular "Goal" (680).

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VI. ED as Sacred Poet

ED as poet and person is one whose work and life are "aglow with God and immortality." The white she wore, like the white in the poems, is metaphor for her dedication to immortality, to God and to poetry. ED's religious sensibility is apparent in the more than five hundred poems in which she specifically speaks to and about Jesus, God, and the soul. The entire canon, read in context of these poems and in light of the devotional poetic tradition, is the poet's reverential and meditative account of her soul's variegated adventures.

ED's God is a "distant -- stately Lover." Sometimes his aloofness exasperates her, and she berates him for his silence and for the pain of death. Her outspoken criticism often takes comic forms, even that of caricature. However, such irreverence is compatible with Christian tradition and indicates that ED is on intimate terms with God.

Although ED sometimes voices doubt, particularly that she will gain the after-life, such misgivings are not rare for religious figures and poets: Donne laments that the new philosophy calls all in doubt; à Kempis warns that doubt sometimes creeps into the mind of the believer; Herbert reproaches God for forsaking him. The dark night of the soul is, after all, a recurring trope in religious thought.

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More often, however, ED expresses love for God and faith in him. He did not ignite this abode only to put it out. Moreover, at death one goes to God; it is the time when the circumference of the soul's finite life meets the infinite sphere of God, when "Love that was -- and Love too best to be -- / Meet -- and the Junction be Eternity" (622).

Although ED's God is silent and unknown, "All Circumstances are the Frame / In which His Face is Set --" (820). As à Kempis says, "all things tell of him." The poet's explorations of nature and the soul are therefore reverential; in both she finds "God's introductions" and awesome omens of the infinite. Poetry, too, is a way of learning of God, for it is the "Word made Flesh," the result of a union between the human and the divine. Like Herbert and other devotional poets, ED acknowledges poetry to be from God and therefore written for him.

ED's portrait of Jesus is distinct from that of God. He is a means of knowing something of the Father; he is God's "Envoy," the *Logos*, the human, accessible member of the Trinity. His perfect life is deserving of imitation; the poet therefore reworks and retells Gospel accounts of his life, death, and resurrection, acting as Orpheus or "little 'John,'" the warbling typic teller of the Christian message. Sometimes Jesus is portrayed as friend, at others as the "Tender Pioneer" who "hath traversed first" so that "No New Mile remaineth -- / Far as Paradise --" (698). In still others he is the exalted second person of the Trinity who assures the speaker of

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final salvation.

Since she rejects traditional prayers and sacraments, ED fashions her own fresh and original ones. In the prayer-poems to him, Jesus is the loving second person of the Trinity who is receptive to human prayers because he once had a human face "like our's." In the nuptial and soul-guest groups as in the Master poems and letters, Jesus is lover, bridegroom, or husband. He is sacred Muse and source of poetry, the marriage to him of the poet's soul on earth a prefiguration of her union with him in eternity.

This marriage of the soul to Jesus and poetry is but one instance of the poet's all-pervasive concern with the soul's experiences on this earth, its circumference. The ED canon is not the confessional account of her quotidian life, but rather a meditative autobiography of a "soul of fire" whose uneventful historical life is but an impassive "shell of pearl." Since she tells of her exploration of the soul and the effects of experiences on it, a search for events in the "little Circuit" of her everyday life which may have served as inspiration is almost always fruitless. Even when ED writes of poetry, her marriage to poetry, and the poetic dark night of the soul she sometimes suffers, she transcends personal autobiography. For "Each Life Converges to some Centre" (680); what matters is that one obtain one's own extent in whatsoever realm one chooses (1543). By extension, then, her poems about her own sacred vocation can apply to every human sphere of action. Like The

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Temple, the ED canon transcends personal meanings to achieve universal ones. It is her letter to the world about the pilgrimage of a representative but unique soul. The poems are the "Essential Oils . . . wrung" (P-675) from a metaphorical life lived in the presence of divinity; they are hymns to the divine creator and to the creation which tells of him. ED must be understood not only as an American poet, but also as one who wrote in the tradition of the poetry of devotion.

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PART FOUR: NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] According to the Rosenbaum Concordance, there are 35 poems in which "spirit," "spirit's," and "spirits" appear; 62, "mind" (as a noun); 116, "heart," "heart's," and "hearts"; 23, "consciousness" and "consciousness's"; 6, "self"; 21, "brain"; 149, "life" and "life's." In some, but not all, cases, these terms seem synonymous with soul. There are other poems in which the soul is suggested but not named. In the following poems, the soul is either specifically named or implied: 10, 42, 43, 45, 76, 78, 106, 126, 128, 129, 136, 139, 148, 159, 184, 206, 242, 244, 263, 269, 270, 277, 280, 281, 292, 303, 306, 314, 315, 317, 322, 332, 346, 351, 354, 357, 365, 369, 378, 383, 384, 393, 396, 405, 410, 412, 442, 472, 473, 474, 483, 493, 501, 512, 515, 524, 533, 552, 565, 577, 578, 587, 593, 594, 601, 603, 607, 613, 616, 618, 619, 622, 627, 642, 645, 646, 664, 670, 674, 677, 680, 683, 701, 709, 733, 744, 751, 753, 756, 768, 769, 770, 777, 788, 789, 798, 802, 822, 855, 876, 883, 889, 894, 915, 943, 945, 947, 948, 957, 967, 974, 976, 980, 997, 1005, 1033, 1039, 1055, 1084, 1090, 1100, 1103, 1120, 1142, 1151, 1165, 1225, 1243, 1262, 1263, 1288, 1297, 1310, 1311, 1332, 1343, 1347, 1351, 1357, 1399, 1402, 1414, 1420, 1425, 1430, 1431, 1451, 1454, 1482, 1486, 1492, 1496, 1515, 1533, 1541, 1543, 1567, 1576, 1601, 1617, 1620, 1623, 1630, 1634, 1661, 1663, 1677, 1680, 1691, 1695, 1705, 1721, 1727, 1729, 1733, 1737, 1756, 1760.

[2] Works of GH, p. 12, Lines 47-48.

[3] Anderson, pp. 55-56.

[4] Sherwood, pp. 219-220.

[5] Gelpi, Tenth Muse, pp. 268-279.

[6] See Gelpi, Tenth Muse, p. 299, for an interpretation of this poem as referring both to herself and her poems.

[7] ED uses "circumference" in letters as well as in poems. Her most puzzling use of the word is in a late letter to Mrs. Holland: "The Bible dealt with the Centre, not with the Circumference --" (950); she seems to refer to the paradoxical

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definition of God as "A circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" and may simply mean that the Bible is about God whose "circumference is nowhere." Her use of the word is less obscure in other letters. It refers to language in 946: "In all the circumference of Expression, those guileless words of Adam and Eve never were surpassed . . . "; here, the word is used simply as sphere. In 689 to Mrs. Holland, she concludes, "Give my Heart to each, and my slim Circumference to her who often shared it"; "Heart" seems to mean affection, "Circumference" her soul's earthly life which she often shared, especially in letters and poems, with Mrs. Holland. In 897 to Mrs. Sweetser, she writes, "I hope you are well as you deserve, which is a blest circumference . . . "; she wishes that her friend have the blessed life on earth she deserves.

[8] Higgins, p. 15.

[9] Prof. Sewall, Life, II, 688-694, cites markings in both the 1857 and 1876 editions, although he cautions that they may have been made by Sue.

[10] Leo Sherley-Price, "Introduction," Imitation, p. 15, says this of The Imitation.

[11] Imitation, p. 75.

[10] Francis Quarles, Emblems, Divine and Moral (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1845), p. 285; Imitation, p. 203.

[11] Leyda, Years and Hours, II, 474.

[14] Leyda, II, 476.

[15] Imitation, p. 31.

[16] "The Pulley," Works of GH, p. 159.

[17] Banzer, p. 430.

[18] Imitation, p. 67; p. 67; p. 76.

[19] Imitation, p. 27; p. 182.

[20] Gelpi, Tenth Muse, p. 278.

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