

GOD'S AMPUTATED RIGHT HAND:

ELEGY AND DICKINSON'S SEARCH FOR AN INTEGRATED UNIVERSE

by

Kathleen Darlington

A thesis

presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the
Department of English

Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1986

Kathleen Darlington, 1986



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KATHLEEN DARLINGTON

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ABSTRACT

This thesis determines that there is a full implicit pastoral elegy in Dickinson's corpus which includes all the major expected symbols, motifs, themes and concerns of traditional elegies. Her emergent elegy does not effect a break with traditional elegies, but it does intrinsically reflect her own temporal, geographical and sexual orientation. In particular her work reflects her Puritan background which she viewed with scepticism; her New England frugality, practicality and language; and the masculinity of her muse. She uses such personae as married women, speakers beyond the grave, world and cosmic travellers to project her own experience beyond the limits of human knowledge. In her search for an integrated cosmos and a "whole" God, she strives to reach the circumference of which she speaks in her poetry, and then to bridge the abyss which is signified beyond that circumference. Milton's "Lycidas," because of its Christian framework and careful inclusion of traditional elegiac forms, supplies the basic model by which to test the recurrence of elegiac components in Dickinson's poetry and the nature of her consolation. She offers some hope of an omnipotent, omniscient, integrated, caring God and of reunion in the Christian heaven, but her outstanding consolation is in the fact that poetry is only possible because of the fall into language which accompanied the fall from Grace and the concomitant human mortality. Through a symbolic marriage with her muse which necessitates, in a sense, the death of the everyday self, the poet undergoes a metamorphosis. Throughout her poetry Dickinson uses the key words "crown," "gem," "royalty," "water" and "whiteness" to symbolise the poet, and the trinity of bee, breeze and butterfly to symbolise the insemination, inspiration and metamorphosis of that poet. Although the poet is born through an awareness of death into loneliness, it is a loneliness which reveals eternity. Having rejected "Covenant Theology" she made her own poetic covenant with God through the immortality of language and the supremacy of poetry and the poet.

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DEDICATION

To E. Godin

for the strength shown in repeated bereavements
enabling me to seek my own consolation.

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CONTENTS

	page
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I -- ELEGIAC CONVENTIONS IN DICKINSON'S POETRY	4
CHAPTER II -- THE PROBLEM OF ELEGIAC CONSOLATION	52
CHAPTER III -- DEATH AND POETIC GENESIS	96
CONCLUSION	134
WORKS CITED	136
WORKS CONSULTED	145

INTRODUCTION

Any reader of Dickinson's poetry cannot help being aware of her overwhelming concern with death, the nature of God, and the possibility of a compensatory life after death. The heaven she seeks is one in which she can be reunited after death with those whom she loved, achieve what in this world is unattainable, and comprehend eternity. Of equal importance to her is the function of poetry and her role as poet. These concerns are those of many elegists.

This thesis determines that a full implicit and cumulative pastoral elegy, which includes all the major expected symbols, motifs, themes and concerns of traditional elegies, emerges within Dickinson's corpus. "Lycidas," because of its Christian framework and careful inclusion of traditional elegiac forms, supplies the basic model by which to test the recurrence of elegiac components in her poetry. Not infrequently these components are modified by the circumstances of her time, place and sex. Dickinson's achievement in breaking through social mores and the domination of male poetics, although she is not without predecessors, must be acknowledged. In particular her work reflects her Puritan background which she viewed with scepticism; her New England frugality, practicality and language; and the masculinity of her muse. The masculinity of her muse is of paramount importance in understanding the complex relationship of suitor, marriage, death and poetic genesis in her corpus. The discussion of the nature of her muse is central not only to chapter one but also to the entire thesis.

Each chapter will explicate one key poem central to the theme of

the chapter. For chapter one the poem is "The Gentian weaves her fringes" (18); for chapter two, "Those- dying then" (1551); and for chapter three, "Her- 'last Poems'" (312). Chapter one establishes the existence of an emergent elegy by considering the characteristics of the traditional pastoral elegy. Chapter two, in discussing the nature of elegiac consolation in Dickinson's corpus, is concerned with the integrity of God, the nature of faith and heaven, the efficacy of prayer, and consolation per se. Chapter three discusses poetic genesis and its relationship with death.

Only two scholars, Thomas H. Johnson in Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography and Thomas W. Ford in Heaven Beguiles The Tired, seem to discuss "elegy" in Dickinson's poetry. Johnson writes, "One of her very last poems -- and by now she composed only elegies -- was . . . in memory of Helen Jackson" (230-31), and he continues by quoting in full the four line poem "The immortality she gave" (1648). Ford writes,

Examples of the fourth group of death poems, elegiac verse, are plentiful in the early years, and towards the end of her life she wrote almost nothing but elegies. (Elegy, as used here, has nothing to do with any particular meter, but refers simply to those poems that offer a lament for, a tribute to, or in some way commemorate the dead.)

In many of Emily Dickinson's elegies one can identify the person for whom she intended the verse, but many more are so general that she appears to have written them to imaginary individuals. Though she sent a number of elegies as notes of sympathy to families who had suffered loss by death, her principal reason for writing was akin to that responsible for all her death poetry: the need to understand death and to relieve doubts and insecurities associated with the phenomenon.

Although there can be no quarrel with Ford's understanding that Dickinson certainly needed to come to terms with death, both critics are really only discussing individual epitaphs. Neither postulates a cumulative elegy emerging within her corpus.

The fact that this thesis proves there is an implicit elegy in Dickinson's work is in no way intended to suggest that all her poems fit into the elegiac pattern nor to invalidate other readings of her work. Because of her ambiguity, her unconventional punctuation, her convoluted syntax, and the lack of her definitive edition of her own work, many different readings may be valid and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Many of her poems can "mean" different things, and even a symbol or cluster of symbols can be consistently interpreted in more than one way.

Since I first encountered Dickinson's work after the publication of Johnson's The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, I was not handicapped by the attempts of editors such as Colonel Higginson "to smooth rhymes, regularize the meter, delete provincialisms, and substitute 'sensible' metaphors" (Johnson, Poems ix). I will be pleased if this thesis helps to diminish the "Myth of Amherst" -- Emily, the frustrated spinster in white -- and further our understanding of the poet Dickinson.

ELEGIAC CONVENTIONS IN DICKINSON'S POETRY

Some things that fly there be-
 Birds- Hours- the Bumblebee-
 Of these no Elegy.

Some things that stay there be-
 Grief- Hills- Eternity-
 Nor this behooveth me.

There are that resting, rise.
 Can I expound the skies?
 How still the Riddle lies!

(89)

Throughout her poetry Dickinson strives to solve the riddle of life, death, and eternity. She often writes in the elegiac mode, using such symbols as birds, bees and crickets, and expressing such emotions as grief and despair. Her investigation into the recurrence of death leads to a polymorphic expression of a series of states of consciousness from innocence, to experience, to chaos, to an order that often seems to be illusory. Although her poetry does not contain a single complete traditional pastoral elegy, this thesis will show that not only has her work a marked tendency toward the elegiac but that her corpus contains an implicit pastoral elegy.

Dickinson orders the experience of loss and bereavement; explores the existence of God and immortality; and, through the fall of innocence into experience which facing one's own mortality epitomises, attempts to discover the role and justification of the poet. These are the themes explored in elegies, and the search for meaning in life and

death becomes more urgent as God becomes less certain. It is death itself that gives life its intensity and urgency, and Dickinson's strength lies in her unflinching examination of the landscape of her mind to the very threshold of death.

Since Dickinson did not arrange and edit a definitive edition of her work, the order in which we read her poetry, and the relationships thus established, tend to be somewhat arbitrary. In The Marriage of Emily Dickinson, William Shurr states,

The accidents of preservation and publication have in most cases obscured Dickinson's intended settings and sequences. The original dismantling of the fascicles and sets, subsequent publication of the poems under artificial headings or subjects, even chronological printing of the poems by Johnson, where the chronology is determined by the latest version of each poem -- all of these conditions have removed or obscured signs of any connections Dickinson may have established when she gathered the poems into collections. In some cases poems which appear sequentially in the fascicles are found separated by as many as several hundred other poems in Johnson's critical edition.

(2)

To further confuse the reader, many of Dickinson's poems were never gathered by her into fascicles or sets. R.W. Franklin explains in The Editing of Emily Dickinson:

The poems Emily Dickinson bound into fascicles had been carefully copied on sheets of stationery generally of uniform size. The poems in the envelopes frequently were on odd-shaped scraps of paper -- everything from newspaper clippings to brown paper sacks -- that the poet used when jotting down her sudden inspiration.

(35)

The lack of any coherent, convincing arrangement of her poems

necessitates some structural device for investigating Dickinson's corpus. For clarity, concision and focus this paper will look at some of her poems which lie within various aspects of the elegiac tradition. Using an elegiac framework, this thesis will show that Dickinson, in her search for an integrated universe, strives to extend the limits of human knowledge by investigating the nature of God, death and eternity. She uses fictive personae as the centres of consciousness through which she continuously explores diverse human experiential radials in an attempt to reach beyond the circumference of the rational.

A brief synopsis of the conventions of the elegiac tradition will act as a skeleton to structure the discussion of poems which constitute Dickinson's cumulative elegy. With variations and modifications, the traditional pastoral elegy, from Theocritus to Shelley, invokes the muses; announces the death; expresses grief; describes the procession of mourners; seeks and finds consolation; and offers the particular elegy as a wreath to adorn the coffin and, also, as a sign of the emergence of a new poet as successor to the dead. Obviously individual elegists concentrate on each aspect to a greater or lesser extent, and omit some "conventions" and introduce others. Similarly, there are such traditional symbols as shepherds, pipers, flowers, the nightingale, and the evening star which becomes the morning star. Again, poets modify, omit or replace any of these symbols.¹ Moschus,² for example, in "The Epitaph for Bion: Idyll III," introduces the idea of poetic succession (Gow pp.135 & 137); Petrarch uses political tirades (Heath-Stubbs 16), which then become an optional part of elegy; Phineas Fletcher, in his Piscatorie Eclogs (vol.2,

175-222), substitutes fishermen for shepherds; and Whitman, in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Americanises the nightingale into the hermit thrush.

Much of the elegiac tradition parallels the experience of bereavement, mourning and acceptance. Both elegy and funeral ritual are used to order the experience of death in an attempt to help the bereaved come to terms with that death. If, therefore, such a poet as Dickinson were investigating death and loss, independently of the elegiac tradition, a certain similarity between that tradition and her poems might well emerge. Her images and symbols might be similar to, but distinct from, the conventional, and her emphases and proportions will almost certainly be different. Points of divergence and tangency will be discussed throughout this thesis: one example is in the poem which opens this chapter. Birds and hours³ are traditional mourners whereas bees are not, but Dickinson predominantly uses birds and bees throughout her poetry rather than hours. In her attempt to find meaning in life and death, in her exploration of the possibility of life after death, and in her concern to understand the nature of an uncertain God, she approaches the problems arising from the contemplation of death from her own peculiar angle of vision.

The first chapter of this thesis will be concerned with the nature and purpose of elegy, and with the following elegiac conventions, themes and symbols: pathetic fallacy; memento mori; a digression on the nature of Dickinson's muse and her use of personae; the invocation of her muse; the announcement of death and the lament; mourning, grief and bereavement; funerals, coffins and graves; the processional; commemorative flowers; the eulogy; apotheosis,

metamorphosis and transformation; various perceptions of death; the act of dying; the nature of the death of others and of oneself; the ability to adjust to death; the relationship between death, love and sexual encounter; and the recession.

Elegies traditionally have a pastoral setting, and Dickinson, also, uses nature or the garden, directly or indirectly, to make elegiac comments. Elegies are often set in the fall of the year,⁴ either because the death occurred in the fall or through the use of pathetic fallacy. Dickinson often equates the departure of summer with the approach of death. One Dickinson poem that might be placed in the composite elegiac mode of autumnal pastoral is "The Gentian weaves her fringes."

The Gentian weaves her fringes-
The Maple's loom is red-
My departing blossoms
 Obviate parade.

A brief, but patient illness-
An hour to prepare,
And one below this morning
Is where the angels are-
It was a short procession,
The Bobolink was there-
An aged Bee addressed us-
And then we knelt in prayer-
We trust that she was willing-
We ask that we may be.
Summer- Sister- Seraph!
Let us go with thee!

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

(18).

The departing summer creates her own elegiac symbols in the late-flowering gentian and the red leaves of the maple. These two

plants function as floral tributes; the procession of mourners, since they "Obviate parade"; and the mourning of nature which is the expression of pathetic fallacy in elegies. The bobolink is part of the processional and may also be a chorister as it is in "Some Keep the Sabbath" (324). There is the suggestion of memento mori in "We ask that we may be" willing to die, which again can be associated with the sentiments in "Some Keep the Sabbath" (324) in which the persona "instead of getting to Heaven at last-/[Is] going all along."

The final three lines of Poem 18 are a parody on the Christian ritual phrase "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost Amen (Matt 28, 19). However, inasmuch as the poem is an elegy for summer, there is an appropriateness in Dickinson's trinity of the bee, the butterfly and the breeze, all three being natural symbols of summer. Furthermore, the bee, for Dickinson a symbol of insemination, is a naturalistic father to plants; the butterfly, with its metamorphosis from earthly worm to heavenly beauty, can be seen as a type of the transformation of resurrection epitomised by Christ (this aspect of the butterfly will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter); and the breeze, as the breath of life, can be equated with the Holy Ghost, the spiritus sanctus.

The phrase "one below this morning" refers both to the first frost which puts the killing touch on the herbage, and also to burial which leads to the consequent resurrection to "where the angels are." The theme of resurrection is also present in the movement of "Summer-Sister- Seraph," with its implicit associative metamorphosis from summer to earthly sister to heavenly seraph. It is the underlying reference to human mortality that undercuts the seeming parody and

invests "And then we knelt in prayer" with a degree of Christian elegiac sincerity. Poem 18 alone could not justify the claim that Dickinson's corpus contains a serious implicit elegy, but it does serve as an indication of Dickinson's complex approach to elegiac topics.

Dickinson sees autumn as intrinsically elegiac, and the cricket as the most appropriate of all elegiac symbols. The cricket brings the "lower metres of the Year" ("The murmuring of Bees" [1115]), and it is the sound of the cricket that

The Typic Mother sends
As Accent fades to interval
With separating Friends
(1115)

The elegiac mood of the end of summer, epitomised by crickets, takes on religious and sacramental overtones in

Further in Summer than the Birds
Pathetic from the Grass
A minor nation celebrates
Its unobtrusive Mass.

Remit as yet no Grace
No furrow on the Glow
Yet a Druidic Difference
Enhances Nature now

(1068).

The sacramental overtones are supplied by such words as "celebrates," "Mass," "Grace" and "Canticle."⁵

The cricket in Dickinson's poetry may serve as a type of the traditional elegiac nightingale. In Johnson's edition of Dickinson's corpus, the last lines of her last poem are "The cricket is her utmost/Of elegy to me" ("The earth has many keys" [1775]). As stated

earlier, there is no definitive edition of her work, but it seems singularly appropriate that those lines should be placed as the last words of her last poem, and so serve as her elegiac epitaph.

Elegiacally death is associated with fall and consolation with spring. Northrop Frye writes of "Lycidas," in Fables of Identity, "Sunset, winter, and the sea are emblems of Lycidas' death; sunrise and spring, of his resurrection" (120). Until consolation has been found, however, although death itself is often associated with fall, spring accentuates the poignancy of loss, because all nature revives in the spring except the beloved dead.⁶ The intensification of the pain of bereavement is epitomised in "I dreaded that first Robin, so."

I dreaded that first Robin, so,
But He is mastered, now,
I'm some accustomed to Him grown,
He hurts a little, though-

. . .

I dared not meet the Daffodils-
For fear their Yellow Gown
Would pierce me with a fashion
So foreign to my own-

. . .

I could not bear the Bees should come,
I wished they'd stay away
In those dim countries where they go,
What word had they, for me?

They're here, though; not a creature failed-
No Blossom stayed away
In gentle deference to me-
The Queen of Calvary-

Each one salutes me, as he goes,
And I, my childish Plumes,
Lift, in bereaved acknowledgement
Of their unthinking Drums-

(348).

The mourner feels that all the world should mourn the loss, a feeling traditionally expressed in elegies as pathetic fallacy. However, even if a mourner has never read an elegy, she will probably feel that same intensification of pain with the coming of spring. Pathetic fallacy is not only a poetic convention but is also a normal response to extreme emotion. As Eric Smith writes, in By Mourning Tongues, "It is, as it were, a symptom of grief that makes the mind to be, and to want to be, indistinct from Nature . . ." (114). It is a commonplace at funerals if the weather is foul to say it is appropriate but if the weather is fair to say it is ironic, as if the weather were intrinsically associated with the emotions of the mourner. But the signs of spring never stay away in deference to the bereaved, not even for "The Queen of Calvary."

In the year following bereavement there may be times when it is impossible to see any hope of joy, partly because during the mourning process the mourner often becomes insecure and, to a greater or lesser extent, doubts the stability of her own identity. The insecure identity felt when grieving is expressed by the juxtaposition of queenly and childish personae when the world will not stop for this queen of sorrows and her "childish Plumes" with their funereal connotations.

If "plumes" has overtones of pen, which it does for me, then the "Queen of Calvary" can only express herself childishly. In our lives we are aware, by the wordless ululation of the bereaved and the truism that "there are no words to express the grief," both of the inarticulateness of grief and of the desire and need to express it. Wordsworth writes in his elegy "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from

Recollections of Early Childhood" (to be referred to in this paper as the "Ode"),

To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong

(22-24)

The elegist is aware of the inadequacy of words to express grief while, at the same time, knowing that it is necessary to order the grief to come to terms with the bereavement.⁷ This sense of imperfection in expression is within the elegiac tradition. "I dreaded" is not an elegy yet expresses both natural mourning and elegiac elements.

Dickinson studied Latin at school, but we do not know what, if any, acquaintance she had with the classical elegies (Jack Capps, Emily Dickinson's Reading 189-90). Nor do we know whether she was familiar with "Lycidas." Capps writes, "Her interest in Milton was a continuing one that included more than Paradise Lost" (71). He mentions her references to Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes, and "Milton's sonnet, 'To the Lord General Cromwell'" (72). Her interest in Milton "extended as far as Ann Manning's biography of Milton's first wife," (71-72), and passages in both "Il Penseroso" and "L'Allegro" are marked in the anthology of poetry in the Dickinson library (72). It seems reasonable to assume that Dickinson may, at least, have read "Lycidas," and within possibility that she was aware of the pastoral elegiac tradition. We do know that she quotes from Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" (Capps 78) and his work uses both pastoral and bucolic, but the implication of his influence on her poetry is beyond the scope of this paper. Dickinson's expression of pastoral elegiac elements is so modified that it is

difficult to say whether she is working consciously within the tradition or merely expressing a common human reaction to death.

Although her intention in using the three symbols, robin, bees and daffodils in "I dreaded that first Robin" (348), cannot be stated definitively, it is appropriate to see how they relate to both funeral ritual and elegiac convention. Only the flowers are used at funerals as a symbol of resurrection. Although the daffodil is not a common funereal flower it does, like the robin, epitomise the renewal of spring. Both flowers and birds are elegiac symbols, although the lone bird singing became a major elegiac symbol in the Romantic era.⁸ The flowers are traditionally the violet, rose or lily rather than the daffodil, and the bird is often a nightingale rather than a robin, but Milton sets a precedent for not using the nightingale, and his commemorative flowers include "Daffadillies" (150).

Bees never seem to be considered in discussions of accepted elegiac conventions, although there is some classical elegiac precedence in the pastoral laments. Theocritus says, in "Idyll I," that where Anchises is in the underworld "There are oaks and galingale [sedge], and sweetly hum the bees about the hives" (106-07). Oaks and sedges are accepted traditional conventions; therefore, by association, presumably bees may be so too. Moschus also writes, "honey [flowed not] from the hives; it perished for sorrow in the comb, for now that thy honey has perished none should gather it more" (p.134). Virgil, in "Eclogue V," says, "long as bees feed on thyme and the cicadas on dew" (77), giving both bees and crickets, (as modified cicadas) pastoral status. "I dreaded" (348), with its bird, bees and flowers, elegiac tone, and pathetic fallacy, is within the elegiac tradition but not

necessarily influenced by that tradition.

The emotional and poetic relationships between natural symbols and sorrow give rise to pathetic fallacy. Music and poetry can transform both sorrow and symbol into aesthetic delight, and this transformation is especially apparent in requiems and elegies. Shelley, in "To a Skylark," writes, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought" (90). But the relationship between life and art is reciprocal. The human imagination and power of association recall the sadness of loss when confronted by beauty. In the "Ode" Wordsworth writes, "To me the meanest flower that blows can give/Thoughts that do often lie to deep for tears" (206-07). Dickinson writes that the bird-song in the spring is "The saddest noise, the sweetest noise" (1764) because

It makes us think of all the dead
That sauntered with us here,

. . . .
We almost wish those siren throats
Would go and sing no more.

An ear can break a human heart
As quickly as a spear,
We wish the ear had not a heart
So dangerously near.

She is aware of the human tendency to distort nature by our own emotions. "When I hoped, I recollect/ . . . /Not a frost could cool" (768). Despite the sun, "When I feared, I recollect/ . . . / how Nature froze-/Icicles upon my soul" But when she despaired not only was it night, but even now she wishes an eclipse between her and that memory. Verifiable objective fact is distorted by subjective perception.

The power of association can, however, function in both directions. It is our very mortality, the knowledge that our time on earth is limited and the date of its termination is unknown, that enhances earthly beauty. To live to our greatest capacity in the conscious knowledge of our mortality is the essence of memento mori. Both "To make Routine a Stimulus/Remember it can cease" (1196), and

Uncertain lease- develops lustre
 On Time
 Uncertain Grasp, appreciation
 Of Sum-
 (857)

express the sense that the awareness of death enriches life.

But memento mori reaches a higher plane if, in the light of the uncertainty of life, you "Endow the Living- with the Tears-/You squander on the Dead" (521). The dead, being insensate, have no use for tears or words. We can only strengthen each other with words, as do the "Two Travellers perishing in Snow" (933), until the moment of death. These sentiments also have elegiac significance because the moment the mourner realises that the tears are not for the dead but for the bereaved the consolation can begin.

The dead are as cold and hard as stone, and are as indifferent to "June Noon- as January Night" ("What care the Dead?" [592]). Death is absolute. The dead cannot feel the heat of summer, hear the bird sing or see the "Purple Ribaldry" of sunrise. The "reverential Hyacinth" of Poem 933 probably refers to the colour of the evening sky, possibly reflected in the snow -- snow which may also be metaphorical as in

Dying! Dying in the night!
 Won't somebody bring the light

So I can see which way to go
 Into the everlasting snow?
 (158)

The choice of "Hyacinth" (933) rather than any other word, such as the purple of Poem 592, to describe the light may not be just fortuitous. The hyacinth, the classical flower of elegiac sorrow (Moschus, p.133), appropriately marks the travellers' passing.

Only the living are sensate and worthy of the gift of spices.
 Spices are possibly words or poetry for

They have a little Odor- that to me
 Is metre- nay- 'tis melody-
 And spiciest at fading- indicate-
 A Habit- of a Laureate-
 (785).

Also, "Spices- stimulate the time/Till my small Library . . . satisfy" (Unto my Books- so good to turn" [604]). Since the writing of the elegy is partially to help both the elegist and the mourners to order the experience of death, the elegy, also, is for the living.

The persona who says, "The Soul should always stand ajar" (1055) for heaven, is advocating perpetual awareness, again indicative of a memento mori poem. But death will not depart however long one fumbles at the latch -- we all know death is insistent. It is heaven which will depart. This heaven which can be experienced on earth, if one is open to such a mystical experience, is not the Christian celestial heaven because, in a Christian framework, heaven can only be attained after death.

It is significant that Poem 1055, concerned with the possibility of experiencing heaven on earth, is one of the many in which Dickinson

uses the image of the house. It is permissible to retire within a house provided one does not completely close and bolt the door. In fact, it seems that retiring into the house is desirable because heaven will know where to find one and, further, with distractions at a minimum, there is less risk that heaven will be "shy of troubling Her." Agoraphobia⁹ may serve Dickinson as a necessary poetic condition. It also seems that mysticism, like other experiences, is cumulative. If heaven once rejected will be "Her Visitor, no more," there is the implication that if heaven is not rejected on its first visit a second visit may occur. By extension, repeated visits may be anticipated if heaven is always welcome. Leaving the door ajar is a metaphor for memento mori.

A digression upon the nature of Dickinson's muse and her use of personae must precede a consideration of the traditional elegiac invocation of the muse. Because King was destined for the ministry, and Milton was concerned with the state of the Church in England, Milton's ecclesiastical digression is integral to "Lycidas." Similarly, because Dickinson was a woman, and the male poet's muse is traditionally considered female, her digression on the nature of her muse and her use of fictive personae are integral to her resultant elegy. Only by trying to understand the nature of her muse can we hope to comprehend her expression of the relationship between suitor, death, pregnancy and poetic genesis.

Freudian critics, especially, state that Dickinson's sexual repression was either caused by, or led to, a fear of men as evidenced by her portrayal of the male. Further, according to such critics, her fears in general, originating from her fears of sexual encounters, led

to an obsession with death.¹⁰ But poets who have used the elegiac tradition -- with the exception of the so-called graveyard school of poets in eighteenth-century England -- have not been accused of being obsessed with death. Psychological critics may lose sight of the ways in which Dickinson's poetry, rather than being obsessive, is elegiac.

In Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender, Vivian Pollak states,

Most of Emily Dickinson's poetry, and all of it that matters, originates in frustration. . . . I mean to suggest that Dickinson's identity crisis was, broadly speaking, a crisis of sexual identity, that her poetry associates love and social power, and that, as the laureate of the dispossessed, Dickinson is also the laureate of sexual despair. . . . Consequently, to know Dickinson is to know her antagonists, which have often been described as nature, God, time and death.

(9-10)

It is difficult definitively to determine the emotional impetus for individual Dickinson poems. It may well be impossible to discover the intellectual stimulus and psychological landscape (even if the latter were desirable) for her whole corpus, even if there were agreement on which of her poems "matter."

Although this thesis will show that there is an implicit elegy within her corpus, it is not suggesting that all her poems can be fitted neatly into such a category, nor is there any intention of invalidating all other readings. However, since it is in the nature of elegy to confront death and one's own mortality and, for a member of a religious community, thoughts of mortality will lead to thoughts of God, the contemplation of death and eternity will evoke contemplation of life and mutability -- "time." Pastoral elegies use, for metaphorical purposes, the contrast between the mutability of the

individual and the perpetuation of the species within "nature." The major facets of Dickinson's cumulative elegy are her consciousness of unavoidable mortality, her investigation of death and its effects, and her attempts at reconciliation with the fact of death. In that she may be considered "the laureate of the dispossessed," the dispossessed for whom she speaks are all who, since the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, suffer the resultant human condition, especially the consciousness of mortality.

It is possible that, rather than sexual despair and a fear of men, Dickinson had a fearful desire to reconcile feminine and masculine principles within herself. There is an important aspect of femaleness that exists irrespective of society, or sexual performance or lack thereof, but is an intrinsic aspect of sexuality. We all seek completion and many of us, as Plato explains in The Symposium (60-69), seek to find this completion in the opposite sex. However, recurringly there have been prophets, oracles and seers who have remained celibate to better serve as conduits for revelation. The Cumaean Sybil, for example, "not yet being open to Phoebus rages furiously in her cavern on the chance that she could shake off the mighty god from her breast [and] by so much the more . . . he fashions her with constraint" (Aeneid VI 77-80, translation my own). Even so might Dickinson fight, actively or passively, against her muse before being overpowered. Her possession by her muse could appear to reflect her attitudes towards males but the possession may well be the overpowering of her conscious by her subconscious mind, in the same way that oracles and the Cumaean Sybil are possessed of the gods. Dickinson's muse, like that of the Cumaean Sybil, could be Phoebus, god of poetry, who is also the sun

god, since for Dickinson the masculine principle is often equated with the sun, especially at noon.

Although psychoanalytical approaches to Dickinson's poetry tend to be mechanistic, forcing her corpus into a uniform and controlled unity through a preconceived critical perception, for convenience this paper will use, as Gelpi does in the following quotation, the Jungian concept of anima and animus. According to Jungians, each of us is seeking union either with her male animus or his female anima. If for a male poet the muse is his anima, it follows that Dickinson's muse is her animus. The masculinity of Dickinson's muse is as relevant within her elegiac context as is the femaleness of Urania to whom Shelley addresses his appeal in "Adonais."

Various critics, such as Gelpi, Gilbert and Homans, mention the masculinity of Dickinson's animus, and some indicate that her muse might be male, but none seems to reach a satisfying synthetic conclusion. Gelpi, although he later confuses the issue with Freudian analysis, has a useful Jungian discussion in The Tenth Muse. He writes,

The "lover" in Emily Dickinson's poetry, therefore, reveals himself not so much as a person or God or Jesus but rather as an essential component of her personality. Jung's term for the masculine elements in the female psyche is the animus. . . . Thus the "other" -- even if a person actually precipitated the crisis, indeed even if the "masculine" catalyst were a woman -- exists in the poetry and in Dickinson's emotional life chiefly as a mask for aspects of herself, potentialities within herself struggling for expression and accommodation within the psyche. . . .

The poet assumes a passive-feminine role before the overwhelming possession by the god; the poet is a prophetess, a vessel overflowing to expression, an oracle whose responsibility is to find human expression for the divine wordlessness.

(249-50 & 288)

Although the "mask for aspects of herself" may be insufficiently complex to account for her multiple personae, "the overwhelming possession by the god" helps to explain the sexual encounters with death which lead to poetic genesis within her corpus.

Gilbert, in "A Woman -- White: Emily Dickinson's Yarn of Pearl," verges on some awareness but also becomes bogged down in Freudian terms. She writes,

[T]he male-female relationship is "really" that of father and daughter, master and scholar/slave, ferocious "man of noon" and vulnerable flower of dawn, reverent or rebellious Nobody and (to borrow a useful neologism from William Blake) omnipotent omnipresent Nobodaddy.

But the fact that Dickinson's poetry suggests such complicated relationships between the female Self and the male Other immediately suggests also the complexity of her art as well as the insistent ambiguity with which even at her most humble and "innocent" she reconciled those apparent opposites of feminine submission and poetic assertion.

(Madwoman 587)

It is Dickinson's attitude to the "insistent ambiguity" of the "omnipotent omnipresent Nobodaddy" that creates the need to come to terms with the effects of death and, paradoxically, her submission to the "ferocious 'man of noon'" that gives rise to her "poetic assertion."

In Women Writers and Poetic Identity, Margaret Homans writes,

Many of Dickinson's poems on poetry are . . . about, or enact, relationships between the speaker and a range of powerful masculine figures. The speaker's attitude shifts, from poem to poem, between love, anguish, desire, fear, and humility, and the figure addressed may be God, an apparently human lover, death, awe, Master [T]hese masculine figures function something like a muse. [She] love[s] and fear[s] these figures, and . . . indicate[s] a sense of alienation from their poetic powers.

(207)

Homans sees some relationship between the masculine figures in Dickinson's poetry and her muse but lacks precision. Joanne Feit Diehl, in Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination, postulates that Dickinson, being female, has a problem with respect to the whole male concept of the traditional muse. Diehl writes, "The relationship between the male poet and his muse is a private courtship . . . in which . . . he may win his muse from [his poetic] father" (18). There is no convention for a female poet and her muse.

One might, by reading Dickinson's poetry, by combining abstractions from such critical approaches as indicated here, and from some understanding of Freudian and Jungian psychology, derive the synthesis that there is a strong relationship between the animus, the muse, the suitor and death, so that a figurative death can lead to marriage with the suitor which, in turn, via the agency of the muse, can lead to the birth of poetry. The relationship between death, suitor and marriage will be investigated later in this chapter, and the whole question of Dickinson's muse will be re-opened and explored further in chapter three.

Dickinson's femaleness and dependency had certain advantages for a poet, according to Jane Donahue Eberwein, in "Doing Without: Dickinson as Yankee Woman Poet." Eberwein writes,

From a purely artistic point of view, Dickinson enjoyed the most privileged literary life in nineteenth-century America. While [male writers were conscious of financial considerations], Dickinson was simply writing. She never haggled for a publisher's advance, stopped work on a project because it might not sell, or worried about financial obligations. In a sense, Edward Dickinson presented her with a lifelong creative writing fellowship as her birthright. While other women authors scribbled with children tugging at their skirts and husbands awaiting dinner, Dickinson

took for granted what Virginia Woolf would later say every woman artist craves: a room of her own.

(217)

Again, there is an oversimplification. Although Dickinson did not have a husband and children, she did have a father and invalid mother. Eberwein seems to be indirectly belittling the time required for home-making. Dickinson's imagery arises from her domestic circumstances and the potential for their creative transformation,¹¹ as does her perception of death and consolation.

Of course, in the nineteenth-century American milieu, the fact that a poet is a woman is significant because of the influences upon her that she accepts, uses, or resists. Obviously there were strong influences on Dickinson's development as a poet: the traditional female role she was expected to accept, her partially self-enforced enclosure within the confines of house and garden, and the patriarchal system she had to deal with, including her dominant father who denounced women's suffrage (Gelpi, Mind 7), her preceptors, and God. However, as Homans says, "Cultural patterns may help to determine sexual identity, but the powerful poet can, if she chooses, adapt these patterns to her own purposes" (6). This thesis suggests that Dickinson creates a new mode for elegy just as her male contemporary, Whitman, does, but that neither poet truly breaks with the tradition, only "adapts these patterns to her [or his] own purposes." Dickinson's achievement in breaking through social mores and the domination of male poetics, although she is not without predecessors, must be acknowledged.

Patriarchal language potentially imprisons women because of its tendency to determine limits for the expression of a woman's

experience, thinking, feeling and symbolism. Dickinson's use of images of garden and home are abundant. As Richard Chase writes, in Emily Dickinson, "A house is one of our poet's favorite symbols of the mind" (130) -- perhaps with her conscious mind as the main floor, her muse and mysticism as the attic, and her subconscious as the cellar. Her images come from the small world she inhabited, not as small images but as microcosms. Such a biographical detail as Dickinson's decision to wear a white dress, for example, and its concomitant psychological significance, only becomes of importance if, and as, it is used in her poetry. Chapter three will consider such symbolic acts. It is the poetry, not the particular psychology or minute biography of the poet, which should be of primary concern.

Many critics have spent much time trying to determine the date and nature of Dickinson's "breakdown" while, at the same time, seeking the identity of her supposed lover.¹² John Cody, in After Great Pain, says that Dickinson's psychological "experience involved a loss of reality contact" (30). In the absence of definitive proof of either breakdown or sexual experience it is valid to view Dickinson's portrayal of these experiences, together with her obviously imaginative accounts of her personal experience of death, as projections. Such projections are neither strictly biographical nor strictly fictional since they originate in Dickinson's personal experience but, in their exploration of possibilities, reach beyond that experience. The personae of poems which involve such projections may be considered fictive. Three such fictive personae are married women, world and cosmic travellers, and the voice beyond the grave. Her "loss of reality" is an extension of experiential radials through which she

attempts to penetrate the circumference of mortality and rationality.

The use of fictive personae is functional, and probably essential, in Dickinson's poetry. As Sharon Cameron writes in Lyric

Time:

If not by a plurality of characters, how does the lyric represent division, conflict, and multiple points of view? If seeming to defy the social world from which it is set apart, how is it coerced back into relationship with that world? . . . For lyric speech is not the recognizable voice of its author, and if we conceive of it as issuing from an anonymous speaker, we are still far from ascertaining its mysterious source. Neither speech nor thought as we know it, not simply different in kind of language but also in function, lyric speech is not a remembrance of the diverted or altered presence, but a distinct contradiction of the reality from which it diverges. . . . Lyric speakers do not even have names, and in their shirking of name they diverge from real persona [sic] or rather from single persona. Thus the lyric is a departure not only from temporality but also from the finite constrictions of identity. . . . [T]he displacement of speech from a definitive context, the namelessness of the lyric speaker and the gratuitousness of her history, the lyric's travel backwards and forwards restlessly over the same ground -- all these features that unhinge time from its fixtures and reduce it to a unity -- are present in the earliest lyrics we can examine.

(23, 207, 208, & 241)

In lyric poetry the use of fictive personae is both functional and traditional. In pastoral elegy, fictive personae can serve the same universalising purpose as classical personae, thus becoming functional and modifying the tradition. By her use of fictive personae Dickinson overcomes the limitations of a patriarchal classical tradition. If "lyric speech is . . . a distinct contradiction of the reality from which it diverges," then Dickinson's seeming loss of "reality contact" (Cody 30) may have an explanation in her poetics.

Although Dickinson rarely refers to her muse, she does partially follow the elegiac convention of invoking her muse to aid her in singing a requiem for the dead. She so modifies the convention that it is impossible to be certain that she is consciously working within the elegiac tradition. But it is difficult to believe that she is merely expressing a human reaction to death when the following poem opens with the traditional reference to the lute, the equivalent of elegiac pipers and Milton's "Oaten Flute" ("Lycidas" 33).

Put up my lute!
 What of- my Music!
 Since the sole ear I cared to charm-
 Passive- as Granite- laps My Music-
 Sobbing- will suit- as well as psalm!

Would but the "Memnon" of the Desert-
 Teach me the strain
 That vanquished Him-
 When He- surrendered to the Sunrise-
 Maybe- that- would awaken- them!

(261)

It is significant that Dickinson calls upon the male "Memnon" to act as her muse.

The first stanza has affinities with Spenser's "A Egloga November." Thenot says to Colin, "Thy Muse too long slombreth in sorrowing" (3). Like Colin, the persona of Poem 261 no longer cares to sing since the dead cannot hear. In the second stanza, she wishes to have the ability to charm the dead awake, but rather than the more obvious Orpheus and Euridice myth used by Moschus (p.137), she uses Memnon. Pausanias writes, "Memnon . . . is a statue . . . and every day at the rising of the sun it makes a noise, and the sound one could best liken to that of a harp or lyre" (XLII, 3).¹³ Because the

statue seems to awaken at sunrise, she desires to learn "that strain" in the hope that "it would awaken" the dead. Failing that, "Sobbing-will suit- as well as psalm!"

One example of Dickinson's use of the traditional announcement of the death and the elegiac lament is that expressed by the persona of "If he were living" (734) when she accepts that "'Buried': 'He!'/My life just holds the trench" This lament is obviously divergent from the traditional "I cry 'Woe for Adonis'" (Bion, p.144) or "O, weep for Adonais" ("Adonais" 2), but amply expresses the bleak despair of the persona.

Within the elegiac tradition, the lament is often followed by anger at the absence of those who should have prevented the death. Inasmuch as one can talk about a normal pattern of emotion after bereavement, the lethargy of despair has to be replaced by a more active emotion, often anger. As the Black Knight in The Book of the Duchess has to overcome despair as a first step to the comfort brought about by grief and acceptance, so must all mourners. The persona, when "Bereaved of all" (784), attempts to escape the sense of loss by going abroad -- possibly a journey of the mind. However, because the deceased is in the grave the persona can no longer disassociate love from the grave. Love and death are inextricably mixed. The grave as the symbol of despair and buried hope cannot be left behind until the persona enters another stage of mourning. The loss of hope epitomised by the trench and the grave is typical of the initial state of mourning, a mental landscape of utter despair which is larger than any sea or continent. There is nowhere to go to seek relief. The grave is passive -- absolute despair. Although the change in memory from grave

to spade is horrific (784), it is, in fact, an improvement. Despite the implication which the spade carries with it of digging the same grave or, as Ford writes in Heaven Beguiles the Tired, "ready at any time to dig another grave" (124), the active fear the spade induces is preferable to the previous despair.

The greater the ecstasy the greater the pain -- the depth of love can, to some extent, be measured by the pain of separation.

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

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittance of years-
Bitter contested farthings-
And coffers heaped with Tears!
(125)

The "contested farthings" are reminiscent of "a certain poor widow, [who] threw in two mites, which make a farthing" (Mark 12, 42). The persona of Poem 125 makes no value judgement; she neither says that it is better to love and suffer nor does she advocate the renunciation of love to avoid pain. If there must be pain, at least "There is strength in proving that it can be borne/Although it tear" (1113), and the strength can be power for "Power is only Pain-/Stranded, thro' Discipline" ("I can wade Grief": [252]).

Fortunately, despite the mourner's feeling of endless grief,

Time does go on-
I tell it gay to those who suffer now-
They shall survive-
There is a sun-
They don't believe it now-

(1121)

Although the hope of ultimate assuagement of grief is offered, the overwhelming nature of grief is also expressed in "They don't believe it now." At the time of loss, comfort seems impossible. Alternatively:

They say that "Time assuages"-
 Time never did assuage-
 An actual suffering strengthens
 As sinews do, with age-

Time is a Test of Trouble-
 But not a Remedy-
 If such it prove, it prove too
 There was no Malady-

(686)

These last two poems can be taken as completely contradictory; as instances of ambivalence; as the different reactions of different personae; as expressions of the complexity of human emotions and reactions so that while we may again appreciate the sun after a period of mourning we might still find no relief for our deepest sorrow nor any replacement for the loss; or as the progressive elegiac oscillation of emotion, typified in Shelley's "Adonais," which leads to a final consolation. Within the context of Dickinson's resultant elegy the last two readings seem the most appropriate, though the first two cannot be eliminated with confidence.

Another problem of perception occurs in "To die" (255). Death eases one out of this life; dying is a fading of sight. The syntax in the first stanza is puzzling; "it's" seems to refer to "To die" but how can to die itself be "out of sight?" The first stanza seems to be concerned with the person who is dying; but the second is definitely concerned with the survivors. The first stanza is wistful and personal; in the second there seems to have been a change of persona to

one who is barely disturbed by the death. The transition from the first to second stanza is through the phrase "it's out of sight." Whereas the dying person can no longer "see to see" (465), the survivor quickly puts aside mourning because the corpse is "out of sight" (and out of mind). This poem, then, appears to be in opposition to "I dreaded that first Robin, so" (348).

But the third stanza has another shift of persona, effected by "And helps us to forget" (255). The second persona easily forgets when "the pretty sunshine comes," but the final persona feels the loss more keenly because of the sunshine, possibly the elegiac return of spring. The difference in the depth of emotion of the personae is shown by the change from the concrete terms of stanza two to the abstractions of stanza three. It seems that the deceased would have relinquished life more easily and, perhaps, earlier but for love of those to be left behind. Therefore, although "To die- takes just a little while-/They say it doesn't hurt," dying has, by the last stanza, acquired the pain of parting. Within a single poem there is the elegiac emotional oscillation and the different perspectives of separate personae.

At best, loss and tribulation lead to some inner strength and new perception, for

By a departing light
 We see acuter, quite,
 Than by a wick that stays.
 There's something in the flight
 That clarifies the sight
 And decks the rays.

(1714)

A "departing light" may have some connection with the final closing of a door. "My life closed twice before its close" (1732)

evokes the image of a house with the door firmly closed so that the persona cannot return. If the closing of the door represents death, then only in the imagination can one die twice, and the poem must have a beyond-the-grave persona. Alternatively, if the closing of the door indicates the finality of passing irrevocably from one stage to another (as in Wordsworth's "Ode"; or becoming a parent; or being widowed), then death could be the one to "unveil/A third event to me." The closing of one door might lead to the opening of others (a new human sensibility to compensate for childlike ecstasy; the joy of parenthood for individual freedom and identity; new relationships for old). "Parting is all we know of heaven" may be understood as the knowledge and awareness of ecstasy in both the before and after state, of which we only become aware by passing from one state to the other. For the dead, therefore, there is the possibility of metamorphosis, but for the bereaved "Parting is all . . . / . we need of hell" (1732).

The despair induced by another's death is the ultimate hell for Dickinson. Although she uses personae, there are some statements in her poems which contain no ambivalence and no ambiguity. Such a statement is "Parting is all we know of heaven,/And all we need of hell." For Dickinson hell cannot be worse than experiences of parting -- especially those ultimate partings forced upon us by death.

The devastation of bereavement is expressed in

The bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon earth-

The Sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity.

(1078)

But it is not only the heart that has to be cleaned and stored away; the death chamber, also, is cleaned and scoured ("There's been a Death, in the Opposite House" [389]). The gruesome task of preparing the corpse for burial is demonstrated in "To make One's Toilette- after Death" (485).

The procession is not only of mourners but of passersby and people whose business is partially the end of life: neighbours; the doctor; curious, fearful children; the minister; the milliner; the undertaker; and then "There'll be that Dark Parade-/Of Tassels- and of Coaches" (389). The funeral parade supersedes all other processions; "Never Bride had such Assembling" as the funeral cortage assembled when "Her Sweet turn to leave the Homestead/Came the Darker Way" (649). The juxtaposition of bridal and burial will be seen again and explored further in chapter three in such poems as "Title divine" (1072), in which the persona is "Born- Bridalled- Shrouded-/In a Day."

The dignity and attention bestowed upon the dead accentuates the lack of appreciation while they were alive. "How noteless Men, and Pleiads, stand" (282) until removed forever, for "We learn in the Retreating" (1083) the value of those now gone. In their belated appreciation these poems can be seen as modified elegiac eulogies.

Sometimes an elegy may not seem appropriate if death is seen as a release from the prison of life. There appears to be no sorrow, no sense of the release of the spirit from the body, only a release from the thankless drudgery of the daily round, in "How many times these low feet staggered" (187). Only through death can the sewing, the flies, the cleaning of windows and of cobwebs be ignored by the now "Indolent Housewife- in daisies- lain!" This poem offers a strange eulogy of the

dead, but it is a eulogy. The self-sacrificial devotion of a conventional housewife supplies the necessary comfort and cleanliness for her husband and children.

The reader might rightly object to the inclusion of such a eulogy in a paper discussing pastoral elegy; this poem would more properly be classified as "georgic" in Low's sense of the word. Anthony Low, in The Georgic Revolution, writes

that georgic is a mode that stresses the value of intensive and persistent labour against hardships and difficulties; that it differs from pastoral because it emphasizes work instead of ease . . . and that it is preeminently the mode suited to the establishment of civilization and the founding of nations.

(12)

The justification for the inclusion of this eulogy is that this thesis anticipated that Dickinson's resultant elegy would have points of divergence from the tradition. Furthermore, America was still establishing its civilisation, and Dickinson was very aware that the human race is excluded from the Garden. She had read Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" (Capps 75), and did not see the common lives of women as easeful, pastoral or romantic. The housewife's only floral tributes are daisies, which need no cultivating, whereas there are daffodils, symbol of spring, for the deceased identified by "She dwelleth in the Ground" (671); the classical hyacinth for the "Two Travellers perishing in Snow" (933); and the men in Poem 282 are, at least to some degree, equated with the stars and apotheosis.

Part of the function of an elegiac eulogy is to emphasise the need for consolation in loss, and to amplify that consolation when it is found. For Dickinson the very best in life is poetry and ecstasy.

Her major eulogy is pastoral: a eulogy to those ecstatic moments when one can surpass the experience of even her bees and butterflies. The loss of such moments of ecstasy as expressed in the following poem will require an exquisite consolation. Dickinson sees life as having greater potential for women than that allowed by society, and especially that demanded by those dogmatic vigilant saints of the Congregational Church.

I taste a liquor never brewed-
From Tankards scooped in Pearl-
Not all the Vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of Air- am I-
And Debauchee of Dew-
Reeling- thro endless summer days-
From inns of Molten Blue-

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
Out of the Foxglove's door-
When Butterflies- renounce their "drams"-
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats-
And Saints- to windows run-
To see the little Tippler
Leaning against the -Sun-

(214).

Her alcohol is the nectar and dew of foxgloves, and her lamppost is the sun itself against which she leans to laugh at those puritanical saints. Because of key words such as pearl, dew, summer, and sun (to be discussed in chapter three) this is a eulogy to her poetic powers.

Parting, grief, bereavement, elegy and the passing of summer are so intrinsically related within Dickinson's poetry that it is difficult, perhaps impossible sometimes, to separate the strands and state categorically the subject of the poem. The following is such a

poem:

As imperceptibly as Grief
 The Summer lapsed away-
 Too imperceptibly at last
 To seem like Perfidy-
 A Quietness distilled
 As Twilight long begun,
 Or Nature spending with herself
 Sequestered Afternoon-
 The Dusk drew earlier in-
 The Morning foreign shone-
 A courteous, yet harrowing Grace,
 As guest, that would be gone-
 And thus, without a Wing
 Or service of a Keel
 Our Summer made her light escape
 Into the Beautiful.

(1540)

Although grief does fade imperceptibly, even its fading seems to require a sacramental elegy. The whole tone of the poem reflects the mood of "Further in Summer" (1068). In both these poems there is a sense of some metamorphosis: "And thus, without a Wing/ . . . /Into the beautiful" (1540), and "a Druidic difference/Enhances Nature now" (1068).

In Dickinson's poetry, although the cricket is associated with fall and elegy, the elegiac metamorphosis associated with death and resurrection is epitomised by the butterfly. Both harvest and evening are the setting for the following metamorphosis.

From Cocoon forth a Butterfly
 A Lady from her Door
 Emerged- a Summer Afternoon-
 Repairing everywhere-

. . .

Till Sundown crept- a steady Tide-
 And Men that made the Hay-
 And Afternoon and Butterfly-
 Extinguished- in the Sea-
 (354).

Similarly, "Two Butterflies went out at Noon" (533),

And then- together bore away
 Upon a shining Sea-
 Though never yet, in any Port-
 Their coming, mentioned be

Although in the former poem the sea is obviously, on the concrete level, the darkness of night brought on by the tide of sunset, in both poems the sea can be death, immortality, or poetic inspiration, and the butterfly can be some form of resurrection or poetry. (The poetical significance of the sea and the butterfly will be considered in chapter three.) In "Three times- we parted- Breath- and I" (598),

The Winds- like children- lulled-
 Then Sunrise kissed my Chrysalis-
 And I stood up- and lived

Both the sun and the breeze are necessary for this metamorphosis. Referring back to the trinity of "The Gentian" (18), both the Son and the Holy Spirit are essential for the resurrection procured by Christ.

It is not known what happens to the butterflies "Extinguished- in the Sea" (354), nor whether the other two butterflies were "met in Ether Sea" (533), but the butterfly in "Cocoon above! Cocoon below!" (129) becomes omniscient.

An hour in Chrysalis to pass,
 Then gay above receeding grass

A Butterfly to go!
 A moment to interrogate,
 Then wiser than a "Surrogate,"
 The Universe to know!

The transformation is implicitly from worm through chrysalis to butterfly, and could be purely naturalistic, perhaps, except for the apparent total knowledge of "The Universe." Also, although a cocoon is usually suspended above the ground, the poem specifically mentions "Cocoon below," and "interrogate" may have the aural allusion to "inter." Further, the time in the tomb and the resurrection are expressed in terms of the chrysalis and the butterfly in "Color- Caste- Denomination" (970). A transformation is effected from an earthbound body of clay to winged omniscience.

In such traditional elegies as "Idyll I: The Lament for Adonis," "Lycidas" and "Adonais," the poet states the cause of the death. Dickinson is less interested in the cause than in the nature of death itself. The particular nature of death implies the nature of any possible afterlife. Shelley in "Adonais," also, investigates the nature of death to arrive at a final consolation based on aspects of immortality, but Dickinson goes beyond Shelley in her investigations.

If death is a metamorphosis into winged omniscience, or leads to the Christian immortal survival of the spirit, then death should be an occasion for rejoicing. In "Of Tolling Bell" (947) the persona asks why the bell tolls when "A Soul has gone to Heaven." If going to heaven is a mournful event, the speaker is left to ask "Is Heaven then a Prison?" If so, death is indeed fearsome and it is difficult to posit a convincing elegiac consolation.

The persona does all in her power to prevent death's victory in

"Back from the cordial Grave I drag thee" (1625). The concrete imagery in "The Frost of Death" (1136), is of a flower on a window sill being killed by an early frost, but again the extension of the natural imagery of autumn is to the fight on behalf of a loved person against the encroachment of death. There is no ringing of bells, only hatred and a fear of the death of one who is loved. Death is a snake, both in intent and in the way the deadly frost patterns the window. The equation of death and serpent may be derived from Genesis, for it was the snake who tempted Eve to eat the apple, an act that led to man's mortality. Once death has won, the bereaved inevitably hate death itself but, in the first stages of grief, hate life alone also.

Death is a snake which suddenly divides the grass only to close it at one's feet and open it further on, in "A narrow Fellow in the Grass" (986). The opening of chasms in the grass which are then closed recalls graves. Because the snake is so sudden, so evasive, and so treacherous, one cannot meet him "Without a tighter breathing/And Zero at the Bone." Dickinson often equates bereavement and despair with a chasm, a break in life.

Even the great individual event "Death" itself can prove to be insignificant. Capps shows that Dickinson read Uncle Tom's Cabin (186) so was conversant with the tradition, epitomised in Eva's death, of the "angel in the house" (Madwoman 20), clothed in white, dying touchingly, peacefully, lovingly, while the household sobs and is converted (Stowe 282-95). But Dickinson takes the great dramatic event and violates it in "I heard a Fly" (465), thus associatively juxtaposing the sublime with the trivial. Further, any "conversion" of the living does not take place through the words of the dying; the new insight is

offered from beyond death, from the grave itself, as it is in "I died for Beauty" (449).

It is immediately after

I willed my Keepsakes- Signed away
 What portion of me be
 Assignable

(465)

that the fly interposes. "The passages [Dickinson] took from Matthew, for example, come from nineteen of the twenty-eight chapters and are twice as numerous as those taken from any other book of the Bible" (Capps 40), therefore it is reasonable to assume that in the assigning away of worldly goods Dickinson is aware of the lines from Matthew, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt" (6, 19). The juxtaposition of keepsakes and fly in the poem parallels the juxtaposition of treasures and corruption in Matthew. The blue fly with its "uncertain stumbling Buzz" is the repulsive bluebottle, or blowfly, allowed to intrude in the death chamber only because the task of cleanliness in the house has been assigned to another and has not been properly undertaken. The fly epitomises the decay of the flesh -- it is often only the buzz of blowflies that alerts us to the decaying flesh of small animals -- and its traditional lechery results in the proliferation of maggots, kin of grave worms.

The implications become universal. The life cycle of man is as trivial, lecherous, consuming and indifferent as that of the fly. Further, part of the repulsion felt towards bluebottles is the horror that in their stumbling they might collide with us; but death will

inevitably collide with each of us and, in the context of this poem, death is absolute. Unlike some of the poems to be discussed in chapter two, there is no indication that the spirit survives the corruption of the flesh. Death is the inability to "see to see" when the windows fail. The fly not only extinguishes the light of life, closing the windows of the soul, but also, in effect, extinguishes the actual windows and, hence, the world.

Cameron writes,

The speaker has been imagining herself as a queen about to leave her people, conscious of the majesty of the occasion, presiding over it. . . . It is, of course, the fly who obliterates the speaker's false notions of death, for it is with his coming that she realizes that she is the witness and he is the king, that the ceremony is a "stumbling" one. . . . Thus flies when they are about to die move ["with Blue-uncertain stumbling Buzz"] as if poisoned. . . . At this moment the changes the speaker is undergoing are fused with their agent: her experience becomes one with the fly's.

(114-15)

Although there is justification for much of what Cameron says, most importantly that the fly is king, there does not appear to be textual justification for the fly's death and, hence, the persona's role as witness rather than participant, for a dead fly would fall and thus not obliterate the window.

Obviously the awaited "King" could be death, but could also be Christ. The dying persona in "Dying! Dying in the night" (158) is expecting Jesus for "They said that Jesus- always came" Poem 465 can be read on any or all three levels: The awaited "King" as Christ, death, or the snake as worm, completing the fly's life cycle.

In "Color- Caste- Denomination" (970) it would seem that the

persona is positing an afterlife, one in which "Death's large-Democratic fingers" erase the distinctions of colour, status and creed. A positive metamorphosis to butterfly, not blowfly, takes place and death functions as a chrysalis.

This democratic death is not unlike the gentlemanly suitor "Death" in "Because I could not stop for Death" (712). In response to "His Civility," the persona puts aside her daily cares, takes a leisurely ride past aspects of the natural cycle, and reaches a point of stasis. Stanzas four and five closely relate birth, marriage and death. Her gown and tippet are of gossamer and tulle respectively, indicative of both wedding dress and shroud, especially when it is remembered that a married woman was often buried in her wedding dress. Further, Christians see death as being "called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19, 9). The grave is a house; but it is also "A Swelling of the Ground" which evokes the swelling of pregnancy. New life is born from the grave both within the natural cycle and, in the Christian ethos, in spiritual rebirth. In the last stanza, there is a sense of timelessness, either centuries or a day, since the carriage ride took place, possibly indicating the lapse of time between burial and resurrection on the day of judgement. However, such a reading is very doctrinal and might imply the possibility of a Christian hell beyond this life, which Dickinson does not postulate.

Consider, for further clarification, another grave which is a house.

The grave my little cottage is,
Where "Keeping house" for thee
I make my parlour orderly
And lay the marble tea

(1743)

while waiting everlasting reunion. If death can be seen as the possibility of the consummation, unattainable in life, of a troth ("There came a Day at Summer's full," [322]), then "Because I could not" (712) could be a love-death poem, and the timelessness could be the timelessness of the ecstasy of love or courtship.

A sexual poem which seems to have strong affinities with "Because" is "A Bee his Burnished Carriage" (1339). The bee, like death, arrives in a carriage; the rose, like the persona, receives his visit with tranquillity; the rose, like the persona, gives freely of herself. Only the purpose and result of the visits differ.¹⁴ In "A Bee" a sexual union is consummated, and

Remained for her- of rapture
But the humility.

And a probable floral pregnancy! In "Because," the death of the persona merges with a wedding which leads to an associative pregnancy. The positive aspects of the rapture of sexual union lead to pregnancy and pejorative humility; the negative aspect of death leads to pregnancy and a positive timelessness. The parallel is apparent but not readily understandable.

Dickinson, in another poem, writes of courtship that

Death is the supple Suitor
That wins at last-
It is a stealthy Wooing
(1445)

Again death leads to a wedding -- "To Troth unknown" -- but the wedding seems ambivalent for it will also reunite the persona with "Kindred as

responsive/As Porcelain." Porcelain can be seen as both hard and fragile, neither of which seems conducive to warm embrace. The fragility of porcelain could also refer to the fragility and precariousness of both the mortal self and personal relationships, both of which can be abruptly terminated by death. In the latter reading porcelain is not pejorative, and the reunion is eagerly anticipated.

Death, and love by association, can be the catalyst for metamorphosis. Joanne A. Dobson, in "Oh, Susie, it is dangerous," explains the "Death as Lover configuration [as the] destructive aspect of the animus" (90). Suzanne Juhasz states, in The Undiscovered Continent, "Love is death in Dickinson's eyes: death to the virgin and to the child; death of the self" (117). But such a death may, in some instances, be metaphoric rather than either destructive or expressive of the sense of the annihilation of the feminist self. Both love and death can be seen as the ultimate union. Cameron writes,

Dickinson's speakers practice dying with frequency. In so doing they court not death but rather union, indeed . . . many of Dickinson's formulations on death are explicitly sexual. . . . If only the end could not be, or could be survived beyond, there might yet be hope for the abolition of the more intractable boundary, the one that separates selves.
(137)

That death and love, allowing sexual activity to imply love, are related ambivalently, but often positively, will be shown in chapter three.

Since "A single Clover Plank/Was all that saved a Bee" (1343) the ending of a life seems somewhat capricious.

'Twixt Firmament above
 And Firmament below
 The Billows of Circumference
 Were sweeping him away-

when the bee fortuitously finds refuge, which proves to be momentary, on a clover. Because the similarity between this poem and "Two Butterflies" (533) is striking and, further, because it is a breeze that unsettles the bee so that it "was not," this poem recalls the trinity of bee, butterfly and breeze in "The Gentian" (18). As in the case of the "Two Butterflies," the fate of the bee is unknown; the perception of the persona seems extremely confused. John Todd writes, in Emily Dickinson's Use of the Persona, "The event is harrowing to [the persona], but there is no indication that the bee finds it harrowing at all. Thus the poem ends with the sober assertion of man's inability to understand the secrets of nature" (18). It is clear that either the wind is the agent of fate, or is itself omnipotent.

It would seem that individual man's life and death may be of no significance in the cosmos; death may be absolute or arbitrary, easeful or excruciatingly unknowing (280); or man's spirit may be immortal. God may be the sole arbitrator; a capricious fate may order man's life and death; or each individual may have some control over his personality and destiny. Dickinson's questioning of the nature of immortality is quintessential to her quest for elegiac consolation which is the subject of the following chapter.

In the final lines of "Lycidas," Milton, having arrived at a satisfactory consolation, recedes from the elegiac mood and, with renewed hope, looks once more towards his daily concerns, conventionally expressed as those of a shepherd.

And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills,
 And now was dropt into the Western bay;
 At last he rose, and twitch't his Mantle blue:
 Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.
 (190-93)

Dickinson is not interested in her housewife's daily round except inasmuch as any earthly event, usually pain or suffering, can extend her awareness to the furthest possible circumference of knowledge or intuition. Therefore, although normally the elegiac recessional would be a return to daily activity, for Dickinson it is something else. Further, in Theocritus' "Idyll I" the elegist is rewarded with a carved bowl (22-63 & 143-52), and in "Lycidas" Milton desires a poetic memorial (19-20); these are lasting artistic memorials comparable to the elegy itself. Dickinson's desired immortal "reward" is a glimpse of eternity -- that "Circumference-/Beyond the Dip of Bell" which follows the despair of "I saw no Way- The Heavens were stitched-" (378), a poem discussed in chapter two.

Dickinson expresses her elegiac recessional in terms of a receding everyday world which leads to "Eternity's disclosure/ . . . / Of Immortality".

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 Height
 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

(306).

Juhasz writes of Poem 306,

Certain things withdraw that others may take their place. One "society" for another. The everyday world recedes to an extreme distance, the soul ascends to an extreme distance, this brings about extreme power -- and it is here and when, although seldom, that immortality is encountered: immortality, or eternity, being enormous, excessive, extreme. . . . She opposes the traditional idea of revelation as heaven, a place to which the passive believer goes, with the notion that eternity is up to the person, who can learn to see it. And yet in the final sentence immortality is also connected with actual death.

(Undiscovered 159-60)

As, indeed, it is in the first sentence. It is only after bereavement, when her soul is alone, or after some "Mortal Abolition," in some sense a dying to herself, that Dickinson can glimpse the nature of immortality. Perhaps eternity is the new perception acquired "By a departing light" (1714).

Juhasz states, "Eternity, in fact, is the place where what I have called the 'dimensional' and 'conceptual' aspects of the mind, and of the language Dickinson creates to talk about mental experience, come into ultimate conjunction, often collision" (Undiscovered 135). Within the context of Dickinson's poetry eternity is the ultimate human conceptual circumference. Because eternity can only be glimpsed, and its nature must be communicated to others in such a way that it, like truth, "must dazzle gradually" ("Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" [1129]), the language used to describe it reaches to the limit of

metaphoric speech. Like the bee in "A single Clover Plank" (1343), the mortal human self is "subject/To Autocratic Air," the omnipotent breeze, the spiritus sanctus, the Word, the "extreme power" of language and poetry. Again there is the conjunction of death, immortality and poetry.

This chapter has shown that within her corpus Dickinson, in her own way, uses the major motifs of the traditional pastoral elegy. The fact that the announcement of the death does not specify the individual deceased both follows tradition and universalizes this elegiac element. Pathetic fallacy is implicit within her work. The lament diverges from the traditional "O, weep for Adonais" ("Adonais" 2) but has the impact of actual grief and despair. The procession of mourners consists of both the traditional natural elements, with variations, and of ordinary people affected each in his own way by the death. The commemorative flowers are few, and include both traditionally elegiac and homely American species. Memento mori is expressed both metaphorically as leaving the door of the mind ajar for revelation, and also pragmatically as behaving toward the living as, after the fact of their death, one would wish one had done. The invocation to a male muse emphasises that Dickinson is female, and diverges from the traditional invocation of the male poet to his female muse. Her eulogies are extreme within the traditional range: recognition of the self-sacrificing drudgery of a New England housewife to euphoric praise for those who can achieve moments of ecstasy. Mourning, grief, bereavement, funerals, coffins and graves are expressed sometimes traditionally but, at other times, unconventionally, with their associations with suitors, weddings, pregnancy, a consummation

unattainable in this life, and a change in vision. Apotheosis, metamorphosis and transformation have points of tangency with and divergence from the classical; Dickinson's major symbol for the change death effects is the butterfly. The points of continuity with traditional elegies establish the existence of an implicit elegy in her corpus, but the points of divergence make the cumulative elegy uniquely hers and evolve organically into her consolation and the genesis of the poet who "sang off charnel steps" (Dickinson, Letters 298).

Notes

1 For the general information on the tradition of the pastoral elegy I am indebted to C. M. Bowra, Archibald Day, John W. Draper, John Heath-Stubbs, Frank Kermode, G. W. Pigman III, Maurice Platnauer, Eric Smith, Ruth Wallerstein and the various critics in the collection of essays on "Lycidas" edited by C. A. Patrides.

However, I have read all the primary works mentioned, in translation where necessary, and studied most.

2 Since Moschus flourished around 150 B.C. and Bion around 100 B.C., there is an obvious time discrepancy: see Gow xxiv-xxvi. However, for the sake of convenience, I refer to the author of "The Epitaph for Bion" as Moschus.

3 See, for example, "Adonais" 4-9.

4 The most obvious example is "AEgloga November."

5 Anderson discusses the religious significance of this poem (151-52) within a study of Dickinson's poems about summer (144-58).

6 Interestingly, although the poignancy of loss being accentuated in the spring is a classical tradition, the Romantics emphasise this elegiac aspect: see "Adonais," "Out of the Cradle," "When Lilacs," and Emerson's "Threnody."

7 See, for example, the opening and closing lines of "Lycidas."

8 See "When Lilacs," "To A Skylark" and "Ode to a Nightingale." In Letters 261, to Higginson, Dickinson acknowledges Keats as a favourite poet.

9 Dickinson's agoraphobia has been the subject of much discussion and speculation (see, for example, Cody 151 and Shurr 170-71), and has been used as evidence that she suffered from emotional and sexual disability.

10 Cody sees "Dickinson's fear of strangers, preoccupation with death [and] agoraphobia" as the result of sexual repression (151).

Griffith, sees the crisis in Dickinson's life as severe religious skepticism from which "emerge . . . her portraits of death" (76-84).

Shurr relates her breakdown to a possible abortion, and hence the guilt, fear and secrecy expressed in some of her love and her death poetry (170-93).

11 See Jean McClure Mudge, Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home.

12 Cody discerns a homosexual tendency in Dickinson's life (150), and Patterson identifies Kate Scott Anthon as the subject of Dickinson's love poetry (224-227).

Gelpi sees the love affair as being with her own animus (Tenth Muse 253).

Mudge sees Samuel Bowles as the mystery lover (182), while Ruth Miller interprets the love poetry as the expression of Dickinson's mystical "relationship to Jesus" (80), in which her earthly love for Samuel Bowles (111) suffers a transformation, similar to that depicted in the poetry of earlier poets.

Shurr elects Charles Wadsworth not only as the contender for Dickinson's heart (142) but also as her active sexual partner, her "Husband" (163), and the male cause of her probably aborted possible pregnancy (171-90).

13 Cited in Gayley, p.180. Gayley also quotes on the same page from Erasmus Darwin's (1731-1802) "Botanic Garden," in which Darwin writes of Memnon's musical rendition when the sun rises.

14 Throughout this thesis my strategy is to remain within Dickinson's poetic corpus for assistance with the explication of any one poem. However, Dickinson's Letters 405, to Higginson, could add interesting light on aspects of the bee, breeze, death, and the continuation of the sense of hearing after sight has failed.

THE PROBLEM OF ELEGIAC CONSOLATION

Since Dickinson lived in a Puritan community she seeks her elegiac consolation within a Christian framework. Milton, as the greatest of the Puritan writers, had a theological aesthetic influence upon the New England community, and "Lycidas" exemplifies Christian elegy. Therefore, this chapter will use "Lycidas" as a model with which to compare Dickinson's search for elegiac consolation. Her work has points of divergency from, and tangency and continuity with, "Lycidas." This chapter will also consider such elegies as "Adonais" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" because Dickinson's faith in an omnipresent omniscient God is not as secure as that depicted in "Lycidas."

Dickinson questions the validity of "Federal Theology." In many of her poems depicting God, she sees Him in terms of a financier. In The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, Perry Miller writes,

Still present was the idea, inherited from federal theologians, that a society is rewarded in this world. So piety was bound to become not just a check upon inordinate propensities, but "the best Friend to outward Prosperity."

(381)

Dickinson further questions the validity of the aspect of "Federal Theology" in which "the saint is received into a compact with the divine" (Perry Miller, Edwards 30). This covenant is as binding as any legal or financial transaction. Miller says,

He who has put his hand to the bargain of grace seals his consent by taking the Communion The Supper was no longer a miracle, but still more marvelously had become a platform of "security" whereon God and His creature could meet, knowing what to expect from each other. Upon both was the covenant binding
 (New England Mind 84)

Chapter three will show that Dickinson converts the two most important Congregational sacraments, Communion and adult baptism, to her own poetic purposes, and thus enters the controversy over the justification for infant baptism. This chapter is concerned with her questioning of the accepted interpretations of God's Word, and the doctrine of election: "that God chose and rejected men at his pleasure" (Edwards 10). Given the sense of an eternal transaction between unequals, unless death is absolute -- a ghastly "Finished knowing" (280) -- an elegiac poet seeking consolation might find it necessary to establish a symbol of resurrection. Since Dickinson has to come to terms with her fractured faith before she can reach a consolation, this chapter will consider in detail "Those- dying then" (1551), a poem central to her disparate representations of an uncertain God.

Before this thesis undertakes to look at Dickinson's search for a God, symbolic or real, to epitomise a heaven of resurrection, a brief look at funeral ritual and at some of Dickinson's poetic predecessors is pertinent. The funeral tradition of decorating and disguising both coffin and hearse with flowers uses natural symbols to signify resurrection at least at the level of the natural cycle. The natural symbol, however, can take on Christian significance when the flowers are lilies which are traditionally used at Easter to signify the

resurrection of Christ.

Elegists use both flowers and other symbols to denote some form of resurrection of the dead. Bion, in "Idyll I," is the first to transform the blood of the dead and the tears of the bereaved into roses and anemones (p.146). Virgil, in "Eclogue V," apotheosizes Caesar into a star (51-52). Milton, in "Lycidas," does not transform King into a star but does use the natural regenerative cycle as a symbol of human rebirth, specifying the star as "the day-star [which sinks] in the Ocean bed,/And yet anon repairs his drooping head" (168-69), thus equating resurrection with the sun's diurnal cycle. Shelley, in "Adonais," signifies the resurrection of Keats by using the identity of Venus and Vesper as an integrated symbol (414). Whitman, in "When Lilacs," a poem contemporaneous with Dickinson's corpus, identifies Lincoln also with the morning/evening star (2 & 70).

In "Eclogue V," "Lycidas," "Adonais," and "When Lilacs," although the star is used in each as a symbol of resurrection, both the religious function and the thought animating the use of the symbol differ greatly. Virgil, in effect, is extending Bion's symbolism of natural vegetative resurrection to elevate Caesar above the previous classical tradition. However, because Virgil also wrote "Eclogue IV" which is known as "The Messianic Eclogue," the apotheosis of Caesar into a star can be seen as pre-Christian and, therefore, applicable to the later Christian tradition. This application is particularly true when it is remembered that not only does "Eclogue IV" proclaim the birth of a prototypical messiah but also that the birth of the Messiah later was proclaimed by the star of Bethlehem.

Milton's use of the sun is an integral part of his progression from a pagan to a Christian framework to arrive ultimately at an unequivocal consolation based on his faith in the Christian God and the promised resurrection of mankind. Shelley is seeking a non-Christian transcendental consolation which finds utterance in the lines "He is a portion of the loveliness/Which once he made more lovely" (379-80). A "portion of the loveliness," however, is a difficult abstraction to grasp, so Shelley symbolises Keats as the "Vesper of our throng" (414) who "like a star,/Beacons from the abode where the eternal are" (494-95). Whitman uses the star, the thrush and the lilac to symbolise Lincoln, the mourners and the elegy, and the three symbols merge as the essence of Lincoln merges with the universe in a transcendental consolation.

Of the five elegies so far mentioned only "Lycidas" offers a Christian consolation based on complete faith in the Christian God. There are, of course, many such elegies. Chaucer, in The Book of the Duchess, explores, however facetiously, the possibility of pagan gods who have the ability to aid mankind. Having read the story of Alcyone and Seys with its reference to Morpheus, the narrator says,

Me thoghte wonder yf hit were so;
 For I had never herd speke, or tho,
 Of noo goddes that koude make
 Men to slepe, ne for to wake
(233-36)

The conclusion of the work is that there is only one true God and only He can wake man from the sleep of death and the stupor of despair. However, the exploration of other modes of consolation is similar to that followed by Milton in "Lycidas."

Both The Book of the Duchess, with its rhyming couplets in variations of the pentameter and octosyllabic verse, and "Lycidas," with its varied poetic form, lie within elegiac practice since, as W.R.Hardie says in Res Metrica, the elegiac metre is "a variation upon the heroic hexameter [a combination of hexameters and pentameters], in the direction of lyric poetry" (49). Dickinson's form bears no relation to either classical heroic hexameters or English pentameters. However, both Shelley in "Adonais" and Whitman in "When Lilacs" modify elegiac form. Further, both "Lycidas" and "Adonais" return to themes already considered, as does Dickinson's poetry. But Dickinson's poetic movement is expressed in separate poems, so that the integration of elegiac fragments is far more complex. Since Dickinson's elegy is not a single unitary poem, her form may be seen as reflecting her content and its concern with fragmentation, in the same way as Milton's form in "Lycidas" reflects his concern with tradition, and Shelley's form in "Adonais" reflects the occasion of his elegy, the death of Keats, who shows a penchant for the Spenserian stanza (Smith 58).

A major raison d'etre for an elegy is to find, and offer to the bereaved, consolation for the death. The consolation may be pagan, transcendental or Christian, for example, but should arise intrinsically and organically from within the elegy itself. Dickinson, throughout her poetry, explores the possibility of consolation in the elegiac mode. Like many elegiac poets before her she seeks consolation through resurrection. But because she is both a nineteenth-century sceptic and a child of the Puritans, and since within a nominally Christian framework resurrection is dependent on the existence of God, her exploration is an investigation into the existence, status and

condition of God and the possibility of any belief in Him.

Many elegies, such as The Book of the Duchess, "Lycidas" and "Adonais," first explore, then wholly or partially reject because inadequate, non-Christian modes of consolation, especially pagan and vegetative, before arriving at a definitive consolation. Since Dickinson does not have the firm faith of Chaucer and Milton, and is not seeking consolation through the paganism of Theocritus and Virgil, or the transcendentalism of Shelley and Whitman, her only course, it would seem, is to risk the charge of blasphemy by unflinchingly confronting her doubts. In "Lycidas" the final consolation is dependent on unquestioning faith in an integrated cosmos ordered by an omniscient and omnipotent God. Dickinson earns her final consolation through questioning, in her poetry, the uncertainty of God in a fractured cosmos.

If the cosmos is fragmented, it may follow that God does not exist, is not omnipotent, or is in some way mutilated. Any inadequacy in God might result in a similar failure of faith in resurrection, and a resultant limit to elegiac consolation. Dickinson's poetry includes an exploration of the disintegration of God, the nature of faith, the personifications of God, and the efficacy of prayer, all with respect to the nature of elegiac consolation.

Dickinson epitomises her disabled God and her uncertain faith in resurrection in

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 Behaviour small-
 Better an ignis fatuus
 Than no illume at all-
 (1551).

Christ is the first being to sit at the right hand of God.¹ Not only is Christ "by the right hand of God exalted" (Acts 2, 33), but He also fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 110, "Sit thou at my right hand" (1). In Psalm 139, David sings of God's omnipresence and omnipotence, in particular "thy right hand shall hold me" (10). In that the New England Puritans are the spiritual successors of the disciples and the prophets, "Those- dying then" are the elect who died before there was any apparent crisis of faith and so they knew they were going "to God's Right Hand" King as Lycidas, being most needed ("Lycidas" 113), is of the elect, and that he has a place in Heaven is as predictable as the sun shall rise each day (165-85). If the prospect of resurrection is assured for the elect, consolation for the bereaved relatives of the chosen few is implicit. However, the consolation is less secure for those bereaved, such as Dickinson, who are less certain of their election.

"That Hand is amputated now" has many implications for the dying and the living. The simplest inference is that God is no longer the omnipotent God of the Psalms. If God has no right hand, one confronts the question whether Christ is still sitting on the right side of God or whether the truncation of the place defined as Christ's position implies His absence. If the latter, not only has God's hand been amputated but the Trinity has also been fractured. The most serious implication of this second death of the Son is that mankind has lost

its intermediary and its salvation. This reading would demonstrate, within this poem at least, the complete rejection of the Congregational doctrine of Dickinson's fathers and the loss of the concomitant elegiac consolation.

The loss of Christ's position has further implications. "Those-dying then" could be those who, before the first millenium following the Revelation as recounted by St. John, bore witness to God, those on whom "the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ" (Rev 20, 6). But if Christ, too, suffers the second death, there is little succour for those living and dying during Satan's period of liberty after his thousand year bondage.

Further, the poem raises the question as to whether God's amputation has any connection with Christ's injunction:

And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast
it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one
of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole
body should be cast into hell.

(Matt 5, 30)

But in what way can God's right hand have offended Him? It seems more likely that Dickinson's persona, not being ready to declare God entirely dead, symbolises loss of faith by amputation. "God cannot be found" may well mean that He exists, though mutilated, and it is only human perception or faith that fails. In this sense, it is the human belief in the divine that is "abdicated" and, hence, repudiates the consolation of resurrection.

Because of the verbal echoes between "They went to God's Right Hand" (1551) and "The son of man sitting on the right hand of power" (Mark 14, 62), "The abdication of Belief" could allude to Christ's

despair on the cross when he cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 14, 34). Christ the divine is the Son of God the King, and Christ the man is the King of the Jews. If "abdication of Belief" refers to Christ's agony at the Crucifixion, the abdication of the crown would appear to be at both the human and divine levels. The resultant loss is not only of faith but also of the power of God to provide consolation through resurrection to the bereaved.

The phrase "no illume at all" could replicate the time of darkness between Good Friday and Easter Sunday when the Son of God was neither on earth nor in heaven. Christ is "the true Light" (John 1, 9) of the world which was extinguished during the harrowing of hell, a time between Christ's death and His resurrection. Now, once again, "God cannot be found" There may, however, still be a glimmer of hope even though belief has been abdicated; "God's Right Hand . . . is amputated now" so that man's behaviour loses its significance and becomes "small"; and "God cannot be found." After all, from Theocritus to Shelley the protectors of the deceased are absent, as expressed in "Where were ye Nymphs?" ("Idyll I" 66 and "Lycidas" 50), and "Where wert thou, mighty Mother?" ("Adonais" 10) referring to Urania. Yet these, and many other similar elegies, result in an intrinsic consolation.

The persona in Dickinson's poem states "Better an ignis fatuus/Than no illume at all" But an "ignis fatuus" is only a will-of-the-wisp, a metaphorical flickering light of faith with no permanent substance, a mirage created out of the desire for a faith and the need for consolation. A will-of-the-wisp "may have been a delusive light but it was better than none" (Charles Anderson, Emily Dickinson's

Poetry: Stairway of Surprise 257) even though it might lead one into a morass. The recognition of need and the desire for a faith is an improvement on the loss of all hope and may lead, ultimately, to some consolation.

If justification after death is expressed in terms of the right (correct) hand, then "How far is it to Heaven?" (929) puts a sinister (left-handed) complexion on the left hand -- the only hand now remaining (left) to God. Both heaven and hell are as far as death but when the persona asks, "How far is it to Hell?" the answer is

As far as Death this way-
How far left hand the Sepulchre
Defies Topography.

By implication, hell is to the left of death and heaven to the right. If this interpretation is correct, and if it is valid to use one poem to illuminate another, then the amputation of God's right hand could question the validity of entrance into heaven leaving, apparently, only resurrection into hell. Poem 929 is in direct opposition to the faith expressed in "Lycidas" (172-82). The symbolism investigated so far does not appear very promising in terms of elegiac consolation.

In the following poem, which diverges from the strong faith expressed in "Lycidas" in "the dear might of him that walk'd the waves" (173), the hand of God is not only amputated but replaced by a dragon's claw.

Far from Love the Heavenly Father
Leads the Chosen Child,
Oftener through Realm of Briar
Than the Meadow mild.

Oftener by the Claw of Dragon
 Than the Hand of Friend
 Guides the Little One predestined
 To the Native Land.

(1021)

If "the Native Land" is the country into which the child is born, there is a reversal of Wordsworth's sentiments in his elegiac "Ode," in which

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home
 (58, 64-65)

Dickinson's child has no "clouds of glory" -- only scratches from the briars -- raising doubts as to the efficacy of God's love and the desirability of His heaven. Wordsworth's consolation consists in increased human sensibility, the use of metaphoric language (Vendler 85) and the birth of the poet. Dickinson's use of a similar consolation will be considered in chapter three.

Alternatively, the poem is about the death of a child and her entrance into paradise. I John 4 states that "God is love" (8), yet in Dickinson's poem God leads the child "Far from Love," presumably the mortal love of parents. The child, chosen and predestined, has no choice but to obey. The irony in the poem seems extremely bitter. A third reading is that the poem is about "the steep and thorny way to heaven" (Hamlet I, iii, 48) that the elect must travel, guided "by the Claw of the Dragon." In either case the desirability of heaven -- "the Native Land" -- is uncertain. If the desirability of heaven is questionable, once again the bereaved are left without consolation.

The three offered readings of the Dickinson poem are not mutually

exclusive and, in combination, raise doubts as to the love of God and the desirability or accessibility of heaven, even if one is able to withstand the journey. All element of choice and free-will has been eliminated ("Chosen," "predestined") and hence, presumably, the necessity for belief. A further reading is that the poem is concerned with the "doctrine of infant damnation she found revolting She never became reconciled to the God who punishes" (Johnson, Biography 234). Although God is not dead, He has suffered a metamorphosis that has changed Him beyond all recognition and all hope of His being the source of consolation.

Another Dickinson poem reminiscent of Wordsworth's elegiac ode is "Over and over, like a Tune" (367), with its "Recollections ./.. of Paradise-/. . . from Baptized Generations." Poem 367 comes full circle within the elegiac mode, for the "Recollections" are

Cadences too grand
But for the Justified Processions
At the Lord's Right hand.

The "Tune" is "too grand" to be heard except by recollection and by the dead who are now sitting at God's right hand. We are born with some memory of the heaven to which we return. Not only is the faith expressed here sure, resulting in certain resurrection and, therefore, Christian elegiac consolation, but it also supports the Congregational dogma of justification.

The absence or amputation of God, or at least Jesus, may sometimes be a flaw in the perception or the faith of the persona. When addressed with the words "Unto Me?" (964), the persona does not recognise the context as Christ's words in either "Suffer the little

children to come unto me . . . for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10, 14), or in the less relevant "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11, 28). Jesus identifies himself in Poem 964 and says that He will convey the persona to "Paradise" in "Arms of Mine- sufficient Phaeton-/Trust Omnipotence" He says, "The Least/Is esteemed in Heaven the Chiefest" when she declares that she is small and spotted. In this poem Christ keeps his Biblical promise made to little children, asserts His omnipotence, and tenderly conveys the persona to heaven in both His arms. God is whole, powerful and loving. The assertion of faith in God, heaven and resurrection expressed here by Dickinson's persona is as convincing as that expressed by Milton in "Lycidas" (172-82).

A perspective of God and life's journey, with the ultimate goal of resurrection at the right hand of God, which is different from that of Poem 1021 will help to indicate the disparate presentations of Dickinson's personae. The journey has its difficulties, but "Sahara is too little price/To pay for thy Right hand" ("I did not reach Thee" [1664]). The quest across the Sahara Desert, symbol of a vast, arid wasteland comparable to the "Realm of Briar" (1021), is not too much to pay for redemption, and appears to be a necessary requirement. Metaphorically the desert stands for the pain and hardships of life. Biblically, as stated in Isaiah, the desert is the highway of the redeemed.

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall
be called The way of holiness .

but the redeemed shall walk there:
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come
to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their
heads

(35, 8-10)

As the persona passes "the Middle Sea," indicative of nearing the end of the journey, she says,

Almost we wish the End
 Were further off-
 Too great it seems
 So near the Whole to stand.

The vision of God and redemption is almost too much for human perception. The integrated God and cosmos, "the Whole," is another part of the vision that is almost too "great" to bear. The sense of awe and wonder presented here, in anticipation of resurrection, is an echo of that felt when reading Revelation. The right hand, no longer amputated, is restored to its accepted Biblical associations. The offered consolation is almost overwhelming. The progression, as delineated so far, is from near despair to the consolation implicit in an integrated cosmos and an omnipotent God, paralleling the traditional elegiac movement.

Many traditional pastoral elegiac poets, in order to arrive at a satisfactory consolation, are concerned with the survival of some essence (whether it is called spirit, soul or immanence) as opposed to the corruption of the flesh. Dickinson, also, is concerned with the question of immortality but, like Shelley, rather than unquestioningly accepting her received Christian doctrine she explores various possibilities. Within her corpus she moves from death as absolute, to unequivocal belief in Heaven, to the possibility of glimpsing eternity before death.

This thesis has already shown that death is absolute in "What care the Dead?" (592). In "Death is a Dialogue" (976) and "Of all the

Souls" (664) Dickinson seems to state with certainty that, indeed, the spirit survives the body. Since

Dust is the only Secret-
 Death, the only One
 You cannot find out all about
 (153)

dust and Death are synonymous. In the dialogue between Spirit and Dust, only the Spirit and Death speak. Dust can again be seen as Death. Death, who "Argues from the Ground," can obviously be equated with the grave; but, as this thesis has already demonstrated, in other of Dickinson's poems there is an identity between death and the serpent to whom God said, "upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (Gen 3, 14). Death is both of the dust and at ground level, is both serpent and grave. Spirit, having "another Trust," merely turns away from death as Dust and, as evidence, removes her "Overcoat of Clay." Death can only overcome the flesh in which he is inherent.

Poem 976 has all the conventional religious connotations, without controversy or doubt, that one would expect from a mid-nineteenth century poet living in the Connecticut Valley, once the home of Jonathan Edwards. Granddaughter of the founder of Amherst College, a Congregationalist bulwark "against the Unitarian heresies of Harvard, (Whicher, This Was A Poet 18), and daughter of a pious, Puritan, lawyer father (Johnson Biography Foreward and 4-12), she produces what one might expect -- a Christian poem, in hymn meter, with a little dash of legalese in "laying off for evidence."

Similarly, in "Of all the Souls" (664) the Christian message

appears clear. The subterfuge of the flesh and the senses "which was" is separated from the royal atom of the soul "which is" as the "brief Drama in the flesh" is played out. Neither the flesh nor death are important since death is only the dissolution of the body, causing refinement and sharp definition of the soul. However, Congregationalists believed in the election of saints with its concomitant predestination. Dickinson takes the word "elected," with its powerful religious connotations, to say that she, indeed, was not predestined but had full choice to elect the "One . . . Atom- I preferred."

Only the choice of soul seems important to her; "the lists of Clay" are trivial. If poet and persona are one and she is obsessed, to the point of neurosis, by her non-maleness, as Cody suggests, one might expect the "lists of Clay" to be less summarily dismissed. Some expression of relief might be appropriate at the persona's disembodied and, therefore, presumably asexual state.

Although the poem closes with the body as clay, it opens with Soul as create. By leaving "create" open, Dickinson allows the reader the option of completing the word as "created," "creating" or "creative" (Cristanna Miller, "How 'Low Feet' Stagger" 140). Perhaps Dickinson elected one of many souls at the time of birth or, as an adult, she may have created the creative soul of the poet by electing to emphasise the facets of her personality that would shift the dross and reveal her poetic potential. Perhaps, like the persona, in "I'm ceded" (508), she chooses "just a Crown," a symbol of the poet for Dickinson, as will be shown in chapter three. In any case, in poem 664, Dickinson uses doctrinal language to express rebellion against

religious orthodoxy, yet, at the same time, she evinces a firm conviction of the superiority of the soul over the body, and of the immortality of the former and the dissolution of the latter.

In "I read my sentence" (412) the first three lines could just be a writer proof-reading or, as Christopher Benfy suggests in Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others (50), a person close-reading. However, "extremest" alerts the reader that the "sentence" is a legal sentence of death; man may dispose of another's flesh. The strength of the irony in "That 'God have mercy' on the Soul/The Jury voted Him" is addressed to men who think they can judge others despite Christ's demand "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt 7, 1), and that they can then ask God's mercy for the victim of their judgement. But there is another satiric target. The condemned has been predestined to this moment by the very "Soul/The Jury voted Him," whoever that selection committee was.

The closure of the poem is firm, offering no speculation on divine judgement; yet the Soul

and Death, acquainted-
Meet tranquilly, as friends-
Salute, and pass, without a Hint-
And there, the Matter ends-

a parting which implies that only the "matter" ends as the soul continues. The poem started ambiguously and it closes in the same way; "And there, the Matter ends" applies to both the fleshly matter of the condemned and the whole matter, or affair, of crime, trial and punishment. Again, the soul survives the body, but the poem has comic and satiric overtones at the expense of the legal and religious cosmos

of the valley. However, the persona follows Christian teaching in that she prepares her soul for death: "I made my soul familiar- with her extremity-/That at the last, it should not be a novel Agony. . . ." The closing six lines imply the survival of the spirit over the flesh and the hope of the elegiac consolation of immortal spirituality.

But the pain of parting is subjective and, therefore, of no significance in the cosmos.

We- who have the Souls-
Die oftener- Not so vitally
(311)

as the sapling or tree seared or scalped by lightning. The tree's recurring leaves testify to the near death blow, whereas man's little deaths go uncommemorated. It would also seem that man's actual death is not as significant as that of a tree, because men generically, in fact, "Die oftener" than trees.

In "It's easy to invent a Life" (724) God is remote and uncaring. Men are only His playthings. He easily invents a life, inserting a sun here, omitting a man there. "His Perturbless Plan" proceeds despite the murmuring of "The Perished Patterns." Man's life on earth is incidental, his existence fleeting.

The history of traditional pastoral elegy establishes the absorption and transformation of the deceased into nature; develops, through pre-Christian Virgil, into apotheosis of a star; continues with the Christian approach, possibly reaching a peak with "Lycidas"; and then begins a new phase to accommodate the search for a viable consolation in a less certain world. "Lycidas" itself follows the historical movement of elegy from pagan to Christian. The consolation

is firm, developing organically from the conviction of a strong faith. Since Christian consolation is dependent on faith in God and heaven, this paper will now investigate the expression of faith in Dickinson's corpus.

For Dickinson "To lose one's faith- surpass/The loss of an Estate" (377). A faith, however uncertain, is much better than no faith at all. Faith, "Inherited with Life," cannot be replenished. If one loses faith, possibly at such times as bereavement, then "Being's-Beggary." "The Child's faith is new-/Whole- like His Principle" (637) but is undermined by the experience of living. If "His" refers to God then God is "the Whole" of Poem 1664 and it is man's maturing perception that fragments Him. If "His" refers to the child then the child is born with clear vision but as he grows doubts his own perception and learns "Men- to anticipate/Instead of Kings" One of the undermining influences is organised religion -- the dogma and doctrine expounded by clergymen and Christians who do not give children an unequivocal answer to the question "Who were 'the Father and the Son?'" (1258). "Principle" is a financial term so either the child is born with a credit account that becomes depleted with experience leading to "Beggary" (377), or God's principle is whole which may imply that it neither decreases nor increases despite his role as banker (49); He is immutable. Despite the corrosion of faith, the persona of Poem 1258 still believes in heaven and sees its attainment as "Event ineffable."

Although the faith expressed in "Lycidas" is a Christian virtue, doubt is also permissible. Derision, not doubt, deprives us of the balm of consolation. If we deride religion, the derision "Invalidates

the balm of that religion/That doubts as fervently as it believes" (Ourselves we do inter" [1144]). Thomas would not believe in Christ's resurrection until he had seen His hands and side (John 20, 24-28). However, faith without proof is better than doubt and the necessity for proof; "'Twas better- the perceiving not-/Provided it believed" ("Trust in the Unexpected" [555]). Dickinson is echoing the Bible, for Christ said, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20, 29). Dickinson specifically refers to Thomas in Poem 555.

Even when God tests one's faith without saying for what wrong, one should maintain faith. "He strained my faith" (497), "Hurled my belief," "Wrung me- with Anguish," and "Stabbed- while I sued." But the persona did not yield, never doubted Him, and "Not a nerve failed." But the persona in "I meant to have but modest needs" (476) grows "shrewder" as she realises that God smiles at those naive enough to take the Bible literally. Part of the dilemma is that often the persona is not sure how far she can trust God to keep His promises, nor whether He is, indeed, better than mankind.

To "Will!/'Tis able as a God" because the ability to choose makes us "The Maker- of Ourselves" ("To be alive- is Power" [677]). But, since the cosmos contains more than "Ourselves," perhaps there is some other power who creates the rest of the cosmos. The persona of "By homely gift" (1563) says that "'Nothing' is the force/ That renovates the world." Either this can be construed as a primum mobile, which having set the mechanism working is no longer required, or as a world no longer renovated. If God is nothing or "Ourselves," there would seem to be little consolation in bereavement.

Further, in "The Brain- is wider than the Sky" (632), the brain not only encompasses everything in the world but exceeds the capacity of sea and sky. There is nothing the brain cannot comprehend and, because of its imaginative possibilities, the brain can create for itself. However, "The Brain is just the weight of God"; the brain has a particular weight (not much) which exactly equals the weight of God. The question arises whether God only exists in the brain. The juxtaposition of concrete measure with abstract divinity casts doubt on the immortality of God. The brain which has a weight will decay when its owner dies. One confronts the question whether God decays in the same way and at the same time as the brain. If so, then God is mortal as well as amputated.

Any difference between the brain and God lies in the distinction of "Syllable from Sound," the word from the Word. Anderson says, "The mind's perceptions of reality, both spiritual and natural, are symbols; like the poet's words ('Syllable') they stand for truths ('Sound')" (265). Juhasz writes, "God and the brain both create by thinking. . . . 'Syllable from Sound' [is] poetic creation as opposed to cosmic creation" (Undiscovered 27). "Sound" can be read as prelapsarian, the "Syllable" being an effect of the fall into language. If the Word should die, God will die, for "When it is lost, that Day shall be/The Funeral of God" ("This is a Blossom" [945]). The connection between language, God, and consolation will be considered further in chapter three.

Sometimes the consolation provided by a belief in heaven seems to be illusory, a creation of desire. Heaven is self-created to the extent that

Heaven is so far of the Mind
 That were the Mind dissolved-
 The Site- of it- by Architect
 Could not again be proved-
 (370).

But unless heaven can be located in space and actual mansions built there, as suggested in Poem 1052 which will be discussed later in this chapter, no architect would be able to prove its existence. Since heaven is "Vast- as our Capacity" and is created to be adequate to our desire, only imagination limits the size, beauty and location of heaven. Although the subject of this poem is not the grief of bereavement, for Dickinson one of the major functions of heaven is to provide a location for the reunion of the dead. An imaginary heaven does not seem very conducive to elegiac consolation. But the memories of the dead can be stored in the brain and, in this sense, the dead can be kept alive.

One subject of "Because that you are going" (1260) is the nature of consolation in the elegiac mode, including the consolation of memories. In the third stanza the persona states that "not even God himself/ Could now annihilate" the significance of a life that has been perceived by another. By implication there is the traditional consolation of survival of the deceased in the memory of the living, often identified with immortality through fame. Virgil, in "Eclogue V," offers the consolation of immortality through fame with the words "ever shall thine honour, thy name and praise endure" (78). In "Lycidas" the beginning of the consolation starts with the words of Phoebus:

But not the praise,

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil

But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
 And perfect witness of all-judging love;
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.

(76-84)

Memories of the dead, like earthly fame, become important to the bereaved, while heavenly fame is untarnishable.

The fourth stanza of Poem 1260, in lamenting the loss, says that without the beloved eternity and paradise are a fictitious presumption. The persona is prepared to forfeit immortality, and the right to criticise heaven and hell, in exchange for a glimpse of the dead. Even heaven would be too plain unless she could recognise the dead face in Christ's. She then quotes variants on Biblical texts, "God is love" (I John 4, 8); He is a "jealous God" (Exodus 20, 5), possibly in the sense of vigilant; and "with God all things are possible" (Matt 19, 26). The final consolation is that "He will refund us finally/Our confiscated Gods." The use of the financial term and the word "Gods" here, juxtaposed with the Biblical quotations, could seem blasphemous, but inasmuch as "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Gen 1, 27), perhaps the blasphemy is modified. Further, since in other poems the integration of God has been doubted and perceptions of God have been changed, the final refunding may involve a re-integration of God. I do not think this poem alone justifies such a reading but, taken in conjunction with other poems, this reading is, perhaps, tenable. In any case, this poem does offer a Christian elegiac consolation.

In "Lycidas," the consolation is based on absolute faith in God and acceptance of the duality of body and soul, for there is the certainty that King's corpse is in the sea while his spirit is in heaven. For Dickinson "Faith slips- and laughs, and rallies," grasps at straws of evidence (straws because faith is beyond legal rationalisation) which can never "still the Tooth/That nibbles at the soul" ("This World is not Conclusion" [501]). Organised religion is only "an opiate" (Robert Weisbuch, Emily Dickinson's Poetry 85) that deadens the personal search and need for the species "Invisible, as Music-/But positive, as Sound" (501) which beckons. The invisible music is in fact "Better- than Music," and vastly superior to anything the Church produces.

Not such a strain- the Church- baptizes-
 When the last Saint- goes up the Aisles-
 Not such a stanza splits the silence-
 When the redemption strikes her Bells-
 (503).

Although the faith and belief of children is corroded by worldly wisdom, as in Poems 367, 476 and 637, there is a recollection, as in Wordsworth's elegy, of the harmony which serves as a testament until "Humming/Drop into tune- around the Throne" (503). Despite occasional doubts, there is the firm conviction of an eternal harmonious heaven.

The implicit faith in "Lycidas" is expressed by Dickinson in "I never saw a Moor."

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-
 (1052).

The first stanza is convincing because of its specificity: heather and a billow to epitomise a moor and the sea. Because that stanza is convincing, the reader is prepared to accept the persona's statement in the second. "Yet certain am I" refers both to the following and preceding line, with its implied parallelism with the first stanza. The understood sense is that the persona is as certain that God and heaven exist as she is that moors and seas exist. Since God and heaven are assured, resurrection and consolation are implied.

However, the reader is checked by the "Checks" of the last line. If one can find "the spot/As if the Checks were given," the checks might be demarcation squares as on a map grid. They might also be some form of pass, like cloakroom check tickets, to allow entrance, or the check marks of accuracy control, as if entrants had to be checked against a list of names. Alternatively, the entrance into heaven can only be gained after one has been checked by death in the progress of life. If all these readings are valid, the poem posits both the Christian concept that heaven can only be entered, with approval, after death, and that heaven can be located in space -- a definite place where God can build His mansions. A very tangible consolation, based on personal non-doctrinal faith!

Even though the keeping of faith is difficult for Dickinson, throughout her poetry she keeps reiterating that faith. Although the persona knows "How brittle are the Piers/ On which our Faith doth

tread" (1433), she also knows

It is as old as God-
 Indeed- 'twas built by him-
 He sent his Son to test the plank,
 And he pronounced it firm.

Although faith is tottery, Christ's death ensures that its basis is sound. Provided faith is firm, heaven is certain and consolation implicit. Again, the movement outlined here is from loss of faith to the complete intuitive faith reflected in traditional Christian elegies.

Before the paper discusses the efficacy of prayer, it will be advantageous to look at Dickinson's representations of God. Dickinson, through her personae, presents God in many different guises. The roles God plays have a bearing on the perception of heaven and the hope of resurrection.

The persona is not party to any financial negotiations with God, in "Is Heaven a Physician?"

Is Heaven an Exchequer?
 They speak of what we owe-
 But that negotiation
 I'm not a party to-
 (1270).

The persona's lack of understanding, since she is not a party to knowledge, relates to that expressed in the first stanza where the persona seems puzzled that God can only heal sublunary wounds but "Medicine Posthumous/Is unavailable." Perhaps she has forgotten, or does not comprehend, that posthumous medicine is not necessary because I Corinthians 15 states, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption/. . . /It is sown a

natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (42-44). The last half of Poem 1270 could then be a statement of God's omniscience, as opposed to the persona's limited knowledge; or it could be a mildly expressed reproof that she is allowed to accumulate debts the origin and payment of which are not made clear to her, as they should be in any financial transaction. In either explication the persona is dependent on the integrity of God.

"I'm not a party to" need not only mean I have not been made a party to, it can also mean I will not be a party to. Ford writes, "Heaven had not asked for her signature; consequently she should be under no obligation. . . . [T]he poem is . . . a reaction against her Puritan background" (145). In this second reading the persona feels that life, death and resurrection are not, and should not be, negotiable. If resurrection is non-negotiable, the consolation must, once again, be based on trust in God's integrity.

Alternatively, she may be denying that there can be resurrection of the flesh without posthumous medicine. Or, within the elegiac mode, she may be desiring a reversal of the death through a heavenly nostrum. This need to revive the dead parallels the denial of death often demonstrated by the bereaved, and that same denial offered in elegies. In "Adonais" Shelley says, "He lies, as if in dewy sleep he lay; Awake him not!" Twice in "Adonais" death is nearly defeated: once when a "Splendour on his mouth alit" (100), and again when Urania approaches the corpse and "for a moment Death,/ . . ./Blushed to annihilation" (217-19). The Splendour and Urania could, in Dickinson's terms, be seen as very temporary posthumous remedies. In this last reading the persona rejects spiritual resurrection as not a sufficient

consolation to her at the present state of her bereavement. Either the consolation in this poem is insufficient or is based on faith in the good intentions of a God whose design seems less than clear.

Milton shows assurance in his faith (an assurance that may owe something to his youthfulness) in saying "the dear might" of Christ transforms King into "the Genius of the shore" ("Lycidas" 173 & 183). The persona in "Papa above!" (61) asks only that there be "seraphic Cupboards" in which "To nibble all the day," and that the "Mouse/O'erpowered by the Cat" should find a "Mansion" in its transformed status of a "Rat." Perhaps the ideal life for a mouse is to be a rat, possibly in the sense of being as powerful as a rat, and do nothing but eat "While unsuspecting Cycles/Wheel solemnly away."

Gilbert sees

the speaker's heavenly Pater clearly [as] a glorified Victorian pater familias, and the poet . . . identifies herself with a subhuman creature. . . . Those solemn but unsuspecting celestial cycles are curiously reminiscent, after all, of the six generations of "earnest God-fearing men" who represented the Dickinson family every sabbath in the old meeting house . . . and the snug poetic mouse is a tiny but subversive force in seraphic cupboards. What foundations might she be undermining, in her childlike "innocence"?

(Madwoman 598-99)

Of course one can see a diminutive "power ratio" (Madwoman 599) between the mouse and some omniscient God. There seems to be no textual evidence, however, to see the celestial cycles of the last two lines as referring to the past rather than the future, although there is, of course, a sense in which the persona of Poem 61 is being subversive. The solemnity of the last two lines of the poem and the juxtaposition

of childish and adult personae point up the satiric irony of the seven preceding lines, but it is necessary to indicate the satiric target or the object of the subversion. Gilbert suggests that such an object is Dickinson's own father and, by extension, all men. Given the actual text, this interpretation may well be both overly simplistic and overly feminist.

The mouse-rat has no apparent altruistic purpose during its afterlife unlike the new spiritual role of Lycidas to "be good/To all that wander in that perilous flood" (184-85). The triviality of eating throughout eternity, especially since the spiritual body of which St. Paul speaks in Corinthians is incorruptible and, presumably, requires no food, is matched by the absurdity of "Papa Above" who, being father to a mouse, must himself be a mouse. The satire is directed at those who would believe in such an afterlife and in any god who promised such. Unless the persona, despite the satiric juxtaposition in the last lines, is as simple as she first appears, there is an admission underlying the poem that the nature of resurrection is beyond mortal comprehension. The consolation is intrinsically present and yet partially incomprehensible.

Besides being an inadequate doctor, a financier and a mouse, "God is a distant stately Lover" (357). To maintain his stately distance, God sends Christ to woo us, as Miles in Longfellow's "The Courtship of Miles Standish" sends John Alden as envoy.² Unfortunately, as a result of such "a Vicarious Courtship" the soul may, like Priscilla, "Choose the Envoy- and spurn the Groom" The final couplet of Poem 357 questions the validity of the Trinity as an identity for it is not possible that "'Miles', [sic] and 'John Alden' were Synonym."

Again doctrine rather than Christianity is being questioned, and the impression the reader has is that the persona would prefer a little more warmth and contact than God the Father offers.

Earlier it was stated that "God cannot be found" (1551) is not necessarily a completely hopeless statement, in that it parallels the standard elegiac complaint that the protectors of the dead were not present to prevent the death. "Where were ye Nymphs?" ("Lycidas" 50) is part of the traditional complaint that of all living organisms only the one who can least be spared is dead. But some of Dickinson's personae go further than just lamenting the passive absence of protection and accuse God of actively being the cause of the bereavement.

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

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

(49)

God, who is "Burglar! Banker- Father," steals those we love and calls us to account. Once again Dickinson transmogrifies Biblical text (Anderson 18). "[F]rom him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matt 25, 29) turns God into both thief and accountant, and "lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven" (Matt 6, 20) shows God to be a banker. Frye says, "she read the Bible and took an immediate dislike to . . . the legal providential God who seems to ratify everything that is meaningless and cruel in life" (207). To see God

the Father as both banker and burglar epitomises religious ambivalence.

Frye continues:

It seems clear that her relation to the Nonconformist faith in which she was brought up was itself nonconformist, and that it would have violated her conscience ever to have made either a final acceptance or a final rejection of that faith. Her method . . . was to prove where she could not believe.

(208)

The fact that twice previously "Angels . . . /Reimbursed my store" indicates some divine mercy. The juxtaposition of the reverent and the satiric or, as David Porter sees it, "supplication and irreverence" (The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry 48) within the poem further emphasises the ambivalence the speaker feels towards God, and a male Trinity.

"I never lost as much but twice,/And that was in the sod" (49) might be indicative of a poem of bereavement. However, there may be some connection between these lines and the opening line of "My life closed twice before its close" (1732), since in "Afraid" (608) life is perceived as "one or two existences." It may be that either poems 49 and 1732 have beyond-the-grave personae, or that loss and closing can take some meaning other than personal mortality. Whatever the closures are, if it is remembered that before the persona in Poem 1664 can "look at Thee" she has to cross two deserts, perhaps desert, loss and closing are interrelated, if not identical, and are essential experiences before she can stand at "thy Right hand" (1664). The sentiments and words used in Poem 49 recall the "Beggary" of "To lose one's faith" (377), so perhaps the closures in Poem 49 and "My life closed twice" (1732), and the deserts of Poem 1664 are the loss of faith. For

the personae to receive any consolation, her faith must be maintained or restored when lost.

In any event, the negative-seeming "Burglar! Banker- Father" (49) can have a more positive interpretation in that the composite burglar-banker may only steal things of value and then treasure them in heaven. Further, the persona has twice been a beggar and is now "poor once more" and, in the sermon on the mount, Christ says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5, 3). The consolation in Poem 49 is dependent upon trust in God's safekeeping of the dead and the resurrection of the persona after death. In God's banking system, given that his "Principle" is "Whole" (637), souls are of equal value before birth, during life, and after death.

The necessity for faith in God's integrity is stated much more clearly in "All these my banners be" (22).

To lose- if one can find again-
To miss- if one shall meet-
The Burglar cannot rob- then-
The Broker cannot cheat.

The different terminology, "Banker" to "Broker," can be seen as the use of nearly interchangeable financial titles. Alternatively, "Broker" can have the double connotation of financial dealer and one who breaks, in this case, mortal relationships. The elegiac consolation is implicit; the broker-burglar only breaks and steals on earth with the assumption of reunion after death.

To enable the consolation to evolve from the pagan to the incontrovertibly Christian, "Lycidas" opens with a pagan scenario, echoing the Greek and Roman pastoral laments. "Some keep the Sabbath

going to Church" (324) moves from the Christian to the seemingly pagan or pantheistic, and then moves back to some middle ground.

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

The chorister, dove and sexton are the bobolink, the orchard and, possibly, the robin; but God, not an organic visible substitute, is the clergyman. "So instead of getting to Heaven, at last-/I'm going, all along" could refer to the heaven that is "so far of the mind" (370), or to the fact that going to heaven is an organic process restricted neither to Sundays nor to a life after death. The dogma and doctrine of organised Christianity are replaced by a naturalistic faith in God, in which both God and man are part of a unified cosmos. The God of this persona is as loving and real as the God of "Lycidas."

One possible point of contact with God, as expressed in "Some keep the Sabbath" (324), is through His creation. Through the northern lights God can give us an intimation of His perfect majesty.

Aurora is the effort
 Of the Celestial Face
 Unconsciousness of Perfectness
 To simulate, to Us.

(1002)

Only the mystical vitality of the northern lights can even simulate God's unconscious perfection.

For Dickinson's personae God can be amputated, absent, a burglar, a banker, Father, a mouse, a clergyman, the aurora and "a distant stately Lover." The lover in "Wild Nights- Wild Nights!" (249) is

presented as neither stately nor distant.

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

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

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

The above can be read as a sexual poem per se, but there are key words and phrases that could be taken as the persona's perception of the ideal resurrection. Todd writes that the "poem is less erotic than some Christian expressions of the desire for such a union [with God] like, for example, Donne's holy sonnet 'Batter my heart, three person'd God'" (37). Earlier Todd writes that the middle stanza "interposes the complementary state of peace and motionlessness suggesting the fulfillment of the sexual act" (37). The state of "motionlessness" resembles the stasis of "Because I could not" (712), and the sexual act may lead to pregnancy, as imaged in Poem 712.³

By referring back to "I did not reach Thee" (1664) and "Far from Love" (1021), it can be seen that the personae can only get "the look at [God]" (1664) after an arduous journey. The "Wild Nights," also, are to come about at the end of a voyage when chart and compass are no longer needed. The projected lover can be perceived as deceased and the resurrection as reunion with him in Eden, or as God Himself. In either case, the consolation for death is undisguised ecstasy in

reunion, probably enhanced by the enforced separation. The persona has found a potential haven and port for when she has done with the "perilous flood" ("Lycidas" 185); she is one of those for whom Lycidas is appointed guardian. Within Dickinson's corpus there are the polarities of both a partially rejected consolation with God as a financier-doctor and also an ecstatic consolation in union after death with God as lover.

Whatever God's roles may be, it is necessary to consider Dickinson's attitude to prayer inasmuch as prayer offers hope of consolation to the bereaved. Provided there is some faith "At least- to pray- is left- is left-" (502). The "At least" and the repetition of "is left" are not very positive but are stronger than "The abdication of Belief" and "an ignis fatuus" (1551). Although the persona in Poem 502 has searched for Jesus and has knocked everywhere, following Christ's injunction "seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt 7, 7), she cannot find Him and is left to ask "Hast thou no Arm for Me?" (502), with no better chance of His keeping the faith of "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt 7, 7). Perhaps Jesus, too, has an amputated arm, or perhaps He is not listening. If God is powerless, no consolation can be sought in Christ's words, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5, 4).

The God of this persona, even when He is listening and extending an arm, bears little resemblance to the compassionate Jesus who also said,

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and
forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.

And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blest them.

(Mark 10, 14 & 16)

The Biblical text describes a loving two-handed God who offers a definite promise of a resurrection in heaven and an understood concomitant consolation for the bereaved, a promise which appears to be invalidated once God is mutilated.

Prayer is, perhaps, the only means of communication with God we have.

Prayer is the little implement
Through which Men reach

By means of it- in God's Ear-
If then He hear (437)

But God does not care that we smart in misery, even though we pray ("Of Course- I prayed" [376]), for He "is indeed a jealous God" (1719). He does not wish to know that we'd rather play with each other than with Him. If God separates us from those we love, and then either does not listen or does not care, consolation is insecure.

Prayer can be answered directly. "God it is said replies in Person/When the cry is meant" ("Tell as a Marksman" [1152]). Unfortunately, the phrase "it is said" casts doubt upon the validity of the persona's conviction.

The persona is uncertain of God's power or desire to answer prayer. In "'Tis true" (538) she says, "Forgive Them- Even as Myself-/Or else- forgive not me" The placing of "Even as myself" allows for two readings. Either God should forgive both them

and her, or as she forgives them so God should also. She is certain of her own capacity to forgive, but is unsure of God's, even though her words echo Christ's on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23, 34). She does not wish to gain paradise on the strength of the suffering caused to her by others, nor does she wish their entrance into heaven to receive any hindrance from the same cause. The persona is interceding for others that the consolation of heaven may be extended to them. It may be that she has no desire for a heaven from which they are debarred.

Personal intervention can be stronger than just a cry for help. "Should you but fail at- Sea-" (226), and should the knock of the dead "at Paradise" go unheard, "I'd harass God/Until he let you in." Whereas the drowned Lycidas, being of the elect, is sure of a place in heaven, Dickinson's drowned person might need help in getting God's attention. However, there is both the certainty of heaven and faith in intercession to offer the possibility of consolation.

Dickinson's persona seems to turn to God only as a last resort in "Savior! I've no one else to tell" (217) and "I got so I could take his name" (293)). She says "I am the one forgot thee so-/Dost thou remember me?" (217). She

Could dimly recollect a Grace-
I think, they call it "God"-
Renowned to ease Extremity-
When Formula, had failed-
(293).

Whatever the "Formula" might be, in "Extremity" the persona can only rely on a personal appeal to God. The last extremity is, of course, death and the only hope of consolation comes from personal intercession.

Perception and faith, to some extent, are not entirely within one's control according to "If the foolish, call them 'flowers'" (168).

Those who read the "Revelations"
Must not criticize
Those who read the same Edition-
With beclouded Eyes!

Understanding and faith do not come easily unless, like "that Old 'Moses,'" one has been allowed to view "Canaan." Despite her apparent lack of understanding and faith, she continues:

Grant that we may stand,
Stars, amid profound Galaxies-
At that grand "Right Hand"!

She is asking that after death we might stand at God's "Right Hand," which in this poem is not amputated, and that we might be "Stars." The sense here seems to be symbolic stars, as in "Adonais" and "When Lilacs," rather than apotheosis as in Virgil's "Eclogue V." This poem, although starting from less than perfect faith, has a point of convergence with "Eclogue V" in its use of stars, of continuity with "Adonais" and "When Lilacs" with stars as symbols, and of tangency with "Lycidas" in its expression of Christian faith and resurrection.

Dickinson's God, however depicted by her personae, can only be approached personally and individually, with a clear mind free of the shibboleths of organised religion. Only in this way will one find the elegiac consolation based on faith in resurrection, the faith that "doubts as fervently as it believes" (1144). Dickinson fervently believes in the God she glimpses beyond the circumference of her knowledge while she doubts the God of Congregational doctrine.

The consolation of resurrection is dependent on Christ's sacrifice. "Death- We do not know" ("Life- is what we make it" [698]) except that Christ's death converted mortality from an end to a beginning. Since Christ took on humanity and experienced death, "Base must be the Coward/Dare not venture- now" Christ thought it no "Extravagance/To pay- a Cross" for the "Grace" of our salvation ("Must be a Woe" [571]). Only grief can give the slanted vision that enables us to peripherally glimpse the "Delight" of that Grace.

Grief and bereavement are often elegiacally expressed in terms of evening and winter, the consolation reflecting the promise of a new day and the regeneration of nature in the spring. "Lycidas" opens with "Myrtles brown . . . Berries harsh and crude . . . Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year" (2-5), and closes with "Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new" (193). On winter afternoons too, for Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light" which gives us "Heavenly Hurt" and "internal difference,/Where the meanings, are" (258). The slant of light is related to the "departing light" (1714) and to the "Compound Vision" in "The Admirations- and Contempts- of time" when

The Dying- as it were a Height
Reorganizes Estimate
And what We saw not
We distinguish clear-

Back- toward Time-
And forward-
Toward the God of Him-

(906).

Death itself causes altered vision, a vision which includes God and an afterlife.

God is both love and truth. "Truth- is as old as God-/His Twin

identity" (836), and can only die if and when God does. Not only is God love, but love is divine and immortal.

Unable are the Loved to die
For Love is Immortality,
May, it is Deity-

Unable they that love- to die
For Love reforms Vitality
Into Divinity.

(809)

We seek reunion with those we love and those who love us, and it is precisely the act of loving that bestows the immortality necessary to that reunion. If there is any "Medicine Posthumous" (1270) it is love, and "God is Love" (I John 4, 8).

Christian consolation, because it is dependent on faith in God, an ordered cosmos, and the resurrection of the soul, is not really attainable by reason and logic. Any understanding of the grandeur and power of God requires a cosmic leap beyond the rational. There are times when life seems to be missing "a rudiment" ("My period had come for Prayer" [564]) which prayer alone can satisfy. The persona relates how she attempts to come closer to God.

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

(564).

There is no doubt that God is the persona's friend. She perceives God Himself as an organic unity, subject to change, and possibly, therefore, capable of rehabilitating Himself after amputation. The "North" epitomises both snow and the ultimate point of contact with

earth and the earthbound, and the horizons which she must ascend are similar to the circumference of such poems as "I saw no Way" (378). This latter poem opens with a claustrophobic atmosphere; there is a sense of no escape. But later the persona claims

I touched the Universe-
 And back it slid- and I alone-
 A speck upon a Ball-
 Went out upon Circumference-
 Beyond the Dip of Bell-
 (378).

By reaching beyond the ordinary, beyond the dogma and doctrine exemplified by the church bell, beyond the swing of any pendulum, she attains some mystical experience. The persona of Poem 564 has a similar experience.

The Silence condescended-
 Creation stopped- for Me-
 But awed beyond my errand-
 I worshipped- did not "pray"-
 (564).

The persona began her journey with an "errand" in mind, but is overcome with awe. The ultimate faith and belief, as exemplified by saints and martyrs throughout the ages, is the worship of God, not petitioning prayer. Dickinson has faced, within her corpus, the polarities of the possibility of God's complete powerlessness as only being an illusion to satisfy our need, to the unquestioning worship of His divinity.

Although Dickinson strives in her poetry to extend her circumferences of knowledge beyond what we can know, she arrives at the awe inspired by the incomprehensible grandeur of God. "This World is not Conclusion" (501) in the sense either of being the end or of being

what we conclude about it. Our conclusions about the world are false because "Our inference is premature,/Our premises to blame" ("God made no act without a cause" [1163]). "God made no . . . / . heart without an aim" so it is only our false understanding that allows us to judge another as a "needless Life" ("Our little Kinsmen" [885]). The culmination of both meanings of conclusion is that there is another world and life beyond this that is outside our mortal comprehension. Faith has to accept God's omniscience completely and say wholeheartedly with Christ, "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22, 42). Only by unquestioning awe and acceptance of God's design can we attain completely satisfactory consolation.

In ordering the experience of loss, Dickinson investigates the circumferences of divinity, eternity and creativity from the centre of her being, with unflinching New England integrity. Predominantly she questions Puritan dogma and the presumption of the elect and the covenant, but she also questions the Bible and God's integrity. She could not, and did not, arrive at an easy, stable system of belief. But perhaps she did come to accept the ambivalences and ambiguities she both saw and posited.

Milton, Shelley, Whitman and Dickinson are seeking some survival of the spirit after death. In her unorthodoxy, Dickinson resembles Whitman; in her methodology, her back and forth motion resembles Shelley's "Adonais"; and in her Christian framework, she resembles Milton. Milton's "Lycidas" progresses from paganism and lack of faith to complete conviction in redemption. Dickinson oscillates from the extreme of the possibility of God's funeral, through His ineffectiveness, malice and amputation, to complete conviction in His

love and the certainty of Christian elegiac consolation. In the final analysis, however, poetry and the poetic genesis arising from death afford Dickinson the greatest consolation.

Notes

1 Christ's claim to the high priest that "Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power" (Mark 14, 62) convicted Him of blasphemy in the eyes of the law.

2 Shurr (79) identifies the reference to Miles Standish and I then went to the primary text.

3 For a discussion of "Wild Nights" (249) as a poem about poetry and the poet see Ruth Miller 90-96.

DEATH AND POETIC GENESIS

The nearest Dickinson approaches to a traditional elegy in a single poem is her tribute to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Her- 'last Poems'" (312). It is singularly appropriate that it should be an elegy to a poet because, since Moschus' "Lament for Bion," the tradition is that the elegy is most appropriate when written for another poet whose successor the elegist hopes to become. This tradition is evident both in "Lycidas," Milton's tribute to King, and "Adonais," Shelley's tribute to Keats. Because there had been so few known women poets it is even more appropriate that both poets concerned in "Her- 'last Poems'" are women.

Her- "last Poems"-
 Poets- ended-
 Silver- perished- with her Tongue-
 Not on Record- bubbled other,
 Flute- or Woman-
 So divine-
 Not unto its Summer- Morning
 Robin- uttered Half the Tune-
 Gushed too free for the Adoring-
 From the Anglo-Florentine-
 Late- the Praise-
 'Tis dull- conferring
 On the Head too High to Crown-
 Diadem- or Ducal Showing-
 Be its Grave- sufficient sign-
 Nought- that We- No Poet's Kinsman-
 Suffocate- with easy woe-
 What, and if, Ourselves a Bridegroom-
 Put Her down- in Italy?

The poem resembles a traditional elegy in that it uses some of the themes and images already considered in this paper. The death is announced in the first line as that of a woman poet, who is later indirectly identified as "the Anglo-Florentine." If Dickinson were following traditional elegiac convention, the deceased would have some such classical name as Lycidas or Adonais, and there would be allusions to the paganism of classical elegies. "Florentine" places Barrett Browning in the Mediterranean area, the traditional home of elegy, while referring to the place where she spent her last years, died and was buried. The use of the events of the deceased's life, death and burial to make an oblique connection with the pagan setting of classical elegies follows Shelley's example in "Adonais" in which part of the setting is Italy, the place where Keats died and was buried.

"Poets- ended-/Silver- perished- with her Tongue" recalls, with its silver allusion to the flute which is mentioned in the fifth line, the piping of the shepherds of Arcadia. The initial statement of the death leaves no hope of the traditional poetic succession, for her death is the death of all potential poets. But the creation of poetry is related to the summer song of the robin. Although the "Robin- uttered Half the Tune" expresses some pathetic fallacy, it is more significant that the robin is identified as the singer of the song, the elegist, a successor, a potential woman poet, Emily Dickinson. It requires some overpowering experience or relationship to enable "Ourself" to create a poem sufficient to put as a wreath on the coffin, and for an everlasting memorial. But Dickinson is not inexperienced in bereavement, apparently a necessary prerequisite for a poet: "Who never lost, are unprepared/A Coronet to find!" (73).

The final two lines of the poem, "What, and if, Ourselves a Bridegroom/Put Her down- in Italy?" is usually taken to refer to Robert Browning as bridegroom-husband.¹ But the Brownings had been married fifteen years, time enough, however idyllic the marriage, for the epithet bridegroom to be questionable. There is, also, the ever-present problem of Dickinson's syntax and her penchant for making words and phrases mean not only more than one thing but as many things as possible. Further, not only is there no definitive version of her corpus but many of her poems are not finished, inasmuch as she left them with a variety of alternate words and, hence, a variety of meanings. Consequently her poetry is open to reader interpretation to a greater extent, perhaps, than that of most of her predecessors. The ambiguity of the poems puts pressure on the critic to examine the poetry with integrity and to attempt some consistent interpretation within the corpus. Nevertheless, several readings of the same poem need not be mutually exclusive.

It would be consistent with the other poems considered in this paper to see the "Bridegroom" as the suitor dead. However, "Nought that We- No Poet's Kinsman-/Suffocate - with easy woe" seems to refer either to the mourners generally, who may give themselves up to the ease of despair or, more specifically, to the elegist who sees herself as neither generically related to the particular dead poet nor to any poet. Elegiac tradition expects such modesty from the elegist.

It is this same "We" who is referred to in "What, and if, Ourselves a Bridegroom-/Put Her down- in Italy?" Since the corpse has already been buried, "Put Her down- in Italy" is not likely to refer to the burial. People do, however, go down in history, and poetry has long

been acknowledged by poets as the most lasting of memorials. Earlier in the poem Dickinson uses the word "late" as a transition between lines, thus making it work in the double sense of deceased and belated -- "the Anglo-Florentine-/Late- the Praise" -- as it is associated with "the Anglo-Florentine" or "the Praise." In the same way "a Bridegroom-/ Put Her down" can refer to both the burial by the husband and to the elegiac tribute by the elegist. The acknowledgement of poetic achievement, conferred by "a Bridegroom," is a crown or diadem rather than the carved wooden bowl of classical elegies or the laurel wreath bestowed on classical poets. Although "We" could be authorial or editorial, it is more likely the crown which allows Dickinson to refer to herself by the royal "Ourself."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's head is too high to crown; nevertheless posterity confers the poetic diadem, a symbol of royalty as shown by "Ducal." Although the praise is late and dull, fame is inevitable. The connection between praise and fame is made in Virgil's "Eclogue V" (78) and in Milton's "Lycidas" (76-84), and the connection between fame, death and elegy is apparent in

Fame is a bee.
It has a song-
It has a sting-
Ah, too, it has a wing.
(1763)

Since "Fame is the one that does not stay-/Its occupant must die" (1475), and elegies are written as a memorial to perpetuate the fame of one who has died, the "song" may be the elegy. Consequently the "sting" is death with its allusion to "O death, where is thy sting?" (I Cor 15, 55). The "wing" alludes to the fickle flight of

fame which parallels the fickleness of the philandering bee, but it also has overtones of the metamorphosis of the butterfly. For Dickinson the bee has affinities with the suitor death, and both eternity and everlasting fame can normally only be achieved after death. Fame is bestowed both by death as suitor and by the elegist as bridegroom of the deceased.

The persona in "Title Divine- is mine" (1072) is "Betrothed," but not in an ordinary betrothal for she has no ring. As Anderson says, "The double-ring ceremony" is evoked by "'Garnet to Garnet-/Gold- to Gold-'" (182), but she is denied both ceremony and ring. The juxtaposition of the words "My Husband" and "Stroking the Melody," separated only by "women say," may imply that she, as opposed to most women, is married to her muse, and "My Husband" would seem to have some connection with the "Bridegroom" of Poem 312.

The ambiguous relationship of birth, marriage and death is typically expressed as "Born- Bridalled- Shrouded-/In a Day" (1072). "Shrouded" may refer to Dickinson's assumption of a white dress to symbolise the metaphorical death of "Emily," the Connecticut Valley spinster who, to some extent, conformed to the standards and expectations of her neighbours. "Bridalled" may be a metaphor for marriage to her muse. She is "Royal- all but the Crown," possibly indicative of being a self-professed poet who has yet to receive recognition. She is also the "Empress of Calvary," reminiscent of "The Queen of Calvary" in the elegiac "I Dreaded that first Robin" (348), so that it is valid to assume that once again she has suffered from loss. "Born" is indicative of the genesis of the poet, accelerated by her need to order her experiences of bereavement but arising out of the

death of her old way of life.

It is obvious that Dickinson saw Barrett Browning as an inspiration for she writes, in "I think I was enchanted," that a startling change was effected within her by reading Barrett Browning's poetry.

I could not have defined the change-
Conversion of the Mind
Like Sanctifying in the Soul-
Is witnessed- not explained-
'Twas a Divine Insanity

(593).

"Divine Insanity" recalls the traditional debate as to whether a poet is mad and/or divinely inspired, and relates poetry with divinity. Again Dickinson uses a careful transition so that "Like Sanctifying in the Soul" refers to the poetic "Conversion of the Mind" and to something that is "witnessed- not explained"

The need for a ritual recognition of the genesis of a poet, "Like Sanctifying in the Soul," is expressed in "I'm ceded" (508). The birth of the poet needs recognition in the same way as the birth of a baby is ritualised in the baptismal ceremony. As exemplified in the two following quotations, Poem 508 is often taken to be an expression of Dickinson's secret commitment to a symbolic marriage. Part of the argument is, as Shurr states, that "[t]he first stanza records the dropping of the maiden name and assumption of the husband's" (24). Anderson, although arguing for a mystical marriage, similarly writes,

In [baptism the name] is dropped from the family tree upon the upturned face of an 'unconscious' life which is thus given identity, but only as one of 'theirs.' In [marriage] a new name is 'consciously' chosen by an adult who is thus identified as the beloved --

'Adequate- Erect' in contrast to the 'whimpering,
dangling' babe on its father's breast

(178)

The assumption may be partially true, but the critical logic is faulty.

Baptism serves three functions. It dedicates the child to Christian precepts, admits her as a member of the Christian community, and bestows her Christian names upon her. Only her Christian names, not her surname, are given at the christening ceremony. But if the new name she has taken is that of poet, her Christian names become of less importance than her surname. If she is to attain poetic stature she will, like the great male poets, be referred to predominantly by surname only. It is the Godparents, not the parents, who state the child's chosen names and undertake to fight the devil on her behalf. It is the Godparents who, in effect, accept her into the community. Dickinson is well aware of the symbolism and significance of the baptismal ceremony and is not likely to use baptism to indicate a change of surname, and "Their's" is not likely to refer to her parents. The ceremony of baptism epitomises her cession from her expected and accepted roles in the community of Amherst to her chosen life as poet.

The persona chooses "just a Crown" -- "one small Diadem" which fills up "Existence's whole Arc." As a token of her new estate her baptismal name

Is finished using, now,
And They can put it with my Dolls,
My childhood, and the string of spools,
I've finished threading- too

She has finished playing; the professed poet shapes in earnest. This new stage in her life and poetic career is similarly expressed in terms of the movement from childhood to adulthood in

We play at Paste-
Till qualified, for Pearl-
Then, drop the Paste-
And deem ourself a fool-
The Shapes- though- were similar-
And our new Hands
Learned Gem-Tactics-
Practicing Sands-

(320).

There are the key words for poetry -- pearl and gem -- and again she refers to herself by the royal "We" and "ourself." She now has enough skill at her art and enough experience of life and death to consider herself an artist.

It is as an artist that Dickinson considers life after death in

There is a morn by men unseen-
Whose maids upon remoter green
Keep their Seraphic May-

. . . .

Like thee to dance- like thee to sing-
People upon the mystic green-
I ask, each new May Morn.
I wait thy far, fantastic bells-
Announcing me in other dells-
Unto the different dawn!

(24)

The "men" may be generic but the poem seems to be specifically about women and, with its "maids," "dance," "birds," "distaff" and "sing," probably about women poets. This dawn of resurrection "upon the mystic green" is for those "birds that sought the sun," even as the robin sang "unto its summer- Morning" (312), and that Robin is definitely related

to the poet. An even clearer association between poet, robin and sun is "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune- / . . . / The ode familiar- rules the Noon" (285). Furthermore, in "The Murmur of a Bee" (155), Dickinson writes,

The Breaking of the Day
 Addeth to my Degree-
 If any ask me how-
 Artist- who drew me so-
 Must tell!

In this single stanza there are the dawn, "Degree" (sometimes associated with a crown), art and divinity. Poem 24 uses one set of symbols to convey two meanings. May and dawn are both elegiac times of rebirth and so may offer elegiac consolation. But because the sun, early summer and dawn often symbolise poetry, Dickinson's consolation may have reference to the resurrection of poets.

Dickinson, in a poem that is as celebratory as "Im ceded" (508), sees her status of poet as conferred during a coronation ceremony.

The Day that I was crowned
 Was like the other Days-
 Until the Coronation came-
 And then- 'twas Otherwise-

As Carbon in the Coal
 And Carbon in the Gem
 Are One- and yet the former
 Were dull for Diadem-

I rose, and all was plain-
 But when the Day declined
 Myself and It, in Majesty
 Were equally- adorned-

The Grace that I- was chose-
 To Me- surpassed the Crown
 That was the Witness for the Grace-
 'Twas even that 'twas Mine-

(356).

Again there are the key poetic words "crown," "majesty," "diadem" and "gem." Both crown and gem are consistently important as symbols of the poet and poetry for "To own the Art within the Soul/ . . . [is] a reduceless Mine" (855). As "the Day declined" (356) it was adorned, presumably by the colours of the setting sun. But the declining day and "Myself . . . /Were equally- adorned" Again, this time by indirection, the persona is associated with the sun. Again there is, in "The Grace," the sense of sanctification. Dickinson writes, "I reckon- when I count at all-/First- Poets- Then the Sun-/Then Summer" (569). Poets supersede both the sun and summer, both real and symbolic. There is a sense of celebration and sanctification expressed in both "I'm ceded" and "The Day that I was crowned" because for Dickinson poetic power is a great and holy gift.

Again, in Poem 356, Dickinson uses a careful transition to create double meanings and ambiguity. "The Grace that I- was chose-/To Me- surpassed the Crown" can be read as meaning that the fact that her worth has been acknowledged is of more significance than the material symbol of that acknowledgement. However, because of Dickinson's use of dashes, her non-specific use of tenses and person, and her convoluted syntax, "The Grace that I- was chose-/To Me" could relate to "Of all the Souls" (664), and the grace may be that "I have elected . . . the Atom- I preferred" (664).

The sense of the doubleness of identity is expressed in many of Dickinson's poems, and is of importance to her perception both of her poetic powers and of how closely death and poetry are connected. The expression of psychic duality often shows a fear and dread of the alter ego, for "Of Consciousness, her awful Mate/The Soul cannot be

rid" (894). In "Experience is the Angled Road" she faces the paradox that although our lives are predestined we have free will.

Quite Opposite- How Complicate
The Discipline of Man-
Compelling Him to choose Himself
His Preappointed Pain-
(910).

At its worst the sense of duality can lead to suicide: "One need not be a Chamber to be Haunted."

Ourself behind ourself, concealed-
Should startle most-
Assassin hid in our Apartment
Be horror's least.

The Body- borrows a Revolver-
He bolts the Door-
O'erlooking a superior spectre-
Or More-

(670).

This poem can be read simply as a poetic statement that one's psyche is more to be feared than an assassin; as Juhasz says, "the self is both torturer and victim" (Undiscovered 73). But if the self is both assassin and victim, this poem can also be read as a beyond-the-grave poem. "The Body- borrows a Relvolver" does not sound like a description of an ordinary assassin for he would already possess a gun. The body, in desperation, destroys itself in its attempt to destroy the spectre, or spectres ("Or More") of its own psyche. An assassin would be a lesser horror than the fear of self-destruction.

The "Assassin in our Apartment" can refer both to an actual potential assassin and also to that part of the mind which drives the persona to suicide. Although "to be Haunted-/One need not be a House"

(italics mine), Dickinson often portrays the mind as a house. Mudge writing on Poem 670, states, "Home, sometimes a paradise of possibility, could be transfigured by the poet into a prison" (12).

The persona of "The Loneliness One dare not sound" does not even need to consider a gun to feel that a divided and isolated self may be fatal. "The Loneliness" is

The Loneliness whose worst alarm
Is lest itself should see-
And perish from before itself
For just a scrutiny-
(777).

The phrase "dare not sound" functions both in the sense that she dare not plumb the depths of the loneliness, and also that she dare not state it aloud or put it into words. This loneliness imposes silence, not poetry, on the speaker.

However, individual human consciousness can be more positive for it will prove

How adequate unto itself
Its properties shall be
Itself unto itself and none
Shall make discovery.

Attended by a single Hound
Its own identity.
(822)

"This Consciousness that is aware" (822) is the human consciousness that will be "aware of Death/ And that itself alone." For many it may be fearsome to be "aware of Death . . . alone," but Dickinson has a great curiosity about death and seems to want to experience it fully

when it comes.

For Dickinson, every aspect of life, including loneliness, seems to be multi-faceted.

There is another Loneliness
That many die without-
Nor want of friends occasions it
Or circumstance of Lot

But nature, sometimes, sometimes thought
And whoso it befall
Is richer than could be revealed
By mortal numeral-

(1116).

Although we are not told the nature of the loneliness in Poem 1116, we are told that it is "richer than could be revealed" even by the largest number known to man. In ordinary speech if we wish to express a supremely large number we refer to it as infinity and assign it a mathematical symbol. Therefore, this loneliness is eternity, but an eternity experienced before death.

It is also an unusual kind of loneliness for, if "many die without it," the lack of this loneliness is a deprivation which has nothing to do with a "want of friends" Also the "many" implies that only the fortunate few (rather like the elect) will experience this loneliness. In "A Defense of Poetry" Shelley writes, "A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge" (Adams 502 & 511). There appears to be no evidence that Dickinson read Shelley's "Defense," but the idea of the poet as a lonely bird is not restricted to Shelley (see Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" for example), any more

than is the use of "centre and circumference" (see Emerson's "Circles"). Perhaps the lonely divided self which can lead to death can also lead to the creation of poetry. Then the loneliness arising from "nature, sometimes, sometimes thought" (1116), leading to both creative process and creative product, can result in a pastoral elegy forged from natural symbolism and "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" (Wordsworth, "Ode" 207).

The sense of the divided self, death and poetic genesis is sometimes associated in Dickinson's poetry with water or the sea. The very process of thought can be dangerous. "If wrecked upon the Shoal of Thought/How is it with the Sea?" (1469). But being swept away can, after the initial fear is overcome, prove to be an improvement.

The inundation of the Spring
Enlarges every soul-
It sweeps the tenement away
But leaves the Water whole-

In which the soul at first estranged-
Seeks faintly for its shore
But acclimated- pines no more
For that Peninsula-

(1425).

Although one might become acclimatized, the new deep waters do not necessarily provide comfort.

Declaiming Waters none may dread-
But Waters that are still
Are so for that most fatal cause
In Nature- they are full-

(1595).

This poem is obviously a poetic reworking of the adage "still waters run deep," which is applicable to people. These waters are not only

deep and silent, they are potentially fatal.

Dickinson has another poem about the silent versus the declaiming man, which may link these still waters with poetic potential.

I fear a Man of frugal Speech-
I fear a Silent Man-
Haranguer- I can overtake-
Or Babblor- entertain-

But He who Weigheth- While the Rest-
Expend their furthest pound-
Of this Man- I am wary-
I fear that He is Grand-

(543).

"Haranguer" and "Babblor" are obviously derogatory. Dickinson herself is frugal both in her chosen life and in her poetry. "Grand" for Dickinson has to be an adjective only applied to a facet of a person which she can unequivocally admire. Since the poem is about the use of language it is reasonable to assume that the man she is admiring is "Grand" in his use of language.

One poem definitely equates the sea with poetry by its use of "sea" in conjunction with such other symbols as pearl, diadem, royalty and mine, used consistently by Dickinson for poetry.

'Tis little I- could care for Pearls-
Who own the ample sea-
Or Brooches- when the Emperor-
With Rubies- pelteth me-

Or Gold- who am the Prince of Mines-
Or Diamonds- when have I
A Diadem to fit a Dome-
Continual upon me-

(466).

The displacement of the verbs by the juxtaposition of the positive and

the conditional in this poem is interesting. There is a thematic conditional subjunctivity, partly because Dickinson sees little as definitive. She states unequivocally that she "own[s] the ample sea" and that she is "the Prince of Mines" But there is an imaginative conditional involved in the other clauses: "'Tis little I could care for Pearls," "when the Emperor," "when Have I." She seems certain that she owns the sea and the mines; what is less certain is her ability to wrest the pearls, gold and diamonds from them. There is an interesting inversion in "when have I" rather than "when I have." Only when she has brought the gems from her subconscious, and converted them to poetry, will she be able to answer the implied question "When have I/ A Diadem"; but there seems to be no doubt that the poetic crown will ultimately be hers.

Although Dickinson's punctuation is not standard, one would expect the punctuation of the first line to read "'Tis little- I could care for Pearls" As it stands, "little" is an epithet for "I." However, since one who is frugal of speech is "Grand" (543), perhaps the "little" indicates that she has not yet attained poetic stature. If the implication is that she is, at this time, only a potential poet, then the use of the singular minuscule "me," rather than her usual royal majuscule "We" when sporting a crown or diadem, is appropriate.

In "I started Early- Took my Dog" (520) the sea can be, as Weisbuch suggests, "a symbol of all the experiential unknowns and of all the denied irrational urges" (55). The poem could be about the poetic process and the mining of the unconscious. Less likely it could be about an imaginative trip to the sea. It would have to be

imaginative because Emily Dickinson never visited the sea. It could be about a sexual encounter. It could also be about a near brush with death, maybe even a desire for death. Or it could combine suitor, death and poetic genesis. Whitman, in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," uses the sea symbolically and, hence, suggestively as the grave of the unidentified subject of the elegy and also as the genesis of poetry. Milton uses the sea inasmuch as it is part of the occasion of "Lycidas," and symbolically unites the elements of his elegy.

In the Dickinson poem there are "Mermaids in the Basement" and "Frigates- in the Upper Floor," while the persona is presumed "to be a Mouse-/Aground. . . ." It is appropriate that the conscious persona should be at ground level. The submerged mermaids represent her subconscious, while the frigates "Extended Hempen Hands" to her aspiring poetic sensibility. As the tide comes in -- the rising tide of poetic consciousness -- the persona is being absorbed into and by the sea as "He" both covers her and consumes her.

I felt His Silver Heel
Upon my Ankle- Then my Shoes
Would overflow with Pearl

But, despite the "Pearl," or because of the presence of the "Dog," or through a fear and reluctance, the persona is not yet ready to commit herself to poetry, and returns to "the Solid Town. . . ." Weisbuch writes, "we should note that the persona initiates the action by visiting the sea and that the sea finally withdraws 'with a Mighty look' which suggests that his defeat is only temporary" (55). She is obviously fascinated by the whole experience and, although the sea "withdrew," his "Mighty look" suggests that the persona has been chosen

and will eventually be overcome.

Death and poetry are linked by the intermediaries of life and resurrection in "Afraid."

Afraid! Of whom am I afraid?
Not Death- for who is He?
The Porter of my Father's Lodge
As much abasheth me!

Of Life? 'Twere odd I fear [a] thing
That comprehendeth me
In one or two existences-
As Deity decree-

Of Resurrection? Is the East
Afraid to trust the Morn
With her fastidious forehead?
As soon impeach my Crown!

(608)

The very structure of "Afraid" is ambiguous. The persona, with great conviction, states that she is not afraid of death who is as the porter of her "Father's Lodge"; of life which is "one or two existences-/As Deity decree"; or of resurrection. But if she is afraid of none of these things then of what is she afraid? If the answer is nothing, then one has to confront the questions why does the poem start with the word "Afraid" and concern itself with the possible causes of fear. The first stanza expresses the conventional Christian concept of death as the portal to a heavenly mansion. The second has both legal and predestinational overtones in "decree."

The final stanza with "East," "Morn" and "Crown" is more complex and uses key words which Dickinson associates with poetry. The movement of the poem is from faith, to intellect, to creativity. Dawn, the new day's resurrection, breaks in the east. As in human birth, the forehead of the day emerges first.² But "her fastidious forehead"

leads into "As soon impeach my Crown," which is worn not on the forehead of dawn but on the head of the persona.

Gilbert, discussing "There is a morn" (24), "Through the Dark Sod" (392), and "I think I was enchanted" (593), writes,

considering that Dickinson's mystic green is so defiantly female, we have to suspect that the festival she is secretly imagining, like the "holiday" of "There is a Morn [sic]," is a female Easter, an apocalyptic day of resurrection on which women would rise from the grave of gender in which Victorian society had buried them alive, and enter a paradise of "Ecstasy- and Dell" Flying into the dawn light like the queen she always suspected she was, she flings off "Shame," that "shawl of Pink" (J.1412) along with even her pearl-white dress.

(Madwoman 645-46, 649)

Since Poem 24 and Poem 593 are specifically about women poets, it is more relevant to talk in terms of a paradise for unacknowledged or silent³ women poets through the ages than of resurrection from burial by Victorian society. Perhaps what Dickinson is really afraid of is that her poetry, if it does not prove immortal, will impeach her crown. The fear of the insignificance of life and death can only be overcome by the glory of resurrection and justification by the transformation of the male laurel wreath into the female crown.

The birth of a poet, like the birth of a baby, is achieved through pain. It is "After great pain, a formal feeling comes" (341) which enables the poet to create form from the pain. Cameron writes,

Dickinson's poems mostly take place "After great pain," in the space between "Chill-" and "Stupor-." . . . Pain was the shot that inflicted temporary paralysis, a remedy that worked till the poems took over. . . . But pain . . . is also the past after which, from which, comes the "formal feeling" that is the poem.

(169)

The pain, like death in "Because" (712) and the sexual act in "Wild Nights" (249), is followed by stasis. The sexual act which may lead to pregnancy, pain which could be the pain of childbirth, and death are all followed by stasis. This specific connection could not stand on the evidence of these poems without the evidence of the connection between death, suitor and birth. Cameron states, "Loss gives birth to language in the strenuous aftermath of its own labor of grief" (174).

Both death in Poem 712 and pain in Poem 341 are followed by a sense of timelessness: "was it . . . Yesterday, or Centuries before?" (341). The new form, like poetry, seems to be outside time. The death imagery in Poem 341 -- the corpse frozen to death and the mourners frozen in grief (paralleling the stiff and careful movements of those in pain) -- together with the emergence of form, is again within both elegiac tradition and human experience.

"The Martyr Poets- did not tell-/But wrought their Pang in syllable" (544), converting pain to poetry. The greatest pain for Dickinson seems to be that experienced after the breaking of emotional ties, especially by death. We can only "learn the Transport by the Pain" (167), because we can only know the good by its opposite. Poets, like the "Wounded Deer" (165), leap highest because of "the Sovereign Anguish" which is "the signal woe" (167). The ordering of pain conceals it with a "Mail of Anguish" (165) so that nobody can perceive its depth. The pain becomes as disguised as a knight in formal battle armour. The ordering of pain leads to form, to poetry, to immortality.

Pain is one of the few things that are absolute and unambiguous for Dickinson. "Men do not sham Convulsion" and death is "Impossible to feign" ("I like a look of Agony" [241]). Pain, both physical and

mental, is important because it represents absolute truth. One of the circumferences Dickinson probes is that between illusion and reality. Because she needed to believe that she would be reunited with all whom she had loved, she had to probe not only the existence and nature of God but also the existence and nature of a celestial heaven. Anderson writes, "Ultimate circumference may well be the extension of understanding from mortal limits to absolute fulfillment in immortality" (56). But, as Juhasz says in Naked and Fiery Forms, "Eternity is absolute abstraction, something the mind can approach through circumference but can never know" (28).

In structuring the experience of loss into the elegiac form the poet finds consolation in the order of the universe, even if that order is temporary and self-imposed. And yet, in "I reckon- when I count at all" (569), Dickinson says there is no possibility that heaven can be more beautiful than the heaven depicted by poets to which their poetry transports us. Poets are greater than the sun, or summer, or heaven, for they comprehend everything, and can reincarnate the sun and summer at any time of day and any season. The poet can arrest the essence of a moment and, in disclosing meanings in pictures, become a translator ("This was a Poet" [448]). The poetic process itself would seem to be a type of translation, communication through creative interpretation.

But creative interpretation, the act of writing poetry, has its own elements of anguish; it must be "wrung" and "is the gift of Screws" ("Essential Oils" [675]). The fall to language is accompanied by the fall to pain.

Essential Oils- are wrung-
The Attar from the Rose
Be not expressed by Suns- alone-
It is the gift of Screws-

The General Rose- decay-
 But this- in Lady's Drawer
 Make Summer- When the Lady lie
 In Ceaseless Rosemary-
 (675).

Gelpi states, "The poems which Dickinson conceived and birthed out of her woman's nature through the impregnating imagination . . . would be waiting in her dresser drawer . . . pungent still with the summer sun's rose" (Tenth Muse 295). Although his language is unnecessarily sexist the underlying associations are valid.

The version of Poem 675, quoted above in its entirety, is that written out by Dickinson herself in Fascicle 34 (Franklin 811 & 836) and the one chosen by Johnson in The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. However, in the second volume of The Poems of Emily Dickinson there is a variant version as sent to Dickinson's sister-in-law, Sue, in which the final line is "In Spiceless Sepulchre."⁴ Since poetry is not for the dead but for the living, it is appropriate that after Dickinson's death her poems should make ceaseless summer for the living while she lies without poetry, spiceless. Dickinson writes of her corpus, "This is my letter to the World . . . Sweet- countrymen-/Judge tenderly- of Me" (441). For Dickinson, also, death must precede praise and fame.

It is from memories that the poet extracts the "Essential Oils" to make a ceaseless summer. As Cristanna Miller writes of Poem 675:

Here Dickinson substitutes "Be," "decay," "Make," and "lie" for their expected forms to demonstrate how one enables meaning -- whether as scent or as poetry -- to remain vital. Essence "Make Summer" [sic] endlessly. The verb is detached from all limitation of person or time; it, like the rose, is reduced to its purest and most potent form. . . .

Dickinson's distortion of these verbs also suggests that the poem is not a single finished thing. Although the sachet, or poem, has been completed, the emphasis is on the process of expressing

(139)⁵

Any endeavour can, by remembrance, become a distillation of life.

The poet does not need exotic materials from which to wring the everlasting and "Essential Oils" (448), for

This was a Poet- It is That
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings

The "Attar so immense" is distilled from "the familiar species/That perished by the Door" It is the homely things, by the door of the house, maybe like Whitman's lilac blooming at the dooryard, that, in dying, can be robbed of their essence. The metamorphosis is performed by the poet through the agency of death. As Anderson writes, "her theme [is] what can be salvaged from death's decay and how it is transmuted into a new life" (64). Both the poem and the poet (of indeterminate sex) are "Exterior- to Time"; they are both outside the constriction of time and the natural cycle, and also beyond time and so immortal. Language, for better or worse,⁶ is eternal and poetry is immortal.

Elegies are occasioned by death, and should immortalise the deceased. For Dickinson the elegy is often an expression not only of the loss but also of the love she feels toward the deceased. Poetry and love are, for Dickinson, almost inseparable.

To pile like Thunder to its close
 Then crumble grand away
 While Everything created hid
 This- would be Poetry-

Or Love- the two coeval come-
 We both and neither prove-
 Experience either and consume-
 For None see God and live-

(1247).

Poetry and love, like an electrical storm, rise to a crescendo and then die away. One is consumed both by being a poet and being a lover, and neither role can be definitively proved or evaluated. Both love and poetry verge on the divine; they are the equivalent of seeing God. Since "the two coeval come" neither takes precedence over the other but each is indispensable to each. What is true for love, therefore, may be true of poetry. Throughout her poetry Dickinson shows her sense of how close the relationship is between love and poetry when she talks of poetry in terms of love and marriage.

Love is, also, alpha and omega.

Love- is anterior to Life-
 Posterior- to Death-
 Initial of Creation, and
 The Exponent of Earth
 (917)

Love both began the Creation and continues to create; it exists before life and after death. It is "The Exponent of Earth" in that it interprets the earth, and also (mathematically) love is an infinite series involving an unknown variable. But the Word, also, created the universe, and poetry exists both before and after any individual's death -- even that of the poet. Poetry also interprets the world, and

the best poetry never fails to offer new insights to suit man's varied condition.

"Beauty is infinity" also, and it is impossible to be "Estranged from Beauty" (1474). We are all part of the eternal beauty and, therefore, we are all infinite despite the individual identity of interior landscape. But beauty and truth are also related. Capps writes, "[Dickinson's] equating of truth and beauty in "I died for Beauty" [449] seems a restatement of "beauty is truth, truth beauty," from [Keats'] "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (79). Keats' poem is life frozen in art twice over: first on the urn itself and then in Keats' words.⁷ However, Dickinson's has two beyond-the-grave personae who talk (use language) "Until the Moss had reached our lips" Keats' words seem to imply that beauty and truth comprise all knowledge. Dickinson, within the context of poetry at least, adds language and love.

The tools of the poet are words and for Dickinson there is little to distinguish the word from the Word ("The Brain" [632]). "A Word made Flesh" (1651) echoes "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1, 14). As Dickinson needs to sanctify her birth as a poet (508) so she also sees words themselves as potentially sanctified. "This loved Philology" (1651) in its repetition -- loved love of the word (Diehl, "Ransom in a Voice" 158) -- emphasises how important are words and the love of words.

"A Word made Flesh is seldom/And tremblingly partook" echoes Christ's words at the Last Supper, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt 26, 26). Words are sanctified, and there is a mystical relationship between communication and Communion. Diehl carries this

divine relationship further. She writes,

The process of transubstantiation here serves as a trope investing the poet's word with godlike authority. In a stunning inversion of orthodoxy, Dickinson takes the Word of God and makes it her own, which then serves as the criterion for measuring all power outside the self. Transubstantiation thus becomes a trope for poetic inspiration.

("Ransom" 158)

But the poem opens with "A Word made Flesh is seldom/And tremblingly partook." It is not a frequent occurrence. The metaphorical relationship between Holy Communion and poetic inspiration is thus limited. We can all find the specific word which exactly suits us, both as givers and receivers, but so seldom do we experience such occasions that we savour them "With ecstasies of stealth" as if we were stealing the food of the gods.

Dickinson elaborates on the rarity and pricelessness of moments of poetic inspiration in

Your thoughts don't have words every day
They come a single time
Like signal esoteric sips
Of the communion Wine

(1452).

There would appear to be a contradiction in that the words come "a single time" and yet are "Like signal esoteric sips/Of the communion wine" Presumably the act of drinking communion wine is one of will and desire, if one is of the elect, and can be undertaken whenever it is offered, for example at eight thirty every other Sunday morning. But poetic inspiration cannot be scheduled in that way. It is in such contexts that the critic has to be very careful not to put too large

and sweeping interpretation on any word. It is precisely in her use of "transubstantiation," and her elaboration upon it, that Diehl's argument is weak. Puritans did not recognise transubstantiation; communion wine is only the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" ("The Catechism," Prayer Book, 198).⁸

Poetic inspiration is only being equated with a certain aspect of communion wine. Indeed we only sip communion wine as the butterfly sips the nectar, and the persona in "I taste a liquor" (214) gets inebriated on such sips of nectar. However, in the ordinary understanding of the word, we do not get drunk on so little wine. If we were really to experience the transubstantiation of wine to the blood of Christ, we might well get inebriated on such a mystical experience. Unfortunately, we do not always experience mysticism, the presence of God, or inner grace at the communion service. Such experiences are rare and esoteric, but when one does occur it

so native seems
So easy so to be
You cannot comprehend its price
Nor its infrequency
(1452).

Although rare and priceless, both the "signal esoteric sips/Of communion Wine" and poetic inspiration seem "so native" that, presumably, they feel as if they will last forever. Such an eternal moment gives rise to "I taste a liquor" (214).

Furthermore, it is the communion service, perhaps more than any other, that epitomises the Trinity. The sacrifice of God the Son implies God the Father, and the Grace that Christ left at Pentecost to comfort mankind is God the Holy Spirit. Inspiration is literally the

drawing in of breath as one should draw in the Grace of the Holy Spirit with the communion wine. Dickinson saw poetry as divinity and eternity.

Linda Munk, in "Musicians Wrestle Everywhere: Emily Dickinson, C.G.Jung and the Myth of Poetic Creation,"⁹ discusses "Like Rain it sounded" (1235) as a poem concerned with poetic inspiration.

Like Rain it sounded till it curved
 And then I knew 'twas Wind-
 It walked as wet as any Wave
 But swept as dry as sand-
 When it had pushed itself away
 To some remotest Plain -
 A coming as of Hosts was heard
 That was indeed the Rain-
 It filled the Wells, it pleased the Pools
 It warbled in the Road-
 It pulled the spigot from the Hills
 And let the Floods abroad-
 It loosened acres, lifted seas
 The sites of Centres stirred
 Then like Elijah rode away
 Upon a Wheel of Cloud.

Munk sees an analogy between this poem and the beginning of Acts 2.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were
 all with one accord in one place.
 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a
 rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where
 they were sitting.
 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of
 fire, and it sat upon each of them.
 And they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to
 speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them
 utterance.

(1-4)

In both instances, Acts and Dickinson's poem, the wind initiates inspired language.

In Dickinson's poem, the wind of inspiration comes first, but it is swiftly followed by the rain. Munk sees water as the Jungian symbol

of the unconscious. The wind "swept" and "pushed itself away/To some remotest plain," thus making possible the "coming as of Hosts," with the possible religious overtones of "Host." (Munk equates lines three through seven with the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites.) The initial response to the storm is one of pleasure for "It filled the Wells, it pleased the Pools/It warbled in the Road." The "warbled" indicates that some poetry emerges from the storm, recalling that the storm of Poem 1247 is equated with poetry and love. But the current storm moves into the apocalyptic as it "let the Floods abroad" There is the feeling that the persona's centre of balance is disturbed along with "The sites of Centres," and that she, too, is both translator and translated.

Elijah seemingly did not die but, while he was walking with Elisha, "there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven" (II Kings 2, 11). Elijah's translation was out of his control. Like the bee in "A single Clover Plank" (1343) it is the "Wind" that carries Elijah away, and as we do not know the bee's reaction neither do we know Elijah's; we can only presume it was favourable. Elijah, bee and poet are overcome by the divine spiritus.

There is a direct relationship between being overcome by poetic inspiration and being "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Luke 1, 41). But in the Bible, which Dickinson knew so well, there are meanings, not yet discussed in this paper, to that expression. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, is "filled with the Holy Ghost" when her own baby quickens the first time she sees Mary after the Annunciation. Joseph is told, "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is

conceived within her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 1, 20). Mary initially "was troubled" at the thought of her impregnation, but later is joyful that she was chosen.

Both Shurr (170-88) and Gilbert (629-31) see images of pregnancy within Dickinson's corpus: Shurr as a biographical aborted pregnancy and Gilbert as evidence of Dickinson's perception of the female body as prison. Gilbert, discussing "This Chasm" (858) in the context of female suppression within Victorian patriarchy, states,

And indeed, one of the extraordinary features of this extraordinary and dreamlike narrative is its elaboration of what seems quite clearly to be a conceit of pregnancy. For in a sort of sexual congress with his "Favorite," Doom or Death does appear to have engendered a bold and turbulent child, a child whose burial in the chasm of the poet's flesh objectifies the poet/speaker's own living death, so that she "bear[s] it big about/My burial- before." She bears before her, in other words, in the place of a healthily fruitful womb, a womb that contains the ambiguous burden of a turbulent dead-alive child-self which represents both a burden she must carry until she is buried and her own untimely burial before her death.

(Madwoman 630)

There is a note to this portrait of a fragmented woman on the verge of madness, in which Gilbert elaborates upon her own words.

The parallels between this speaker and Sin, in Paradise Lost, are very striking. Sin is, after all, the Favorite of both metaphorical Doom (Satan) and literal Doom (Death), both of whom afflict her with turbulent children. In a more specifically personal sense, however, for Dickinson the burden with which this poem is pregnant is also the burden of the body of her poetry, which is a bandaged secret she must carry around with her. Similarly, the untimely burial she discusses also represents the untimely burial of her poetry, written in secret and hidden away (before her death) in a coffinlike bureau drawer.

(Madwoman 697, n.64)

There really does not seem to be too much evidence that Dickinson either had an abortion or that she saw her poetry in any way as an unwanted pregnancy. Yet, as chapter one of this thesis established, there is a relationship between birth, marriage and burial, and between death and lover.

It seems that a synthesis might be achieved by returning to the blessing which closes the key elegy of chapter one, "The Gentian weaves her fringes" (18).

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

This invocation brings together God the Father, insemination, fame, suitor and death in the bee; God the Son, metamorphosis, transformation, resurrection and poetry in the butterfly; and God the Holy Ghost, insemination, poetry, divinity, eternity and omnipotence in the breeze. The apparent parody on the Christian blessing becomes the invocation to the muse. Writing of the traditional invocation of the muse Diehl states, "The ritual of invocation itself serves as a propitiating gesture, a positive strategy to make one's obeisance to the forces of creativity" (Dickinson 18). But the invocation of the Christian Trinity as recorded in St. Matthew takes place at baptism, the time of rebirth through water and the Holy Ghost. There is a direct relationship between the spiritus sanctus and the birth of the poet.

Chase writes, "Emily Dickinson regarded poetry as one of the stratagems by which she was empowered to endure life until the time came to assume the 'estate' of immortality" (120). This statement

belittles, however unintentionally, both her poetry and her own assessment of her poetic powers. Rather than using her creative talent as a strategy to endure life, she lived for the creation of poetry. Creativity, divinity and eternity come together in

One life of so much Consequence!
 Yet I- for it- would pay-
 My Soul's entire income-
 In ceaseless- salary-

One Pearl- to me- so signal-
 That I would instant dive-
 Although- I knew- to take it-
 Would cost me- just a life!

The Sea is full- I know it!
 That- does not blur my Gem!
 It burns- distinct from all the row
Intact- in Diadem!

The life is thick- I know it!
 Yet- not so dense a crowd-
 But Monarchs- are perceptible-
 Far down the dustiest Road!

(270)

Again there are the poetic symbols of sea, pearl, gem, diadem and monarch. The persona, knowingly, consciously and willingly, would exchange her divine soul for all eternity to be able to live a mortal life of consequence as a poet. She may well not be the loser in the transaction for she finds it nearly impossible to conceive of an actual Heaven more beautiful than that depicted by poets (569). To be such a poet, with the certainty of creating a heaven here and now, is better than the chance of a dubious heaven after death.

There are other pearls and other gems in the sea, in the sense both of other poems created by other poets and also of other possibilities within the sea of her own unconscious. But despite other

poets and other options her bejewelled diadem will glow with its own heat and light. There is also a hint of fame and glory for "Monarchs-are perceptible-/ Far down the dustiest Road!"

Not only would she give her soul for "One Pearl" but poetic creativity seems to be akin to the metamorphosis she associates with death.

My Cocoon tightens- Colors tease-
I'm feeling for the Air-
A dim capacity for Wings
Demeans the Dress I wear-

A power of Butterfly must be-
The Aptitude to fly
Meadows of Majesty implies
And easy Sweeps of Sky-

So I must baffle at the Hint
And cipher at the Sign
And make much blunder, if at last
I take the clue divine-

(1099).

Again considering Dickinson's use of verbs, "baffle" may mean to be baffled in which case "baffle" and the "blunder" may be related to the persona's "And deem ourself a fool" when looking back on her behaviour during her poetic apprenticeship in "We play at Paste" (320). On the other hand, cipher is a form of understanding through regulation and a baffle regulates flow so that "baffle at the Hint/And cipher at the Sign" can both be methods of grasping and controlling "the clue divine." Further, a baffle on a musical instrument modifies the sound produced. In this sense there is a relationship between Poem 1099 and "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" (1129). Because it is

Too bright for our infirm Delight

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind-

and one way to metaphorically "dazzle gradually" is to use a baffle.

However, the greatest significance, in the context of this thesis, of Poem 1099 is its connection with poetry, death, metamorphosis and consolation. For clarification it is necessary to refer back to "The Soul's Superior instants" (306) and "I taste a liquor never brewed" (214).

In "The Soul's Superior instants" the persona says,

This Mortal Abolition
Is . . . subject
To Autocratic Air-

Eternity's disclosure
To favorites- a few-
Of the Colossal substance
Of Immortality
(306).

Only to the "favorites," the chosen few, is "Immortality" disclosed. Only by the surrender of self to "Autocratic Air" can the poet experience translation in both senses of that word. The poet, like Elijah (1235) and the bee (1343) must be open to the divine spiritus to glimpse eternity. The movement from Poem 306 to Poem 1099 is from lack of control towards some self-determination. In the earlier poem the persona is passively "subject/To Autocratic Air" but in the later poem she is actively "feeling for the Air"

In chapter one it was suggested that an exquisite consolation would be required to match the eulogy of "I taste a liquor never

brewed." In that poem, although the persona leans "against the- Sun" there is no mention of actually flying, but in "My Cocoon tightens" she feels "A dim capacity for Wings" and is anticipating "The Aptitude to fly." The total experience in the earlier poem feels as if it were an exceptional, very rare occasion, but in the later poem there is the sense that once the metamorphosis has taken place, the persona will be able to soar whenever she wishes. In Poem 214 Dickinson replaces the butterflies in the foxgloves to become a "Debauchee of Dew," but in Poem 1099 she is on the way to actually becoming a butterfly through metaphoric death and the metamorphosis of the cocoon. In "I taste a liquor" the persona is "Inebriate of air," but in "My Cocoon tightens" her "Aptitude to fly/ . . . implies/ . . . easy Sweeps of Sky"

This thesis has shown that "Air" is equated with the breeze, omnipotence, the spiritus sanctus, the Word, language and poetry. Only by the fall from the Garden of Eden did man fall into language. The Fall led to both mortality and poetry. Only by living a mortal life can one become a poet -- aspire to the "power of Butterfly" The consolation for the death of a poet, therefore, is that there can be no life without death, and no poetry without life, and that the poet experiences a type of pre-transfiguration.

What makes Dickinson's implicit pastoral elegy uniquely hers is her vision of herself as nothing but a poet. Her religious training included the doctrine of the elect and the justification by works, works visible to the community and subject to evaluation. Dickinson's works were her poems, written in secret, concealed in a drawer, and not subject to evaluation in their entirety until nearly a century after their composition. Rather than publishing for possible fame and

fortune she refused to "Sell/The Royal Air-/In the Parcel . . . /Of the Heavenly Grace" ("Publication- is the Auction").

We- would rather
From Our Garrett go
White- Unto the White Creator-
Than invest- Our Snow
(709)

The predominant symbolism is that which recurs throughout her work: air, royalty, grace, and whiteness. This poem is about nothing but poetry and the need to be absolutely sure that the poet does not prostitute her art. Because of the standard literary metaphor of "prostituting one's art" there are again sexual overtones. And, of course, there is the allusion to death because she will not publish in her lifetime.

Throughout her poetry Dickinson expresses the need of a God for two recurring occasions in her life. Her empathy with nature needs an emotional outlet in a creator. Whicher writes,

The Puritan conception of nature as a visible manifestation of God, which Jonathan Edwards and Bryant in many of his early poems expressed, was so ingrained in her that she took it for granted without comment. . . . The beauty and harmony of nature offered a revelation of the hereafter

(264)

This statement is somewhat simplistic -- Dickinson seems to question everything -- yet she does use nature to express and symbolise both joy and sorrow, and to convey both the elegiac mood of the end of summer and the ambivalence felt in the renewal of spring. Her sense of desolation during separation or bereavement gives rise to an

overpowering need to believe in reunion after death with those she loved. It is this need which makes her seek desperately for the God of resurrection.

Although Dickinson could not have the historical perspective completely to be aware of the fact, she was at the centre of a religious paradigmatic shift in the western world. The nineteenth century bridges the eighteenth-century's certainty of the existence of the Christian God and the twentieth-century's near certainty that "God is dead." Dickinson could accept neither the New England covenant with God nor the dogma of the elect. She did, however, make her own covenant of poetic integrity, and transform the doctrine of the election of the chosen few into the poetic theory that only a chosen few are elected to be poets. Shelley sees poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" ("Defense," Adams 513); Dickinson sees poets as the unacknowledged elect of heaven.

With her historical position, her religious heritage, her empathy with nature, and her need for resurrection, it is not surprising that Dickinson's poetry contains an ambiguously Christian cumulative pastoral elegy.

Notes

1 A cross section of critical opinions are unanimous on this point although the inferences vary.

Ford and Shurr say that Dickinson's closing reference is to Robert Browning and to her awareness of how much greater his grief is than her own (129).

Cristanne Miller sees Robert Browning as the weak groom of the poet who, nevertheless, has sovereignty over her body (154).

2 The final stage of labour is heralded by the doctor saying "the baby's crowned" signifying the first concrete sign of the new life.

3 Wordsworth, in "Poems on the Naming of Places VI," calls his brother John "A silent Poet" (80) because, despite his poetic sensibility, he never wrote any poetry. Similarly, Wordsworth says of himself, in Prelude XI, that had he been killed in the French Revolution he would have been an unacknowledged poet. I am using silent in the same sense for all those women of poetic sensibility who, for whatever reasons, died in poetic obscurity.

4 Gelpi remarks in passing that there is the variant "Spiceless Sepulchre" for "ceaseless Rosemary" (Tenth Muse 295), so I went to the primary source.

5 Although I have quoted Cristanna Miller her ideas seem to be merely a slight extension of Anderson's (67) expressed some twenty years earlier.

6 Language, though immortal, can be deadly in effect as in "There is a word" (8), "She dealt her pretty words like Blades" (479), "A Man may make a Remark" (952), "A Word dropped careless on a Page" (1261) and, possibly, "My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun" (754).

7 This is my inference from Cleanth Brooks' argument in The Well Wrought Urn 151-66.

8 Although this quotation is from The Prayer Book it is an accepted Puritan theological extension of Biblical text.

9 Linda Munk delivered this unpublished paper orally; therefore it is difficult to determine exactly what she said and how much of the explication is extended by my own inferences and associations.

CONCLUSION

Dickinson skillfully draws upon the realities of dying and its domestic aftermath, the traditions of funerals, the emotions of bereavement, the actual circumstances of a particular death (as in her "elegy" to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Her- 'last Poems'") and, knowingly or not, many of the poetic conventions of traditional pastoral elegy to create an implicit cumulative elegy from her New England Puritan scepticism. Her elegy does not break with the traditional pastoral elegy, but it does intrinsically reflect her own temporal, geographical and sexual orientation.

Funeral rites only partially assuage grief by helping the bereaved to accept the fact of death. An elegy, by moving from the particular to the universal, may help to resolve some of the inherent conflict between the grief of bereavement and the hope of immortality. Dickinson, in her search for an integrated cosmos and a "whole" God, strives to reach the circumference of which she speaks in her poetry, and then to bridge the abyss which is signified beyond that circumference.

She uses personae to imaginatively project her own experience beyond the limits of human knowledge. She also uses personae to universalise her cumulative elegy in much the same way as the use of mythological allusions or a classical name for the dead universalises traditional elegies. Her use of the pastoral (and occasionally the bucolic) may be partially due to an unproved awareness of the pastoral

tradition, but is predominantly due to the fact that much of her life as a poet was circumscribed by her garden. It is from her home and garden she creates her major elegiac images and symbols.

Throughout her poetry she uses key words to symbolise the poet: "crown," "gem," "royalty," "water" and "whiteness." She uses the trinity of bee, breeze and butterfly to symbolise the insemination, inspiration and metamorphosis of the poet. Through a symbolic marriage with her muse which necessitates, in a sense, the death of the everyday self, the poet undergoes a metamorphosis. Although the poet is born through an awareness of death into loneliness, it is a loneliness which reveals eternity.

Dickinson offers some hope of an omnipotent, omniscient, integrated, caring God and of reunion in the Christian heaven. But her outstanding consolation is in the fact that poetry is only possible because of the fall into language which accompanied the fall from Grace in the Garden of Eden and the concomitant human mortality. It is the knowledge of death that makes life precious and may lead to the concentration of life to its most important aspects. She rejected "Covenant Theology" but made her own poetic covenant with herself and God. Language is immortal and poetry and the poet are supreme.

Dickinson's cumulative elegy could, in part, be her own in that it makes her name immortal, finds its own consolation for the death of a poet, and serves as a mentrial on her "Spiceless Sepulchre" (675).

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A Wounded Deer	165
Afraid	608
After great pain	341
All these my banners be	22
As imperceptibly as Grief	1540
At least- to pray- is left	502
Aurora is the effort	1002
Back from the cordial Grave	1625
Because I could not stop for Death	712
Because that you are going	1260
Bereaved of all	784
Better- than Music	503
By a departing light	1714
By homely gift	1563
Cocoon above	129
Death is the supple Suitor	1445
Declaiming Waters none may dread	1595
Dying! Dying in the night	158
Endow the Living	521
Essential Oils- are wrung	675
Estranged from Beauty	1474
Experience is the Angled Road	910
Fame is a bee	1763
Fame is the one	1475
Far from Love	1021
For each ecstatic instant	125
From Cocoon forth a Butterfly	354
Further in Summer	1068
God is a distant- stately Lover	357
God is indeed a jealous God	1719
God made no act	1163
He strained my faith	497
Heaven is so far of the Mind	370
Her- "last Poems"	312
Her Sweet turn	649
How brittle are the Piers	1433
How far is it to Heaven	929
How many times	187
How noteless Men	282
I can wade Grief	252
I did not reach Thee	1664
I died for Beauty	449
I dreaded that first Robin, so	348
I fear a Man of frugal Speech	543
I felt a Funeral	280

I got so I could take his name	293
I heard a Fly buzz	465
I like a look of Agony	241
I meant to have	476
I never lost	49
I never saw a Moor	1052
I reckon- when I count at all	569
I saw no Way	378
I started Early	520
I taste a liquor	214
I think I was enchanted	593
If He were living	734
If the foolish	168
If wrecked upon the Shoal of Thought	1469
I'm ceded-	508
Is Heaven a Physician	1270
Life- is what we make it	698
Like Rain it sounded	1235
Love- is anterior to Life	917
Must be a Woe	571
My Cocoon tightens	1099
My life closed twice	1732
My period had come for Prayer	564
Of all the Souls	664
Of Consciousness, her awful Mate	894
Of Course- I prayed	376
Of Tolling Bell	947
One Life of so much Consequence	270
One need not be a Chamber	670
Our little Kinsmen	885
Ourselves we do inter	1144
Over and over	367
Papa above	61
Prayer is the little implement	437
Publication- is the Auction	709
Put up my lute	261
Savior! I've no one else	217
She dwelleth in the Ground	671
Should you but fail	226
Some keep the Sabbath	324
Some things that fly there be	89
Tell all the Truth	1129
Tell as a Marksman	1152
The Admirations- and Contempts	906
The Brain- is wider than the Sky	632
The Bustle in a House	1078
The Child's faith is new	637
The Day that I was crowned	356
The earth has many keys	1775
The Frost of Death was on the Pane	1136
The Gentian weaves her fringes	18
The grave my little cottage is	1743
The inundation of the Spring	1425
The Loneliness One dare not sound	777

The Martyr Poets	544
The Murmur of a Bee	155
The murmuring of Bees	1115
The saddest noise	1764
The Soul should always stand ajar	1055
The Soul's Superior instants	306
There came a Day at Summer's full	322
There is a morn	24
There is a strength	1113
There is another Loneliness	1116
There's a certain Slant of light	258
There's been a Death	389
They have a little Odor	785
They say that "Time assuages"	686
This Consciousness that is aware	822
This is a Blossom	945
This is my letter to the World	441
This was a Poet	448
This World is not Conclusion	501
Those- dying then	1551
Three times- we parted- Breath- and I	598
Through the Dark Sod	392
Time does go on	1121
'Tis little I- could care for Pearls	466
'Tis true	538
Title divine	1072
To be alive- is Power	677
To die- takes just a little while	255
To learn the Transport	167
To lose one's faith	377
To make One's Toilette	485
To make Routine a Stimulus	1196
To own the Art within the Soul	855
To pile like Thunder	1247
Trust in the Unexpected	555
Truth- is as old as God	836
Two Butterflies went out at Noon	533
Two Travellers	933
Unable are the Loved	809
Uncertain lease	857
"Unto Me?"	964
Unto my Books	604
We learn in the Retreating	1083
We play at Paste	320
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