"Twas as Space sat singing / To herself – and men - ': Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture: Tradition and Experimentation

By

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This thesis is submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2007

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between the expressions of spirituality in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and the representations of spirituality associated with the hymn culture she encountered. Drawing upon contemporary women hymnists and the influence of the hymns of Isaac Watts, the thesis traces the dissent and challenge to the hierarchical 'I-Thou' model of relation in traditional hymn address and shows how Dickinson engaged with it. Watts's Dissenting position has been overlooked in previous discussions of Dickinson's use of the hymn form. Women hymnists contemporary with Dickinson, who also sought to redefine God in ways more compatible with their own experience, have similarly been ignored when considering the impact of hymn culture on Dickinson's poetry. This cultural context is further illuminated by the debates concerning alternative versions of the divine found in recent feminist theology. Like the redefinitions of the expectations surrounding hymns, these feminist debates centre around ideas of community and relation and so are used as a basis for the exploration of the emphasis on multiple and diverse relation in Dickinson's poetics.

The thesis is divided into three sections that are preceded by an Introduction which describes the overall scope of the project. The first section (Chapters One and Two) describes the history of hymn culture and analyses current debates about hymns and hymn space. The second section (Chapters Three and Four) examines the literary contexts and influences surrounding Dickinson's writing and engagement with hymn culture, as exemplified by the work of Isaac Watts, Phoebe Hinsdale Brown and Eliza Lee Follen. The third section (Chapters Five and Six) offer detailed analysis of a selection of Dickinson's hymnic poems, focussing on her use of bee imagery.

The conclusion the thesis reaches is that Dickinson's relation to hymnody is more wide-reaching, complex and subtle than criticism on this area has allowed. Far from being contextless and siteless, the radical re-visioning of the divine to be found in Dickinson's 'alternative hymns' can be situated within an engagement with a community of hymn writers. The 'I-Thou' relation to be found in traditional hymn

address is something that Dickinson's poetics negotiate through the various alternatives they forge in the imagery of flight and relation which serve as mobile and fluid metaphors for the divine. Moreover, such metaphors display similarities not only with the ideas of 'relation' and 'community' of recent feminist theology, but also with the qualities of mystical discourse as understood by Michel de Certeau, both in their ability to voice the other, and also in their radical mode of relation to the discourses that produced them.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Jill Rudd and Dr. Hester Jones for their support, encouragement and inspiration during the writing of this thesis. Also Dr. John Redmond for his proofreading and thoughtful comments.

I would also like to thank the School of English at the University of Liverpool for my receipt of the Price Memorial Award, and the Arts Faculty for providing financial assistance to attend conferences during the course of this study. Also, the staff at the Sydney Jones Library, the British Library and St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden.

A thank you also to Roy Coleman, Jennie Tsai, Clare Williams and Alison Winch who have provided friendship, discussion and humour throughout the course of this thesis.

Finally, a very special thank you goes to my parents Gregory and Norma Morgan, and to my sister Joanne Morgan, for their support from the beginning and throughout.

Abbreviations

DCC	E.A. Livingstone, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
ED	Emily Dickinson
Fr	*The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* ed. by R.W. Franklin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005)
HL	Isaac Watts, *Horae Lyricae* (1706) as appears in *PW*
HSS	Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) as appears in *PH*
HSF	Eliza Lee Follen, *Hymns, Songs and Fables for Young People*, 2nd edn (1831;Boston: W. M. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1851)
L	*The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols, ed. by T. H. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958)
MWL	Alfred Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 2001)
PH	*The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts* (Philedelphia: Soli Deo Gloria Publications,1997)
PL	John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Gordon Teskey (London: Norton and Company, 2005)
POD	Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (1719) as appears in *PH*
PW	*The Poetical Works of Isaac Watts, With a Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1866)
RMB	Benjamin Lease, *Emily Dickinson's Reading of Men and Books* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990)
SL	*Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, ed. by T. H. Johnson, eleventh printing (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002)
THJ	*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* ed. by T.H. Johnson, 2nd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1975)

VH Asahel Nettleton, ed., *Village Hymns for Social Worship Selected and Original: Designed as a Supplement to Dr Watts's Psalms and Hymns* (Hartford: Printed by Goodwin and Co., 1824)

Introduction

Situating Dickinson's Relation to Hymn Culture

This thesis reassesses Emily Dickinson's engagement with the hymn genre and its associative imagery and assumptions. It interrogates her critical engagement with religious orthodoxy[1] by examining the symbolic value of the hymn as a genre that always implies a representation of a speaker-God relation. The form and imagery of eighteenth and nineteenth-century hymns will be examined alongside Dickinson's poetry in order to do this. It argues that Dickinson's connection to hymnody is more complex than recent critical debate has allowed, and can be seen as producing not only subversion of patriarchal discourse on the divine, but also a re-envisioned and performative version of hymnic space in which an alternative mode of relation to the divine comes to the fore.

By comparing Dickinson's verse form and imagery with those of the eighteenth-century hymn writer, Isaac Watts, and arguing that this identifiable influence stems largely from Dickinson's dependence upon displaying an ironic distance from orthodox religion, many critics have obfuscated the possibility of a closer relationship between traditional hymnody and the articulation of spirituality in Dickinson's verse. Moreover, Dickinson's connection to hymnody has always been analysed with regard to a male hymnist and in view of her being intrinsically antagonistic to the qualities connected with a particular kind of hymnody. In contrast, this thesis aims to uncover the way in which some of the conventions of traditional hymnody (particularly the imagery and form to be found in the hymns of Watts but also those found in contemporary women hymnists) which are employed in Dickinson's poetry serve to convey an ideal space in which experience of spirituality is expressed and given a shape. In doing so, it will challenge the tradition of reading Dickinson's poems as essentially atheistic and of being produced out of a dedication to solitariness. Traditionally, the hymn is used to give voice to the imagined or real congregation alongside that of the hymn writer, while also conveying the expression of the writer's subjective relation to God or the divine other. A form of expression in which individuality *and* a sense of interrelation, such as a sense of community and social cohesion, are simultaneously articulated implies problematic restrictions that Dickinson's poetry engages with in different ways. If the speaker-God relation and notion of community expressed in traditional hymnody and religious discourse does

[1] The term 'religious orthodoxy' will be used to refer to the assumptions and practices surrounding Christian doctrine which are inherently exclusionary and hierarchical, such as Calvinism's emphasis on Original Sin and an 'Elect' society.

not accurately reflect one's own experience of the divine, then other ways to express it must be negotiated. The notions of 'relation' and community are considered by feminist theologians as an alternative to an 'I-Thou' model of describing an individual's relation to the divine.[2] Dickinson's engagement with the hymn genre can therefore be seen through the dialectic between community and individuality that her poetics construct.

The thesis does not aim to reclassify Dickinson's poems as hymns, but rather, to explore the ways in which Dickinson's relation to hymnody can be seen as informing the representation of spirituality in her work in terms of her manipulation of hymnic space to incorporate her own experience. In Dickinson's poems (more so than in work by many other poets) there is a sense of space in which the reader has scope to exercise her/his own imaginative processes. The sheer amount of wide-ranging criticism on Dickinson's work perhaps illustrates this point best; if one wishes to find a contradictory feeling or opinion expressed in Dickinson's work then examples are plentiful. It is not the intention of this study therefore, to present analysis of Dickinson's work overall, but rather to show how hymn culture influences particular aspects of her poetics. That is, the way in which some dominant modes of expression in her work, such as her use of the hymn form and of imagery of flight work to convey an alternative to the 'I-Thou'[3] model of address to be found in traditional hymnody and prayer. The focus of critics has hinged predominantly upon Dickinson's 'flood subject'[4] of immortality, and the fluctuation between religious faith and doubt. Given that spirituality and the various formalised and pre-established ways in which people express it is often considered in Dickinson's poems, a

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[2] As discussed in Chapter Two and referred to throughout the thesis, the notion of 'relation' is used by theologian Elizabeth Johnson to connote the state of relation between the three elements of the Holy Trinity. This mode of relation or 'relatedness' which for Johnson is a model to describe a Christian way of life which does not reinscribe oppositional, patriarchal definitions of self and world and negotiates hierarchical structures, also has affinity with Daphne Hampson's notion of 'relationality' and Susan Welch's idea of 'community'. (See pp. 65-70.)

[3] The 'I-Thou' model of prayer is referred to throughout this thesis and is discussed further in Chapter Two, in relation to the hymn. The term is used by Daphne Hampson in *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) (p. 169.) and draws upon Martin Buber's (1878-1965) *Ich Und Du* (1923; Eng trans., *I and Thou*, 1937 and 1970). See E.A. Livingstone, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 84. Hereafter abbreviated to '*DCC*' followed by page number.

[4] For example see Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, vol 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) pp. 572, 690, 717. ED describes the 'flood subject' of immortality in a letter to T. W. Higginson, see *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, ed. by T. H. Johnson, eleventh printing (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002) 9 June, 1866, p. 194. Collection hereafter 'SL', followed by page number.

connection between the space which Dickinson's poems allow and generate, and that which exists within the hymn form she chose to use, is an intriguing path of investigation. Dickinson's poems enact what they describe and the focus of this thesis is an exploration of how they do that and to what effect.

The space which is made available in Dickinson's poems serves to accommodate, in a heterologous[5] way, both an individual subjectivity and also an 'open' space of relation with others by rendering the poem unbounded by the restraints and traps of linguistic and semantic definition. The notion of relation to others in Dickinson's work is both the imagined community, the state of being-in-relation, and also anticipated readers of her work. In this way, Dickinson, like mystical writers, offers versions of the divine to the reader in the ways which, somewhat ironically, mimic what might be said of God's offering of grace, with enough space between to create the freedom to choose. Dickinson's frequent rupturing of hymnic common metre serves only as a marker for what is a much deeper engagement with the organising structures of orthodox religion that the 'speaker-God' relation in traditional hymnody reflects.

Although not formally aligned with a particular church or religious practices, Dickinson's use of the hymn form, and of biblical/Puritan imagery places her within a tradition of nineteenth-century women poets who negotiate space within traditional religious discourse in order to articulate their own version of spirituality. Cynthia Scheinberg and Linda Lewis have demonstrated the ways in which the work of Victorian poets such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti utilise orthodox religion in their creative poetic processes to reformulate their own versions of spirituality.[6] Although both of these women poets remained more aligned to particular religious affiliations than Dickinson (who famously refused conversion and formal connection with the Church), their negotiation of religious discourse has affinities with Dickinson's use of the hymn; working within orthodox religious discoursal space and radically re-shaping and transforming it to accommodate their

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[5] The term 'heterologous,' from Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) is discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

[6] See Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), hereafter shortened in parenthesis to 'Scheinberg', and Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998)

own (and by implication also others') experience of spirituality. Scheinberg argues that women poets such as Barrett Browning and Rossetti

> [...] should be read as creative agents of theological enquiry rather than merely passive recipients of a patriarchal tradition. Poetry was one of the most important generic sites in Victorian culture to accommodate this radical and public theological work of women – radical not in the sense that this theological poetry always positioned itself against traditional notions of gender or religion – but radical at the moment poetry provided a sanctioned public forum through which women could voice their theological ideas and participate in debates about religious, political and gendered identity.
>
> (Scheinberg, p. 4.)

With this in mind, Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture can be seen as a deliberate attempt to emphasise the consideration of religious, political and gendered identity at work in her poetry more than as an attempt to disguise it within an acceptable mode of expression for a woman. Dickinson's use of the hymn form and of poetics of relation which invoke community can be seen as the representation and enactment of the 'alternative modes of literary values' (Scheinberg, p. 236.) in women's poetry which Scheinberg identifies as a resistance to the increasingly androcentric and theological 'generic patterns' in Victorian poetic theory:

> The alternatives to these generic patterns might position communal identity as more valuable than individual redemption, might posit multiplicity of perspectives and a community of voices [...] over unitary or monologic identity, might emphasise narratives of persistence rather than conversion or transformation, and might replace narratives of redemptive closure with narratives of perpetual hope. This list [...] is not meant to be conclusive, but rather only suggestive of a method that could challenge the often naturalised, universalised, and essentialised categories of 'great literature' through which certain theological assumptions are recast as 'aesthetic' values.
>
> (Scheinberg, p. 236.)

Scheinberg's reading of Victorian poetic theory (as espoused by critics and poets such as Matthew Arnold) as androcentric and Christian, and her list of the alternative modes which she finds highlighted in women's poetry of the Victorian period is instructive. Such poetic 'alternatives' of multiple identities and deferred closure are

immediately recognisable in Dickinson's 'modern' poetry.[7] However, Dickinson's use of the hymn form and the repeated attraction towards multiplicity *and* relation in her poetics suggests not only a challenge to the individualistic or 'monologic' identities which Scheinberg identifies in an increasingly theological Victorian poetics, but also a radical reconfiguration of those theological and poetical structures.

In analysing Dickinson's relation to the hymn by establishing key aspects of contemporary hymn culture, and focussing on her use of bee imagery to exemplify her engagement with this culture in the final two chapters, this thesis will demonstrate how her poems challenge the rigid parameters (and 'narratives of closure', Scheinberg, p. 236.) set by the Puritan Protestant work ethic and the assumptions about worthy production implicit in hymnody. It will illustrate how they display instead a mystical spirituality which opens up a space for ideas of community, revery and sexuality which challenge the exclusionary aspects of orthodox religion, and which recovers a version of the divine which has affinities with the projections for a version of the divine in feminist theology as well as philosophical discourse of 'the Other.'[8] Such mystical spirituality can be seen through Dickinson's engagement with the modes of orthodox religion, namely through the interchange between God and speaker which the act of worship in hymns invokes. The nature of Dickinson's relation to orthodox Christian faith is a large subject to approach,[9] and any discussion of it involves at least a brief examination of the transition from Puritanism to Transcendentalism in mid-nineteenth-century New England. This study does not aim to consider whether Dickinson was herself ultimately a Puritan or Transcendentalist, but rather to examine the extent to which her use of such a religious culture, primarily

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[7] David Porter's *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) describes Dickinson's spiritual doubt as pre-emptive of modernist decentredness, and in 'Searching For Dickinson's Themes' in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* ed. by Gudrun Grabher and others (Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1998) he connects her 'indefinite' self with Post-modernist literary theory. pp. 183-196. Grabher and others hereafter referred to as '*The Emily Dickinson Handbook*'.

[8] Feminist theologians Daphne Hampson and Mary Daly, as well as the theories of Luce Irigaray and Michel de Certeau will be discussed in relation to this, in Chapter Two.

[9] The recent reprint of Roger Lundin's 1998 biography, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) and James McIntosh's *Nimble Believing: Dickinson and the Unknown* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2004) are evidence of the continuing interest in the subject of Dickinson's relation to orthodox religion and the nature of her spirituality.

through hymnody, provided her with an avenue to express mystical relation of the divine which goes beyond such categories.[10]

Critical assessments of Dickinson's work which speculate about the poet's personal experience of religious faith and are predicated upon 'facts' or assumptions about her character (for example as an eccentric 'recluse') serve only to obfuscate her literary technique and to reinstate the binaries associated with religious discourse, such as the distinctions between conformity/dissent, atheism/belief, chaos/design which her poetry necessarily suspends. Ambiguity and contradiction are always present in Dickinson's depiction of her relation to religious faith. Jane Donahue Eberwein argues:

> One can make whatever case one wants about Dickinson's beliefs or disbelief by selecting individual poems, letters, or even lines, but the way to reach insight is to look for long-term patterns in her religious references. Despite variations in tone and imagery, religion remained a centering concern for Dickinson from her first valentine with its comic references to Eden to her last letter [...].[11]

The hymn form, and the use of bee imagery, in Dickinson's poetry can be seen as such a 'long-term pattern.' David Porter's estimation of Dickinson's use of the hymn form epitomises the precedent which was set for criticism on this subject:

> [...] inherent in the hymn form is an attitude of faith, humility, and inspiration, and it is against this base of orthodoxy that she so artfully refracts the personal rebellion and individual feeling, the colloquial diction and syntax, the homely image, the scandalous love of this world, and the habitual religious scepticism.[12]

Whilst there is no doubt that Dickinson's rebellious use of hymns and paraphrases of Watts challenge religious orthodoxy, they also challenge the speaker-God relation that hymns present and represent. Although hymns can be seen as the expression of

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[10] For a recent discussion of Dickinson's relation to orthodox religion and the medieval mystical tradition, see Angela B. Conrad, *The Wayward Nun of Amherst: Emily Dickinson in the Medieval Women's Visionary Tradition* (New York: Garland Science, 2002) Conrad re-positions the 'recluse' model of Dickinson within mystical tradition, associating this, and her preference for wearing white garments, with the lives of medieval mystics.

[11] Jane Donahue Eberwein, "Is Immortality True?': Salvaging Faith in an Age of Upheavals' in *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson* ed. by Vivian R. Pollak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) pp. 67-102. (p. 70.)

[12] David T. Porter, *The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) p. 74.

religious orthodoxy, and as reinscribing hierarchy, in Dickinson's poems the speaker-God relation becomes fluid, and hymnic space is reshaped to destabilise oppositional thinking. In this way, Dickinson's relation to the hymn genre precipitates the dialogical interplay in her poetry between orthodox religion and anti-linear, anti-hierarchical, mystical spirituality.

St. Armand argues that 'much of Dickinson's poetry was a continuing dialectic that used the imagery, premises and metrics of Puritan hymnology as a basis for a personal psalmody of questioning and protest.'[13] His term 'personal psalmody' locates Dickinson's creative process within a direct response to the Book of Psalms, and suggests a method and structure to her work which other critics have been inclined to avoid. David Porter, for example, comments; 'For theme-seeking readers especially, Dickinson is not forbiddingly but, rather, *triumphantly* unmanageable.'[14] The meaning or main subject in Dickinson's poems can be especially difficult to pin down because of their combination of tight structure, complex syntax and seeming elusiveness. The complex and often apparently contradictory nature of her work makes any discussion of it challenging. We are given many paths to follow when exploring Dickinson's attitude to faith, and St. Armand's term is useful for an inquiry into aspects of it which confront the ideas and images in hymns which she would have been privy to because it is in her attitude to these ideas, more than anywhere else, where we can see most clearly such 'questioning' and the approach of protest through the exploration of alternative possibilities which pervades so much of her work.

In highlighting the musicality in Dickinson's poems Valentine Cunningham asserts that she was an 'alternative hymn writer,' who wrote, like Christina Rossetti, 'in the mode most available to nineteenth century women poets.'[15] Indeed, the writing of congregational hymns initially became an acceptable form of expression for women, because it involved declarations of praise rather than espousing a complex theology and liturgical and poetic symbolism. However, Dickinson's use of hymnody does not appear to be born of necessity, given that she was not obviously aiming to publish her work and that she did not seem particularly interested in gaining critical acclaim or support from those around her. We know that in 1862, aged 31, she wrote

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[13] Barton Levi St. Armand, *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 158. Hereafter referred to as St. Armand.

[14] David Porter, 'Searching for Dickinson's Themes' in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 183-196. (p. 196.)

[15] Valentine Cunningham, 'The Sound of Startled Grass', *The Guardian*, Oct 19, 2002. (For full reference, see bibliography).

to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, asking him whether he thought her verse 'breathed,'(SL, p. 171.) but her interest in carving out a place for herself within the literary world seems to be very limited, and only several of her two thousand or so poems were published in her lifetime. Another point to remember is that Dickinson received a good level of education, and was perfectly capable of expressing complex theology and liturgical and poetic symbolism without utilising the hymn form or adducing a form of communal expression. Therefore, Dickinson's use of the hymn form was not born from a desire to offer acceptable, marketable verse, but rather, a decision to adopt the mode of traditional expression of spirituality in order to highlight its dissonance/resonance with her own experience. Moreover, her use of it can be seen as providing her with a an ideal space in which to articulate her own sense of spirituality whilst simultaneously offering comment upon the traditions and restraints of orthodox religious culture, such as Calvinism's hierarchical model of Election in which women were seen as being further away from God than men, and capable of only a vicarious experience of God.

The modes and methods employed by Dickinson to express her experience of spirituality and relation to orthodox religion will be analysed in light of her response to the symbolic nature of the hymn. The thesis will trace two dominant modes in Dickinson's poetry concerning religion; firstly the ways in which the poems challenge the portrayal of a direct and linear movement towards and communication between God and speaker in religious orthodoxy, as exemplified in the hymns of Isaac Watts, and secondly, the ways in which they emphasise, instead, the God-in-process, and God-in-practice view of spirituality as asserted by twentieth-century feminist theologians.[16] The inherent duality and contradictions in Dickinson's relation to the divine, and also the frequent paradoxes in Watts and other hymnists, belying the ultimate paradoxes not only within Puritanism but ultimately within both traditionally dominant and also more radical conceptions of the divine, has led inevitably to the application of different theoretical approaches in this thesis. Theoretical approaches to Dickinson are necessarily dialectical, as the intersections between different

[16] Both terms 'God-in-process' and 'God-in-practice' used in this thesis allude to Mary Daly's notion of 'God the Verb.' See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973, London: The Women's Press, 1995) p. xvii. Daly describes the trajectory of her book's 'task:' 'of changing the conception/perception of god from 'the supreme being' to Be-ing. The naming of Be-ing as Verb'.

approaches identified by Roland Hagenbuchle conveys.[17] Whilst there are points of contact with Post-Structuralist theories, some of which are used in this study in reference to feminism and mysticism, the aim of this thesis is to suggest that the method of Dickinson's poetic production can be seen within the context of the hymn genre and communal subjectivity as supporting the active way-of-being in the divine, which Dickinson's poems reconstruct and endlessly enact. The alternative metaphors for the divine in feminist theology, and Certeau's notion of 'heterologies' are both useful for describing this active mode of being-in-the divine.

In order to situate Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture, her interaction with the early influence of the hymns of eighteenth century hymnographer Isaac Watts will be examined in Chapter Three, with reference to the motifs of sight and wings which signal in Watts's hymns knowledge of the divine and spiritual transcendence, respectively. This will be followed by a comparative analysis of Evangelical and Unitarian women hymn writers who were contemporary with Dickinson and the Praying Circles as an example of female spiritual community and alternative use of hymnic motifs to connote spiritual transport. Chapters Five and Six serve as the exemplificative section of the thesis and provide analysis of Dickinson's use of bee imagery. This bee imagery will be examined as an alternative to liturgical symbolism and further explored as part of a theoretical examination of 'community' which utilises debates about articulating the spiritual in both feminist literary theory and feminist theology, in order to forge a connection between Dickinson's use of the hymn form and 'liturgical' emblems and what can be seen as a systematic critical engagement with orthodox religion which is both patriarchally and hierarchically inscribed. In doing so, the arguments in this thesis will provide new debate within Dickinson studies which brings together feminist theology and theories about space in discourse in order to uncover new ways in which to approach the questions surrounding the shape and shaping of Dickinson's spirituality in poetry.

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[17] Roland Hagenbuchle, 'Dickinson and Literary Theory' in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 356-384. (p. 381.) 'In reviewing the impact of literary theory on Dickinson, one notes that the poet's work yields equally rich results no matter whether one approaches the poems through time-honoured literary methods [...] or through the rigorous lenses of more recent theories. [...] No critical study of importance [...] has relied on one specific theory alone.'

Dickinson and Belief

We know from Dickinson's letters that she saw herself as being at odds with Evangelical Protestant Christianity, and the extent of her 'atheism' has provided a constant source of debate within Dickinson criticism. Much of Dickinson's poetry does seem to express a reaction against orthodox Christian modes of thinking and practices, and yet the extent and meaning of this reaction is difficult to assess because it also has affinities with non-Protestant groups prevalent in the mid nineteenth century such as Catholicism and also with the most liberal of the Dissenting Protestant sects, Unitarianism.[18]

Early on Emily Dickinson dispensed with the comfort of religious orthodoxy and the apparent certainties it brought many of her contemporaries. In a letter to her friend Abiah Root, the sixteen year old Dickinson recalls an earlier time when she had momentarily felt the 'perfect happiness' of religious conviction:

> I think of the perfect happiness I experienced while I felt I was an heir of heaven as of a delightful dream, out of which the Evil one bid me wake & again return to the world & its pleasures. Would that I had not listened to his winning words! The few short moments in which I loved my Saviour I would not now exchange for a thousand worlds like this. It was then my greatest pleasure to commune alone with the great God & to feel that he would listen to my prayers. I determined to devote my whole life to his service & desired that all might taste of the stream of living water from which I cooled my thirst. But the world allured me & in an unguarded moment I listened to her syren voice. From that moment I seemed to lose my interest in heavenly things by degrees.
>
> (28 March, 1846, L:I, pp. 30-31.) [19]

However, for the rest of her life, and from the huge corpus of poetry that she left behind, we can discern an unflinching dedication to the 'syren voice' or poetic muse that, as I shall argue, cannot be divorced from her own spiritual conviction or the ongoing evaluation of 'heavenly things' which most of her poems convey. For Dickinson, experience of the world and spiritual experience were necessarily

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[18] For discussion of religious plurality in nineteenth-century America, see Catherine A. Brekus, 'Interpreting American Religion' in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. by William L. Barney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) pp. 317-333.

[19] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols, ed. by T. H. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958) vol 1, pp. 30-31. Hereafter 'L' followed by volume number and page.

concomitant, and her letters and poetry chart equally, a spirituality which developed to collapse the distinction between 'heavenly things' and the 'syren voice' of worldly experience which inspired her writing. The 'heavenly things' in the letter above is conspicuously dismissive, characterising the rehearsal of Calvinist Election rhetoric ('heir of heaven') and Evangelical fervour ('Evil one' and 'great God') as an immature aberration, as opposed to a lamentable lost state of grace.

Connecting Dickinson's mode of articulating spirituality with the hymn form serves both to re-contextualise her position within nineteenth-century American society and also within recent criticism which sees her work as having no 'frame of reference'[20] or specific social context. In uncovering the ways in which Dickinson interrogates the hierarchical structures implied by organised religion, we can also highlight her critique of a society that is founded on those structures. Although space and time do not allow for a definitive account of each religious group, effort has been made throughout to distinguish between the various modes of Christianity in mid-nineteenth-century New England. The literary form of the hymn provides a focus through which to see Dickinson's relation to such a culture and her defiance against, as she writes, being 'shut up in prose' (Fr 445)[21] and restricted from speaking against the Church's desire to regulate experience of spirituality. If we view Dickinson's engagement with Isaac Watts and the popular hymn form as a model for dissent and for an articulation of protest, then her apparently heretical stance can be redefined as a desire to be connected to the world in a more solid way, and therefore also, the desire for the closer experience of heaven that such a connection with the world implied for her.

In a letter written to a friend in 1850 Dickinson denounced the revival and religious fervour engulfing her home town of Amherst. She says:

> Christ is calling everyone here, all my companions have answered, even my darling Vinnie believes she loves and trusts him, and I am

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[20] Lynn Shakinovsky, *No Frame of Reference: The Absence of Context in Emily Dickinson's Poetry*, in *Emily Dickinson: Critical Assessments*, vol 4, ed. by Graham Clarke (Mountfield: Helm Information Ltd, 2002) pp. 703-716. (p. 714.)

[21] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* ed. R. W. Franklin (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) poem number 445. Franklin's reading edition of Dickinson's poems will be referred to throughout the thesis. Poems will hereafter appear with the abbreviation 'Fr' followed by the poem number in this edition. As they do not have titles, poems are sometimes referred to by their initial lines, as well as the poem number. Reasons for using this edition are that Franklin uses the final fair copy of Dickinson's manuscript and also retains all original spelling and punctuation.

> standing alone in my rebellion, and growing very careless.
> (3 April, 1850, to Jane Humphrey, L:I, p. 94.)[22]

Her 'rebellion,' I want to argue, is not against the God she redefines and articulates in her poems, but rather against the need to organise spirituality and therefore society in a hierarchical way. The fact that organised religion played such a big part in Dickinson's community means that any critique of it implied a critique of that particular society, and its effects upon the individual as well. Paradoxically, it is through her interaction with the popular but restrictive nature of hymnody that Dickinson's sense of spirituality, or, in her own words, her 'carelessness' can be most recognised and registered.

In a letter to Mrs Joseph Haven in 1859, when discussing a recent sermon given by Mr Seelye, she clearly states her mistrust of 'doctrines:'

> Father has called upon Mr S[eelye] but I am waiting for Vinnie to help me do my courtesies. Mr S preached in our church last Sabbath upon "Predestination," but I do not respect "doctrines," and did not listen to him, so I can neither praise, nor blame.
> (13 February, 1859, L:II, p. 346.)

Whilst stating that she could 'neither praise, nor blame' the preacher and his doctrinal assertions, Dickinson's stance against orthodox religion was rather more critical and pro-active than this comment suggests. The excerpt below, from a letter written in 1856 to Dr and Mrs J.G. Holland, is particularly interesting because it is typical of the critical nature of her response to religious ideals, and echoes those set out in her poetry:

> Don't tell, dear Mrs. Holland, but wicked as I am, I read my Bible sometimes, and in it as I read today, I found a verse like this, where friends should "go no more out"; and there were "no tears," and I wished as I sat down tonight that we were there - not here - and that wonderful world had commenced, which makes such promises [...] If God had been here this summer, and seen the things that I have seen – I guess that He would think His Paradise superfluous. Don't tell Him, for the world, though, for after all He's said about it, I should like to see what He was building for us, with no hammer,

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[22] Leder and Abbott discuss this letter briefly in *The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987) in order to highlight her increasingly independent stance. (pp. 46-47.)

and no stone, and no journeyman either.

(L:II, pp. 140-141.)

Her derisive distrust of the 'wonderful world' of Heaven anticipated and portrayed in the Bible verses she read is equally as vivid as her vision of the paradisal on earth. Her ability to perceive Godliness in nature, and, simultaneously, to be highly critical of traditional ideas about salvation and 'Heaven' is a perspective which she senses would be deemed as a form of heresy, or as an unwelcome challenge to her local community's religious culture if spoken aloud; 'Don't tell Him' is mocking and gossipy in tone, yet seems to characterise Dickinson's interest in revering that which is not said, and her distrust of the process which translates the unsaid into dogma. Whilst appearing to reject the biblical utopian vision of a world beyond death and mortality which has been built by and upon 'His' words alone, she then presents her own version of paradise which, she implies, is less 'superfluous' to the one she reads about in the Bible. Therefore, it is the unsaid, the space in Dickinson's poems which is emphasised by contradictory states, in which such 'Paradise' is articulated.

Reading Dickinson's Hymnic Space

Most she touched me by her muteness –
Most she won me by the way
She presented her small figure –
Plea itself – for Charity –

Were a Crumb my whole possession –
Were there famine in the land –
Were it my resource from starving –
Could I such a plea withstand –

Not opon [*sic*] her knee to thank me
Sank this Beggar from the Sky –
But the Crumb partook – departed –
And returned on High –

I supposed – when sudden
Such a Praise began
'Twas as Space sat singing
To herself – and men –

'Twas the Winged Beggar –
Afterward I learned

To her Benefactor
Making Gratitude. (Fr 483)

Dickinson describes in the final two stanzas of this poem the moment at which a bird's song is heard by the speaker/listener, and is then interpreted as a song of gratitude from the bird, for its being fed. The moment between hearing the birdsong and recognition of where it emanates from is the poem's climactic moment, temporarily delayed and stretched out ('I supposed' – 'Afterward I learned') as a dramatic ploy in which the reader is invited to consider the strangeness of listening to singing which erupts, apparently out of nowhere, out of 'Space.' For the moment, Dickinson compels us to contemplate an absence, to imagine a void which sings both 'to herself - and men - ;' a space which is both self-gratifying *and* which also extends such singing, such self-generative 'praise' outwards towards others/ 'men.' The poem is striking because its central proposition (to imagine such a 'Space') anticipates, not without irony, the perplexing space that Dickinson the poet has occupied within literary criticism ever since her poems became publicly available. Which spaces do Dickinson's poem inhabit? The many theoretical and cultural spaces, ranging from the various academic and critical perspectives her work has been read through, to the interpretations of her work in popular culture, such as music, film and theatre.[23] The challenge of positioning Dickinson within a particular literary tradition and/or framing her work within specific critical discourses persists because Dickinson's writing privileges this kind of 'space' which accommodates a decentred simultaneity and thus resists cognitive and imaginative boundaries.

However, in this poem, 'Space' is decidedly feminine. Dickinson's gendering of space ('herself') in this poem is striking as the information appears where it is not needed, space usually being perceived in terms of neutrality. Although Dickinson often disrupts expectations of gender assignment, in this case she provides it where it seems unnecessary. The brief moment when the poet contemplates such space, in between connecting the sound to the bird, is amplified to epiphanic proportions, and the fact that space is mirrored as female serves to connect contemplation of space with contemplation of the self. Re-cognition of the self and consciousness appears to have replaced God, and yet the poem itself replicates the surface features and concerns of

[23] For a survey of the critical reception of Dickinson, see Marietta Mesmer, 'Dickinson's Critical Reception', and for adaptations in the arts, see Jonnie Guerra, 'Dickinson Adaptations in the Arts and Theatre', both in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 299-322 and pp. 385-407.

traditional hymnody, such as the line of relation between a 'supplicant' speaker and a transcendent being. However, the deeper function of the hymn, to reinscribe or mirror the divine, is radically repositioned here as feminine.[24]

By expanding and dramatising this brief exchange between the speaker and the bird (which is not named but described only in relation to 'her' gender and lowly position as 'beggar') Dickinson invokes a connection or interchangeability between the poem's speaker and the bird/singer, and calls to attention culturally prescribed notions of the female poet. The speaker's view of the bird parodies the expectation of Christian humility and coy reticence often associated with socially prescribed femininity in patriarchal nineteenth-century culture. At the beginning of the poem, the bird is described as winning the speaker's attention and affection, initially, 'by her muteness' and the way in which she presents herself in supplication:

> Most she touched me by her muteness –
> Most she won me by the way
> She presented her small figure –
> Plea itself – for Charity - (Fr 483)

Dickinson places herself as the masculine eye, the 'Benefactor'/God who judges such behaviour as worthy of essential 'Crumb' or not. And yet, simultaneously, the bird is heaven-bound whilst the speaker is decidedly earthly; the bird has to 'sink' in order to reach the speaker's lower position, take the food ('the Crumb partook' conveying the bird's eucharistic participation) and 'return[ed]on High.' As with most poems by Dickinson, hierarchical positions are interchangeable and ultimately destabilised. The hierarchy between speaker and God to be found in traditional hymnody is inverted in this poem; the speaker is positioned as 'Benefactor,' and the bird singing praise is decidedly anthropomorphic ('her small figure' and 'this Beggar'). Not only is the hierarchical distinction between God-human to be found in traditional hymnody destabilised in this poem, but the dramatised delay between hearing the birdsong and recognition performs as a visibly dramatic construction which only thinly veils (and thus invites) the conclusion that the speaker and 'singer' can be perceived as being one and the same.

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[24] Definitions of hymns and particular qualities of a hymn, such as narrative including a climactic moment such as the one in this poem, and as representing an 'agreed' notion of the divine are explored in Chapter One, p. 51 and Chapter Two, pp. 60-65.

The poem of course works on a simpler level, where the irrational expectation of gratitude from a bird is eclipsed by a greater and more perceptive gratitude on the part of the bird to God as the ultimate source of crumbs and nourishment. However, it also conveys that although the speaker's initial desire is for a display of the bird's 'gratitude,' the power of melody is arresting in itself, and enough to propel the speaker (and the reader) into contemplation of singing that isn't merely 'gratitude.' One of the associations with hymnody, of 'making gratitude' towards a Creator, together with notions of the woman poet are compared strikingly with an imagined but also momentarily potential alternative within the hymn-poem; the vastness of 'Space' which does not come with limitation, where singing is unrestricted and is also arresting enough to be heard by 'men.' When the birdsong is finally located, the speaker's 'explanation' of the bird's singing in the poem's final stanza describes the pattern of praise to be found in traditional hymnody, as the bird sings; 'To her Benefactor/Making gratitude.' The final stanza is however surplus to requirement; the 'gratitude' is expected in the poem's third stanza, where disappointingly, 'Not opon [*sic*] her knee to thank me/Sank this beggar from the Sky -' and provided in the fourth '-when sudden such Praise began-'. The explanation of the bird's singing, which comes in the final, fifth stanza, moves us towards the conclusion we would expect to reach if we were reading a traditional hymn; gratitude to a 'Benefactor'/God is the aim of 'Praise'/singing, not self-gratification or the gratification of 'men.' However, Dickinson relegates the function of 'praise,' the act of 'making gratitude' described within the scene/poem to a secondary position. The delayed conclusion the speaker in this poem reaches is secondary to the primary focus for consideration, which is the instance of 'space singing to herself and men.' What matters is not whether the bird is singing 'for' the speaker or not, but rather, the moment at which the speaker experiences the liberation of the 'sudden' birdsong. As a result of the birdsong, the speaker is allowed to contemplate an ideal, anarchic space in which the seemingly impossible can exist. Such space is anarchic because it allows for explosive articulation which is both self-generated and ungoverned by social conventions. A new experience of 'praise' emerges out of the experience which the space (and therefore also interchangeability and interconnection) between 'Benefactor' and 'Beggar' has allowed. By destabilising the traditionally imposed divisions between God and speaker as modelled in conventional hymns, this poem highlights the way in which Dickinson's poems negotiate an ideal space in which the both/and position is

achieved, where the poet sings both 'to herself - and men -', a space in which the divine is re-imagined as relational, anti-hierarchical, and always open.

The suspension of the question of the bird's 'gratitude' in this poem is also a deliberate suspension of the divisions which are made between a hymn and a poem, suspending also in turn for the reader, the question of Dickinson's religious faith or doubt. If the bird's singing is a praise, or song of gratitude toward a 'benefactor,' then it is a hymn of sorts. Indeed, Rivkah Zim has argued that many of the images in Psalms come from nature, which 'contributes to their relevance and appeal beyond particular time or place.'[25] In the following Psalm, which is dedicated to a musician specifically, we can see the connection between nature as a natural enactment of devotion, and a human's devotion to God:

> My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.
>
> Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay a nest for her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.
>
> Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.
>
> (Psalm 84:2-4, 'To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the Sons of Korah')[26]

The emphasis on music in this psalm, and the equation between the birds singing, whose nests are 'even thine altars,' and the practice of religious worship 'still praising thee' can also be seen in Dickinson's poem. Just as the speaker's observation of the 'praise' from 'space' in the poem confers its hymnic quality, so too can Dickinson's poem be seen as a form of (automatic, inadvertent) praise. Dickinson's poems do not make any attempt to bridge the gap between poem and hymn, faith and doubt, but the status conferred upon a hymn as being a depiction of a speaker's relation to the divine is always presented for consideration. Wendy Martin (1984) argues that 'her poems and letters are not hymns to a transcendent God but a celebration of 'the moment immortal.'[27] However, Dickinson utilises the premises, structure and imagery of traditional hymnody in order to allow creative space to reaffirm itself, and to suggest

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[25] Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer 1535-1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 35. Aspects of psalmody are discussed further in the following chapter, pp. 38-40.

[26] *King James Version of the Bible*, Psalm 84.2-4, p. 680.

[27] Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984) p. 164.

that the 'celebration of the moment immortal' in *relation* is perhaps the best version of gratitude a poet can provide. By utilising and reading hymnic space in this way, Dickinson's poems connect ideas about the divine with the act of writing. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the notions of relationality and process which Dickinson's writing privileges and elicits bears affinities with both mystical discourse and debates around a female version of/relation to the divine in feminist theology and feminist literary theory.

Beyond Doubleness

Women's poetry of the nineteenth century can be understood as both utilising and subverting the dominant modes of expression and assumptions of a religious culture which is essentially oppressive towards women. This process is described by Isobel Armstrong as follows:

> The doubleness of women's poetry comes from its ostensible adoption of an affective mode, often simple, often pious, often conventional. But those conventions are subjected to investigation, questioned, or used for unexpected purposes. The simpler the surface of the poem, the more likely it is that a second and more difficult poem will exist beneath it.[28]

Although the hymnic mode of Dickinson's poems does offer a simple 'cover' for complexity, equally it utilises and exploits the communicative aspect of hymns and religious worship and therefore presents a three dimensional version of the 'double' poem. Complexity which is derived from a dialogical relation to devotional hymns and poetic expression necessarily also takes upon itself a concern which goes beyond the expression of resistance and subversion and becomes in and of itself something new and transformative. We can see this process at work in Dickinson's poetry as it struggles to shape alternative values and beliefs to those, particularly with regard to religion, which she found did not resonate with her own experience and views. With this in mind, we can see the ways in which both a feminist theoretical framework and cultural context can inform readings of the work of women poets such as Dickinson and the ways in which their representations of spirituality have been shaped. Despite

[28] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 324.

being both white and middle class (and so operating within the defining hierarchy) I will argue that Dickinson actively struggles to shape her relation to the dominant patriarchal and capitalistic implications of orthodox spirituality in her own society.

Although Dickinson was not aligned to any particular group, her engagement with the work of Watts also includes the modes of expression that were the result of his position as a Dissenter. As Chapter Three will explore, Watts was part of a visible group who engaged dialogically with the rituals of Anglicanism and Catholicism that the Puritans regarded as obscuring a person's direct relation to God. With this in mind, Dickinson's engagement with the work of Watts can be seen in two ways. Firstly, Watts can be seen as representing the tradition of established orthodox religion and an 'obscurer' of her own spiritual experience. Although himself a Puritan and Dissenter, the popularity of Watts's hymns made him the 'father of the modern hymn'[29] whose work was championed during the Evangelical religious revivals in New England. In this way he is also a cultural touchstone, representing the repressive tradition of religion Dickinson derides (commenting upon her family's religion, she notes the 'eclipse they call their 'Father', SL, p. 173.) and associates with the Evangelical fervour of her childhood. Fearing her brother's waywardness, Dickinson mocks; 'I will send you *Village Hymns* at earliest opportunity' (SL, p. 101.), a volume in wide circulation during their childhood and which included the hymns of Isaac Watts.[30] Secondly, however, Watts's position as Dissenter and innovator of poetic and religious expression meant that he offered an example of someone who attempted to bridge the gap between religious and lyrical expression and produced such expression as a form of protest against a stifling dominant ideology and regime.[31] Such an examination of Watts in relation to Dickinson provides an important counterpoint to the minimal criticism that exists in this area, most of which has read Dickinson's memory and use of Watts as being ultimately and foremost as a critical subversion of religious faith.[32] Focusing on Dickinson's use of Watts's hymn form (always remembering that Watts is regarded as the 'Father of Hymnody') is a way of

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[29] David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpenden: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust Ltd, 1974) p. 102.

[30] As will be discussed in Chapter Four, this popular hymnal also included the hymns of Phoebe Hinsdale Brown.

[31] For discussion on Watts as poetic innovator and Dissenter, see Chapter Three, pp. 97-100.

[32] As discussed in Chapter Three, critics such as Wendy Martin and Shira Wolosky tend towards such a view of Dickinson's use of Watts. See Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*, pp. 138-9. and Shira Wolosky, 'Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts' *The New England Quarterly* 61 (1988) 214-232.

uncovering Dickinson's critique of society and methods of formulating her own ideas about spirituality and her relationship to orthodox religion in general. This in turn reveals how she uses one of the primary tools of that orthodoxy and effectively turns it back on itself, in order to criticise the hierarchical structures of an inherently conservative social order and to offer an impassioned and important overhaul of orthodox modes of thinking about spirituality.

In revivalist nineteenth century New England, spiritual conversion provided a fundamental method of organising society, of keeping people in their allotted places, and of being 'saved' from the dangers of competing and 'ill' influences. Much emphasis was placed upon conversion in Dickinson's community; Edward Hitchcock, a popular contemporary writer describes the act of conversion of a young man as being like the 'ring inserted through the young bullock's septum which allows the owner to lead the animal at will after it matures.'[33] With this in mind, we can see how it was necessary for Dickinson to forge a considered distance from such socially controlling forces. What is more, her work can thus be seen as a deliberate construction of resistance which is not, as Habegger argues, 'a silent, a non-act, a turning away' (Habegger, p. 386.) from such religious fervour, but a bold and loud protest in poetic form which was deliberately dissonant. Her mode of questioning dominant religious ideology is consistent; 'Why do they shut me out of Heaven? / Did I sing - too loud?' (Fr 268), and frequently related directly to the act of writing poetry ('singing') itself. The role of poet as a form of industry becomes a central concern in Dickinson and it is by foregrounding the roots of the Protestant work ethic that the extent of Dickinson's dissent can be illuminated. The important connection between ecstatic pleasure and 'industry' we find in Dickinson's bee imagery (which is explored in depth in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis) is a crucial explication of the relation between subjectivity and spirituality so prevalent in twentieth/twenty-first century feminist literary theory and feminist theology. The ecstatic community in Dickinson's bee imagery also leads us to a new metaphor for the divine.

There has been a shift in recent scholarship on Dickinson which has highlighted a desire to uncover the many ways in which Dickinson was engaged with and creatively stimulated by her own society and context of late nineteenth century

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[33] Alfred Habegger, 'Evangelicalism and its Discontents: Hannah Porter versus Emily Dickinson,' *The New England Quarterly* 70: 3 (1997) 386-414 (p. 389.) Habegger discusses Edward Hitchcock's use of this metaphor in his *Reminiscences of Amherst College* (1863).

New England. There is currently a need to recover Dickinson's work from decades of criticism which defined it as being absent of any frame of reference or social context and displaying evidence of a severe alienation from (and uninterest in) her own society. Part of this project is to highlight important connections between what has been the obfuscation of Dickinson's engagement with society and configurations of spirituality as a politically viable option. Betsy Erkkila employs Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* to describe the ways in which the public and private spheres have been falsely separated, and the private sphere depoliticised, to support criticism of Dickinson as a reclusive poet, ultimately uninterested in engaging with society or the political environment of her day.[34] Although Dickinson was not interested in publication, apart from the self-publication her fascicles and poems in letters provided her with, Dickinson's poems paradoxically demand the engagement of the reader, almost as if their existence was dependent upon reader's response, as the proliferation of Dickinson criticism since their publication has proved. As Erkkila's essay shows, Dickinson's most prolific period can be seen as being connected directly with the American Civil War (1861-1865) and her responses as a poet to it:

> in [...] poems composed during the war years, Dickinson enacts her artistic dedication in language that uses biblical symbolism and Church ritual to challenge the social, sexual and religious ideologies that eclipse and shroud women's lives.
>
> (Erkkila, p. 157.)

The shape of Dickinson's writing during the Civil War period which Erkkila observes, and which this study also takes as its focus, demonstrates increasingly outwards, externalised or 'centrifugal'[35] focus in her poetics. Apart from the fact that Dickinson composed the majority of poems during the Civil War period, it is also during this period that her concern with the motifs and practices associated with hymnody comes most creatively to the fore. This can be seen namely in her poetics of flight, such as in the bee imagery examined in Chapters Five and Six.

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[34] Betsy Erkkila, 'Dickinson and the Art of Politics' in *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Vivian R. Pollak, pp. 133-174. She notes that Habermas describes 'a public sphere that exists between civil society and the state, in which private persons engage in public talk about issues of common concern.' (p. 146.)

[35] Jay Ladin's term for one of the forces in Dickinson's work, as discussed in the following chapter, pp. 53-56. See Jay Ladin, ''So Anthracite to Live:' Emily Dickinson and American Literary History', *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 13:1 (2004) 19-50 (p. 28.)

Overall, then, this thesis examines the representation of spirituality in Dickinson's work by focussing on her relation to hymnody and by providing analysis of hymnic space as heterologous. It revisits her relation to the work of Isaac Watts in light of his position as a Dissenter, and analyses her use of the hymn form alongside that of other contemporary women hymn writers. It also provides new research into the ways in which Dickinson utilised particular images, such as in the example of the bee, and in doing so, invokes culturally specific ideas about orthodox religion, spirituality, community, and the intersection between them. In analysing such representations of spirituality in relation to specific texts and cultural contexts, this thesis provides a new foray into Dickinson criticism, and also fills the current gap within criticism with regard to this particular aspect of her work. Moreover, the thesis aims to uncover the ways in which Dickinson's poetic adoption and adaptation of the modes of religious orthodoxy and traditional devotional expression goes beyond the characteristics of Armstrong's 'double poem.' As Armstrong argues, feminist analysis of nineteenth-century poetry by women often 'retrieves the protest, but not the poem.'(Armstrong, p. 319.) With this in mind, the thesis aims to suggest ways in which Dickinson's hymnic poems go beyond this doubleness to produce new ways of thinking about and expressing spirituality, and in doing so, also to highlight the ways in which reading Dickinson's poetry in this way may present new opportunities for reading representations of spirituality in nineteenth-century poetry by women.

Chapter One

The Hymn - A Form of Devotion?

> I have promised three Hymns to a charity, but without your approval could not give them – They are short and I could write them quite plainly, and if you felt it convenient to tell me if they were faithful, I should be very grateful [...].
>
> (November 1880, SL, p. 267.)

In a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1880, towards the end of her life, Emily Dickinson describes her poems as 'Hymns'. Her use of the term 'Hymns' to describe her poems, and of 'faithful' as a benchmark for quality in this letter is undoubtedly ironic.[1] However, Dickinson's relationship with language (as evidenced in her letters as much as her poetry) conveys a preference for multivalency, for varying levels of meaning to co-exist, and even also for meaning to be generated where there would not normally be any semantic connection. For example, in a poem which expresses anxiety about the return of a robin (signalling to the 'bereaved' speaker that time passes, despite any desire or indeed fear of the contrary) the emphasis on pianos in the second stanza is unexpected, but it implies both an intimate connection with, and also a dislocation from, nature's cycles and the recurrent alarm of the birdsong. The speaker's fear transmutes nature into a man-made instrument, with tunes intended to damage and 'mangle':

> I thought if I could only live
> Till that first Shout got by –
> Not all Pianos in the Woods
> Had power to mangle me - (Fr 347)

With such an inventive and fluid use of language it is likely that Dickinson's use of the term 'Hymns' in the letter to Higginson connotes both her irreverence for traditional forms and also the import of her project. Whilst drawing upon the extent to which her poems deviate from traditional hymnody is humorous, there is also perhaps a genuine challenge being presented: How do these poems differ from traditional hymns and in what ways are they (un)faithful? Dickinson uses the terminology associated with organised religion in order to highlight both the distance of her poems from it, but also, simultaneously, to present them as an alternative and new form of hymnody, asserting a new kind of faith. The letter to Higginson quoted above

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[1] Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*, p. 109. Martin views Dickinson's reference to hymns in this letter as ironic because she perceives the poems Dickinson was offering to the charity as 'emphatically secular.'

witnesses the extent to which Dickinson conferred a spirituality upon her writing, where the two are inextricably connected. Whilst calling her poems 'Hymns' operates upon the level of irony, it is undoubtedly also a sincere statement about her relationship with her art. In this letter, and in the poems she produced throughout her life, Dickinson is reclaiming the hymn. In conferring the status of hymns upon her work, and by making the connection between spirituality and writing explicit, Dickinson also aligns herself with other women hymn writers. Given her lack of concern with orthodox modes of publication, alluding to the inferior, 'acceptable' status of the female hymnist as opposed to poet was a risk that Dickinson was prepared to take.

This chapter outlines a brief history of hymn culture together with some of the features of the genre, and introduces the ways in which 'hymn' is discussed in this thesis, in relation to Dickinson's use of and engagement with it. The term 'hymn culture' is used in this thesis not only with reference to the tradition of writing and experience of singing hymns, and the conventions they follow, such as hierarchical address, teleological narrative and particular imagery.[2] It also refers to the rationale, and specific ideas about social cohesion that such conventions produce, and the various effects those ideas bear upon the editorial choices made during the compiling of hymnals. Hymns are ideally relational because they invoke the individual's communion with God and also the congregation, that is, a diverse relation in unity. However, the hierarchical model of relation in hymn address ('I-Thou'), which reflects oppositional thinking, is something women hymnists negotiate through the varying ways in which they represent experiences of the divine.

The aim of this and the following chapter is not to argue for a reclassification of Dickinson's poems as hymns, but rather, to outline the flexibility between lyric poetry and hymns which Dickinson's work uses and makes explicit. Understanding hymnic space as heterologous (that is as spaces which allow individuality and difference to exist within a contained connection to a larger body[3]) can inform readings of Dickinson's representations of spirituality. The difficulties of framing Dickinson's work within a particular genre is something which Virginia Jackson has explored in relation to reading Dickinson as a lyric poet through 'posthumous

[2] Hierarchical address in hymns is discussed in detail in Chapter Two in relation to the 'I-Thou' model of address and the alternatives to this considered by recent feminist theology.
[3] Discussed further in the following chapter.

transmission and reception of her writing as lyric.'[4] Jackson's reading of Dickinson as a poet whose work often does not conform to the parameters of lyric poetry, but rather has been affected by, and read through, various theories of lyrical expression, is instructive.[5] Whilst repositioning Dickinson as a hymnist is not the aim of this thesis, exploring the connections her work has with hymnody provides a fruitful alternative to confining her work to the genre of lyric poetry. It also uncovers new ways in which to explore Dickinson's engagement with the discourses that constructed a woman's relation to the divine through the role of the traditional female hymnist.[6] In this way, the hymn can be seen not only as a form of religious devotion, but also as a site of political dissent which, in turn can be seen as articulating an alternative version of devotion, both religious and/or secular. In order to understand the fluidity between lyric poetry and hymns and the gravity and effects of Dickinson's use of the hymn form, a brief outline of the development of hymnody up to the mid-nineteenth century will be useful.

A brief History of Hymns

The journey of the hymn form from its origins up to the mid-nineteenth century in America is described in historical accounts as a long and somewhat complicated one. The ways in which the hymn has been used as a mode of expression to serve as a public function of worship over the centuries is something that inevitably reflects the different historical periods in which they are written (and written about) both politically and culturally. Cheslyn Jones's definition of hymns is useful here, as it applies as well to nineteenth-century as to twentieth-century hymns. Jones sees hymns as corresponding directly with 'those ritual situations when the congregation acts as a group, whether to reply to the word of God or to utter praise and entreaty. The hymn

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[4] Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) p. 212.

[5] Ibid. Jackson cites Dickinson's 'Valentine' (Fr 2) as one of many examples which do not conform to protocols for the lyric in citation, reading or printing; she calls it a 'cultural grab bag of languages, texts, stories, myths, aphorisms, and bon mots.' (p. 139.)

[6] As will be discussed in Chapter Four, Dickinson's engagement with hymnody both re-presents and challenges culturally prescribed versions of a woman's relation to the divine. Similarly, although not concerned with female hymnody, Jackson's view of Dickinson as 'immersed in female sentimental lyricism' positions Dickinson as challenging the discourse which positioned women's poetic expression within the genre of sentimental lyricism. See Jackson, p. 212.

acts as a mirror in which the congregation can see itself.'[7] The history of the hymn, therefore, can be seen as a representation or mirror of the various versions of the divine that were agreed upon and expressed by a particular group, at a particular moment in history. The fact that other versions would be suppressed, edited or excluded is also part of that history.

Most hymns currently in existence date from after the seventeenth century; before then the act of writing hymns often relied upon the practice of paraphrasing Holy Scripture. When writing about hymns before this period, compilers and commentators refer largely to the tradition of paraphrasing liturgical sources. The tradition of setting sacred poetry to music has a long history, and the ways in which hymns were used to perform particular functions within society can be traced as far back as the fourth century, when hymns were used not only to perform public celebration of the Christian mysteries, but also to promote or refute heresy.[8] The Arian Controversy is an early example of hymns enabling a literal performance of social and political identity, foreshadowing the use of hymns in the cultivation of a woman's 'domestic' identity during the mid-nineteenth century, as discussed further in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

The debate over what should and should not be included in hymns as part of devotional worship is something which has fluctuated over time within different periods, inevitably reflecting shifting power relations between Church and State.[9] The shift in the usage of hymns is mainly attributed to the work of St. Ambrose, the fourth century Bishop of Milan, who championed their use as a simple and direct part of formal worship. Nearly one hundred hymns have been described as 'Ambrosian', but John Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* (1892) tells us that only three can be attributed to Ambrose with any certainty.[10] However, we do know that as a composer and writer of sacred poetry, Ambrose sought to systematize the form of musical

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[7] Cheslyn Jones, ed., and others, *The Study of Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1979) p. 452.

[8] An example is the 'Arian controversy' in the fourth-century Roman Empire, when hymns were used to align oneself with a particular branch of Catholicism. (*DCC*, p. 281. and p. 36.) Arius and those who followed his idea that the Son of God should be seen as being a separate entity from God himself (so as not to ascribe the human weaknesses of the Son to the Father) were seen as heretics, and public hymn singing became an expression of one's social and political identity. (*DCC*, p. 281.)

[9] In the fifth-century Eastern Orthodox Church, hymns did not deviate from biblical text. This gave rise to *troparia*, hymns of a single stanza in length, and *contakia* which were a series of stanzas. (*DCC*, p. 281.) The later, Latin hymns signified an important shift as hymns gradually infiltrated the Western Churches and by the twelfth century were a fully recognised part of religious worship. (*DCC*, p. 281.)

[10] John Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology* (London: John Murray, 1907) p. 56.

worship within the liturgy and as a result served to promote the use of hymns in the Western Church.

During the Middle Ages, a significant figure in the development of the hymn form generally and for this thesis in particular is the twelfth century German woman mystic and composer Hildegard Von Bingen (1098-1179). Hildegard wrote liturgical plainchants and also a few hymns in Latin in honour of saints, virgins and the Virgin Mary.[11] John Julian dismisses her contribution to the hymnody of her day as 'neither numerous nor important', however, the distinction Julian imposes between Hildegard's 'mystical verse' and her more 'traditional' hymns ultimately affects his conservative estimation of Hildegard's contribution to hymnody as he sees it. (Julian, p. 523.) Regardless of how her works are categorized, Hildegard's compositions provide an example of a woman engaging with the form as early as the twelfth century, and despite Julian's record, her work is regarded highly today.

With the onset of the Reformation in the sixteenth century there were changes again to how hymns were regarded as part of formal worship. The main exponent of the German Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote many hymns during this period which are still around today, for example, 'All praise to Thee, Eternal God' and 'Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word'. These and the hymns written by Luther's followers are influenced heavily by Lutherian philosophy which places emphasis on personal justification by faith (*DCC*, p. 281.), a tenet that became part of the basis for the Protestant attack on Catholicism and which was also important for the Puritans in the seventeenth century.[12] At much the same time John Calvin (1509-1564) worked to establish a theocratic (church governed) regime and his influence led to a series of more rigid guidelines on the use of hymns and the insistence that they should be comprised of scriptural words only. So there came with Calvinism a need to place greater emphasis on the psalms, giving rise to the singing of metrical psalms instead of hymns, which were seen as being a deviation from scripture. Rivkah Zim explains how different versions of psalms embody 'contemporary views of what was thought to be proper to the nature of a psalm,' and how writers in the sixteenth century

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[11] See Sabina Flanagan, *Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen* (Shambala Publications: Boston and London, 1996)

[12] Luther's 'Ninety-Five Theses' criticised the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, such as accepting financial donations in exchange for pardoning sins and granting indulgences. See *DCC*, p. 281.

'exploited the shared, contemporary resources of that kind.'[13] In the sixteenth century, poets 'inherited a devotional tradition in which the Psalms provided a nucleus for the private prayers of the laity and this tradition persisted among Catholics and Protestants alike.'(Zim, p. 3.) Thus, there was a desire to paraphrase the Psalms from all walks of literary life, including those who were not devout reformers.

The eighteenth century was pivotal in the received history of hymnody largely because of the minister and hymnographer Isaac Watts (1674-1748). Watts was instrumental in changing the way in which people worship, away from the metrical psalms favoured by Calvinism, back towards the wider ranging forms and content that existed before the Reformation. Although Watts's collection of psalms, *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (1719) was influential, it was his extremely popular congregational, non-scriptural hymns that were instrumental in effecting the change from using psalmody in church practice to participatory, communal congregational hymn singing. Thus hymns which did not rely upon paraphrasing psalms became much more acceptable during the eighteenth century and set the precedent for the fluidity between lyrical expression and 'hymnody' thereafter.

Barton Levi St. Armand's labelling of Dickinson's poetry as a 'Christian Psalmody of questioning and protest,'(St. Armand, p. 158.) is instructive, as a reading of Dickinson's poetry through the tradition of psalmody would serve to highlight a process of dissent, questioning and reconfiguration of spirituality in her work. Thought to have been written by David, although its multiple viewpoints suggest otherwise to scholars today, the Bible's *Book of Psalms* expresses one particular human's experience of God. The personal tone of the one hundred and fifty psalms, and the imitation of it, lends itself to the articulation of a personal and personalised relationship to God or the divine, and the often problematic nature of that relationship. Watts's extensive *The Psalms of David* provide a good model for the reinterpretation of personal experience and through them we can trace an influence which might inform Dickinson's mode of 'protest'. The residual influence of Calvinism in Dickinson's society remained strong. However, despite the element of personal response within orthodoxy that the metrical psalms encourage, the practice of psalmody in church worship, which is a less restrictive form of expression than the

[13]Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer1535-1601*, p. 2.

singing of metrical psalms, combines the personal mode with a more liberated and looser expression of spirituality. However, it was congregational hymns more than psalmody that held sway in the period of religious revivals during the early to mid nineteenth century as a method and display of conversion, much as they were used in early Christian church history (as explained above). Therefore, the personal mode associated with the practice of psalmody is pertinent to this study as much as the assumptions about social cohesion implicit in the hymn (the representation of an agreed or communal version of the divine which is reinforced by both the act of singing and the containing structure of hymn common metre) found in congregational hymnody, and both aspects bear equally upon the readings of Dickinson that make up this study. As discussed earlier (Introduction, p. 8.), St. Armand's comment sets an important precedent for reading structure and method in Dickinson's corpus where other critics have been less inclined to do so.

As this brief history of hymnody demonstrates, gradual shifts in the political and social climates which affected western church history can be identified and demonstrated by the differing levels on restriction placed upon hymn usage in public worship. Therefore, particular uses of the hymn (or psalm) can tell us a lot about the kinds of expectations from readers at the time they were written and their cultural contexts. Like the psalm, the space of the hymn carries with it a set of expectations, but a gradual shift can be identified from the use of strictly paraphrastic verse, to a more lyrical expression in congregational hymnody from the eighteenth century onwards. This shift occurs partly through imitation which at times is akin to parody.

Martha Winburn England writes of Dickinson's use of the hymn as a form with specific associations and assumptions, and makes a comparison with T.S. Eliot's use of 'orthodox' forms:

> The method is parody in the usual sense: the imitation of an art form that handles any element of art so as to criticize the original form with more or less serious intent. In our day, Mr. T.S. Eliot['s] [...] frustrates the expectations raised by some familiar verse form, and turns the reader from lyric mood to critical evaluation of statements commonly associated with the original form. Emily Dickinson

> handled various elements of words and music so as to comment on statements commonly associated with the hymn form.[14]

It is the nature and effect of the 'statements commonly associated with the hymn form' which this thesis will interrogate in relation to Dickinson's use of the hymn and her treatment of such associative 'statements' and modes of articulation, through metaphors for the divine and for one's relationship to the divine, primarily, as found in Watts's hymns. However, because Dickinson's treatment of the hymn form does not rely upon paraphrasing and reworking the psalms, the way in which to approach Dickinson's 'comment' differs from the methods usually employed in investigating traditional hymnody. Recurrent images such as the bee indicate important connections between Dickinson and the Puritan-Protestant work ethic conveyed in many hymns. Particular motifs, such as flight will be traced in relation to those in Watts and also in contemporary hymns by women of whose work Dickinson would almost certainly have been aware.

Hymns which do not follow the traditional paraphrastic structure of psalmody are by their nature slightly more difficult to define. At the end of the seventeenth century, hymns no longer relied exclusively upon paraphrase and poems which were simply religious verse were admitted into the Non-Conformist Church as hymns. However the considerable criticism that greeted Benjamin Keach's defence of hymns in his *The Breach Repaired* (1691) shows that the incorporation of such unscriptural songs into church services was controversial. It was only with Watts who popularised the use of hymns via congregational singing in the eighteenth century, that the hymn finally became established as an accepted form of worship. Watts's hymns are an example of verse that does not rely entirely upon paraphrasing scripture. They are short and direct in their structure and approach, usually written in the Hymnic Common Metre with its 4-3, 4-3, formulation, and appeal to a more personalised experience of faith and spirituality than the generalised expression associated with paraphrases of scripture.[15] Watts has since become known as the 'father of the modern

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[14]Martha Winburn England, and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers* (New York: New York Public Library, 1966) p. 121.

[15] Hymn Common Metre is usually comprised of four-line verses with each line alternately comprising of three (trimeter) and four (tetrameter) iambic metrical feet. An iambic line begins with an unstressed syllable which then 'rises' to a stressed syllable or beat, and is often called 'rising' metre. Trochaic lines begin with a stressed syllable or beat, and then fall to an off-beat, and is thus often called a 'falling metre.' Dickinson uses both iambic and trochaic stresses/unstresses or 'feet' in her use of the Hymn Common Metre to achieve metrical emphasis. See Thomas Carper and Derek Attridge, *Meter*

hymn'[16] and his influence is recognised on a global scale as being someone who radically altered the mode of church practice with his support of congregational hymn singing. Watt's preference for this simple but taught structure that encourages plainness of language, was perceived by some as evidence of a lack of poetic skill[17], but in fact this unadorned style can be connected to Watts's politics and position as a Dissenter with Puritan roots.

An increased questioning of religious faith is reflected in the writings of the Victorian period both in Britain and America. The increased critical awareness of the Bible and the proliferation of linguistic and historical studies of biblical texts in the nineteenth century as a whole gave rise to a scepticism towards literalist interpretations of the Bible as the word of God. Krueger argues that such developments led to the 'empowerment of individual conscience as the final authority.'[18] With this increased biblical literacy there was also an increase in the number of laity incorporated into the workings of church practices. This led to what Krueger terms as 'common cultural currency' and a 'widely shared typology by which to interpret history, politics, art, and individual experience.'(Krueger, p. 142.)

During the nineteenth century the proliferation of hymn collections compiled for both public and private usage led to many alterations at the hands of editors. The nature of hymns as a tool for 'moulding' theology meant that hymns were altered frequently to accommodate the different theological leanings of religious groups. However, this also led to anxiety about the corruption of hymns which, as essentially sacred texts, should remain intact. An article from *The Atlantic Monthly* (1882) entitled 'Hymns and Hymn-Tinkers,' conveys such anxieties:

> All these and many more have had their words passed under the harrow and mangled with needless and cruel wounds. It is the duty

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and Meaning: An Introduction to Rhythm in Poetry (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 88-93. for fuller explanation of metre labels.

[16] David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpenden: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust Ltd, 1974) p. 102.

[17] As discussed in Chapter Three. See Rufus Griswold, ed., *Sacred Poets of England and America* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848) p. 241, and Bernard L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London: Epworth Press, 1942) pp. 88-89.

[18] Christine Krueger, 'Clerical,' in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by H.F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 141-154. (p. 142.)

> of all who have the interests of an authentic literature at heart to manifest their disapproval of such literary crimes.[19]

The nature or 'integrity' of a hymn therefore becomes a matter of literary taste, and is supported by dedication to a non-specific claim to 'authenticity.' Dickinson's 'tinkering' or 'mangling' of the traditional hymn metre challenges claims to what constitutes a particular type of 'authenticity,' as demonstrated by the anonymous critic above whose focus is on the importance of preserving the linguistic idiosyncrasies in the hymns of canonical male hymnists, Watts and Wesley.

The tensions and difficulties implicit in attempting to define differences and/or similarities between lyric poetry and hymns is something which Dickinson's work itself emphasises and also exploits. Definitions of lyric poetry include non-dramatic and non-narrative verse. The hymn, which both dramatises a speaker's relation to the divine and presents a clear narrative in which speaker and God are defined, can be distinguished from lyric poetry on this basis. Dickinson's work ruptures the expectation of narrative and resolution associated with the hymn and in this sense can be seen as lyric poetry. Thus the two main qualities of hymnody relevant for this thesis are the assumption of their articulation of an agreed 'common bond' of a Christian community, and what Baynes described in 1867 as their desired effect of being able to 'mould our theology':

> Next to the bible itself, hymns have done more to influence our views, and mould our theology, than any other instrumentality whatever. There is a power in hymns which never dies. Easily learned in the days of childhood and of youth; often repeated; seldom, if ever forgotten; they abide with us, a most precious heritage amid all the changes of our earthly life.[20]

Dickinson's challenges to theology and to notions of community as defined by religious culture can therefore be seen through her engagement with hymn culture, which directly underpins and reflects both theology and community. In the same way that the Puritan's conscience might be seen as being powerfully effective because

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[19] A.P. Hitchcock, 'Hymns and Hymn-Tinkers,' in *The Atlantic Monthly* 46:3 (1882) 336-346. (p. 345.)
[20] Rev. Robert Baynes, ed., *Lyra Anglicana: Hymns and Sacred Songs* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1867) p. 6.

each person becomes, with an internalised self-censure, to use Foucault's phrase, a 'judge of normality,'[21] so too does the hymn reflect such versions of 'normality.'

Defining the Hymn: 'Acid test Questions' and Naming the Divine

The division between lyric poetry and hymns is somewhat debatable and Dickinson's use of the hymnic common metre plays with the boundaries of such distinctions and their correlative assumptions, both of lyric poetry as being secular, produced in inspired isolation and of hymns as representing both a cohesive community (as Baynes describes 'Christ's mystical body') and of shaping theology. By using a form of traditional Christian devotion as a form of dissent, Dickinson's relation to hymns can be seen as producing an alternative form of devotion, an alternative mystical spirituality which is produced dialogically alongside Christian theology and negotiates alternatives to the 'I-Thou' model of relation in traditional hymn address.[22] An alternative mode of relation is signalled in Dickinson's poems through imagery connected with flight. As Chapters Five and Six will demonstrate with reference to bee imagery, her poems convey an alternative version of community through tropes of diverse and multiple relation and interconnectedness. Moreover, her use of language is relational, as lines such as

> The Drop that wrestles in the Sea –
> Forgets her own locality
> As I, in Thee - (Fr 255)

exemplify. The speaker in this poem voices concern over the potential loss of individuality and freedom, of losing a sense of self and being absorbed by an other, a comparatively greater person, ('Thee'), be it a lover, friend or God. However, rather than simply deconstructing the mechanism of relation which connects 'drop' and

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[21] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) (London: Penguin, 1986) p. 304.

[22] As discussed in detail in the following chapter, this hierarchical model for prayer, also a central feature of hymns, is considered in Daphne Hampson's book in terms of its inadequacy for feminist relations to/versions of the divine. See *Theology and Feminism*, p. 169.

'ocean', the poem reproduces relation and interconnectedness, and ultimately an alternative vision of community, by the consideration of 'locality' the poem promotes. The urge to redefine self through myths of difference and hierarchies subsumes in the poem into an ultimate reconsideration of 'locality' and how that locality ('Drop') might operate in relation to vastness ('Ocean'). In this way, the poem considers the hierarchical model of address ('As I, in Thee'), from the speaker to God, common in hymns. The poem exemplifies the possibilities of heterologous space, where difference might not be lost, but exist productively within, and be necessary to, a wider body.

A good example of the fluidity between poetry and hymns is given in the introduction to Tom Ingram and Douglas Newton's anthology *Hymns as Poetry* (1956). The editors begin by asking themselves the two 'acid test' questions when considering a poem or hymn for inclusion in their collection: 'Does this express any kind of relationship between the worshipper and God?' and 'Was this hymn ever sung, or was it at least written for singing?'[23] The first question appears to be rather straightforward, and the editors do not feel it necessary to give examples. However, as in the case of many women hymn writers, the ways in which 'God,' or the relationship between 'God' and the speaker, is depicted or encoded often differs radically from, or is at least more complex than, the model of ideal reciprocity projected in more 'traditional' hymns. The depiction of the relationship between speaker and God in hymns is crucial to Dickinson's use of the form as a form of dissent. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, hymns by women were often modified by editors of hymnals, or the authors were asked to modify them themselves, in order to make them more suitable for the 'rationale' of the collection.[24]

Ingram and Douglas explain that answers to the second 'acid test' question are less easy to provide, conceding that there are so many cases where hymns were written but never sung, and where poems which were not written with the hymn-book in mind were adapted and permanently enshrined within the genre. They concede, moreover, that the apparent 'intention' of the writer (whether the work was intended as a hymn or not) becomes the somewhat haphazard ruling principle for

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[23] Tom Ingram, and Douglas Newton, eds., *Hymns as Poetry* (London: Constable, 1956) p. 1.

[24] John Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* cites many examples of hymns written by women that were altered, usually by the hymnist, in order to be included in particular hymnals. As in the case of Phoebe Hinsdale Brown (p. 185.)

classification.[25] Dickinson's poems hold culturally received or known ('sacred') and unknown ('heretical') versions of God in tension with each other. As will be illustrated further on, the verse form tugs thoughts about the divine generated within the poem in opposite directions and works to destabilise received notions of Protestant, Christian faith while elevating the experiential and 'heretical' and deflating the supposedly sacred and transcendent; all of which has the effect of creating a mystical aspect to her verse. In this way, and if what we mean by 'hymns' is re-examined and challenged, then Dickinson's verse can be read as hymns, not because they are poems intended for singing (traditional hymns), but because they enact what hymns are supposed to do; that is, express a relation to the divine. Moreover, the metaphors of relation which give shape to Dickinson's poetics invoke the symbolic values of the hymn, such as community and relation, more so than other devotional verse. Indeed, the dialogism at work in Dickinson's scrutiny of religious culture as exemplified by her use of the hymn genre, has led to a number of varying interpretations of her relation to Christian faith. Although not used as hymns, many of Dickinson's poems have been put to music and are sung.[26] Roger Lundin's recently revised biography, which takes Dickinson's experience of faith as its focus, maintains that Dickinson did in fact create 'her own body of hymns.' The fact that these hymns ranged in tone from what Lundin sees as 'devastating irony and sincere devotion' does not affect his classification.[27] The inclusion of Dickinson's poems in collections such as Donald Davie's *New Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (1981)[28] indicates both the narrow gap between Dickinson's poems and more traditional Christian verse, and also the wide definition applied by 'modern' editors who perceive Christian faith as incorporating not only moments of doubt, but also explicit challenges to institutionalised and specified versions of the divine, and regard such challenges as being an integral part of the religious experience.

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[25]Ingram and Newton, p. 2. Examples of prolific writers whose complete volume of work was never sung include Mrs. Alexander and Fanny Crosby as well as Watts and Wesley. John Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827) is given as a key example of poetry being sung and functioning as hymns.

[26] A major collection and early example of Dickinson's poetry set to music is Aaron Copland's *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson, Set to Music. Voice and Piano.* (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1951). In addition many individual poems have been put to music, such as Wim de Ruiter's 1983 setting of poem Fr1742, which became known as 'In Winter, In My Room.' See Jonnie Guerra, 'Dickinson Adaptations in the Arts and the Theatre,' in Gudrun Grabher, and others, eds., *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 385-407.

[27] Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief*, p. 146.

[28]Donald Davie, ed., *New Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) This collection includes eighteen poems by Dickinson and eleven hymns by Isaac Watts.

In contrast, feminist critics such as Camille Paglia and Adrienne Rich view Dickinson as a solitary woman and a decadent late Romantic. Paglia and Rich wish to counter the marketable image of Dickinson as the benign nature-poet with ruffles and curls, depicted by the altered daguerreotype which became the public image of the poet in 1924.[29] Paglia's essay 'Amherst's Madame de Sade' (1990) pictures Dickinson's work as the 'womb tomb of decadent closure,' arguing that 'Blake and Spenser are her allies in helping pagan Coleridge defeat Protestant Wordsworth.'[30] Rich's 'vesuvian' view of Dickinson is one which observes a similarly explosive power. However, Rich positions Dickinson's depictions of violence upon the self as a dominating poetic force, often depicted as masculine in her poetry because culturally poetic power is ascribed to men.[31] It may be surprising, then, to want to align Dickinson, the energetic, anarchic and 'heretical' poet, with a traditionally sacred (and therefore also implicitly patriarchally determined) genre, whose structures and formulations she does indeed go at length to bend and parody. Nevertheless, the increasingly feminised hymn culture of the nineteenth century provides a lens through which to contextualise the tensions implicit in issues of identity and spirituality which organised religion exploits, such as those between individuality and community, or pleasure and industry which are continually brought to the fore in Dickinson's work.

Categorising Dickinson's poems as hymns should not in theory relegate them to a decidedly lower order of poetry, yet the pressures placed upon poetic expression from the legacy of Romanticism perhaps contributed to the force of the division between hymnody and lyrical expression that operated in the nineteenth century.[32] The masculinist criteria and precedent which was set for individualised lyrical expression during the Romantic period, and which gendered nature as feminine,

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[29] The only daguerreotype of Dickinson dating from 1847 was used in 1924 to create a more sentimental image with a ruffle and curls, and included in Martha Dickinson Bianchi's *The Life and Letters.* See Judith Farr, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) p. 75.

[30] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nerfertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) p. 624. Adrienne Rich's essay, 'Vesuvius at Home,' provides a similarly explosive view of Dickinson, see Adrienne Rich, 'Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson,' (1975) in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose,* 2nd edn, ed. by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: Norton, 1993) pp. 177-195.

[31] Adrienne Rich, 'Vesuvius at Home', p. 187.

[32] See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and their Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) Homans argues that the legacy of Romanticism, which gendered nature as feminine and perceived poetic creativity through masculinist criteria created obstacles for women writers of the nineteenth century. Wordsworth's 'feminization of nature' (p. 13.) is given much consideration in this context.

perhaps also fuelled a desire to move away from the communal aspect of the hymn. As Melnyk (2006) argues of the Romantic tradition;

> The focus was on the originality of the vision and the individuality of the author, an individualism that could border on solipsism. But if Romantic lyrics were the poetry of individuality, hymns were the poetry of community.[33]

The 'communal' aspect of hymns became synonymous with 'commonplace,' and the tendency to position them as a lesser form of poetry can be seen in Tennyson's remark upon the 'difficulty' of hymn writing:

> A good hymn is the most difficult thing in the world to write – you have to be both commonplace and poetical.[34]

However, 'commonplace' also implies the idea of communal orthodoxy which is implicit in group hymn-singing and increasingly, then, the realm of hymnody became an 'acceptable' arena of expression for women in the eyes of society in general and the role of the hymnist, together with that of educationalist, became one which women frequently adopted to enable their writing.[35] As will be discussed further in Chapter Four in relation to the work of Phoebe Brown and Eliza Lee Follen, the 'cult of domesticity' which served to idealise women's position (and status as 'moral centre') within the home leant itself to this acceptability of hymn writing by women. It is because the acceptability of the hymn rests on this domestic basis that Dickinson's use of the hymn form is in the first instance, ironic, but is also a direct challenge to the central premises of, and assumptions surrounding, hymn culture.

Separate Spheres: Women's Hymns/Warring Hymns

Despite the concept of congregational hymns being an ideal discourse space in which a person's relation to the divine can be articulated without an intermediary, or

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[33] Julie Melnyk, *Christianity, Community and Subjectivity in Victorian Women's Hymns* (Forthcoming) p. 149.
[34] Mark Bryant, ed., *Literary Hymns: An Anthology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999) p. 16. Bryant quotes Tennyson in the Preface to the anthology.
[35] See J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) p. 430.

intervening formal restrictions (hence the notion of their 'levelling effect') the pressures of gender division are perhaps made most visible in the hymn. In her 1892 anthology, *Lady Hymn Writers*, Mrs. E. R. Pitman claims that:

> [...] God's singers have come from all ranks and conditions of life, as well as from all branches of the Church militant. Some have worn queenly crowns, others have toiled for a daily living [...]. Yet in one and all we can trace a family likeness. A congregation may sing at one and the same service hymns from Mrs Adams, Charlotte Elliott, Frances Ridley Havergal and Adelaide Anne Procter, and never find anything in one hymn to clash with another, so true is it that in the region of hymns all doctrinal differences are forgotten.[36]

And:

> Somebody has well said "there is no heresy in hymns;" and we verily believe that there is more true Christian unity to be found in hymns than anywhere else. Matthew Arnold says: "The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry."
>
> (Pitman, *Lady Hymn Writers*, p. 64.)

Whilst the level of 'unity' in women's hymns can be seen as asserting a communal understanding of subjectivity based upon a connectedness and less masculinised version of the divine, Pitman's insistence upon their sameness not only elides class difference (using Arnold's views on religion and poetry to support her relegation of hymns to the 'unconscious' level) but it also reaffirms the association of women's hymns with the cult of domesticity ('Hymns have soothed the pulse of sorrow, have brightened darkest days', Pitman, *Lady Hymn Writers*, p. 15.) and emphasises their functional, rather than expressive, aspect.

Such a view of the hymn undermines the possibility for fluidity and self-reflexivity within the form, where women speakers may both adopt but also reflect upon the version of self experienced within the cult of domesticity, placing it within the tradition of self-narratives popular in Puritan culture.[37] Moreover, versions of self (and therefore also of the divine) which are counter to the dominant socially

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[36] E.R. Pitman, *Lady Hymn Writers* (London: T.Nelson and Sons, 1892) p. 19.

[37] For discussion of self-narratives within a Puritan redemptive framework, See C. Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self,' in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London: Routledge, 2000) ed. by T. Cosslett, C. Lury and P. Summerfield (Cited in Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) pp. 119-134.)

prescribed ones are equally present in women's hymns of the period. Dickinson's use of the hymn form both radically contests the 'redemptive' power of hymns, along with their implied participation of a communal spiritual engagement, and simultaneously, invokes a reconfigured notion of spiritual community and connectedness which accommodates the troublesome 'I'. In this way, hymnic space operates as heterologous within Dickinson's poems.

Dickinson's use of the hymn as a form of 'heresy' and dissent can be contextualised as being both a response to and also operating within the cult of domesticity, born from a 'separate spheres' ideology which posited home as an earthly heaven for women. Critics point out the ways in which Dickinson utilised the domestic space of the home to create her own 'workshop' of literary production.[38] Her evocations of 'home' in poetry, such as 'Some keep the Sabbath going to Church - / I keep it, staying at Home' (Fr 236) and 'I learned – at least – what Home could be - ' (Fr 891) are both ironical reflections upon the cult of domesticity and depictions of 'heavenly home' which appeared in domestic literature of the period. They are also, simultaneously, a defiant refusal of the practices and nature of church worship available to her. The separate spheres ideology which served to proliferate the 'cult of domesticity' is highlighted in Alexis de Tocqueville's observations in *Democracy in America* (1835-1840).[39] His views on the division between public and private spheres which involved also division between the sexes in nineteenth-century American society are perplexing because of their assurance:

> In America [...] care has been taken constantly to trace clearly distinct spheres of action for the two sexes [...]. You will never find American women in charge of the external relations of the family, managing a business, or interfering in politics; but they are also never obliged to undertake rough labourer's work or any task requiring hard physical exertion. No family is so poor that it makes an exception to this rule.
>
> (Tocqueville, vol 2., p. 601.)

Tocqueville's observations seem to take account of all classes, as the final statement about women not having to undertake 'hard physical exertion' above suggests,

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[38] Fr, p. 2. Franklin refers to Dickinson's method of self-publishing and dividing her poems into individual packets or fascicles as being akin to a 'workshop.'

[39] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835-40), 2 vols, ed. by J. P. Mayer (London: Fontana Press, 1994)

although in fact such comments simply deny the existence of the woman labourer. What is clear, however, is that the 'cult of domesticity' which is a production of the separate spheres ideology Tocqueville here espouses,[40] is well established as a much debated social paradigm for women's experiences. Not everyone agreed with such versions of domestic bliss: Susan Van Zanten Gallagher argues that many hymns written by women during the mid 1800s did much to challenge this 'cult of domesticity'. She posits that the increasing opportunity for women to engage in hymn writing during the nineteenth century gave them a way of being critical of the assumptions implicit in the 'cult of domesticity' which elide issues of class by taking it for granted that men enter the workforce whilst women remain in the 'heavenly' home. The many non-idealised descriptions of 'home' to be found in their hymns question the perception of women as the moral centre of the home, as prescribed in domestic literature and novels of the period.[41]

As will be discussed in Chapter Four, Protestant Evangelical hymnody supported, and was supported by, nineteenth-century gender ideology which stressed the division between public and private spheres, ensconcing middle-class women such as Dickinson within the domestic arena as the moral centre of family life. Women's hymn writing during the nineteenth century witnesses an increased participation in religious practices. During this time Britain continued to be a source of inspiration for American women who wished to participate in religious life.[42] The devotional mode of the hymn thus became a socially acceptable form of writing that women could actively pursue, without attracting the stigma that was frequently attached to women who desired publication of secular verse.[43] However, as mentioned briefly above (pp.

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[40] Susan Van Zanten Gallagher argues that this established phrase which represents the 'structure of norms' in the nineteenth century when loss of independence for middle class women led to them being instead the 'social repository of moral virtue,' relied upon the notion of gendered, separate spheres as described by Tocqueville. See 'Domesticity in American Hymns, 1820-1850,' in *'Sing them Over Again to Me:' Hymns and Hymnbooks in America* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2006) ed by Mark. A. Knoll and Edith L. Blumhoffer. pp. 235-252. (p. 235.)

[41] Ibid, p. 237. Gallagher cites images of toil in the home in hymns by Phoebe Hinsdale Brown and Charlotte Elliott as examples of such challenges, and provides examples in domestic literature, such as *Godey's Lady's Book, Lady's Home Journal, Good Housekeeping* and books such as Catherine Beecher's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) and Lydia Maria Child's *The Frugal Housewife* (1830).

[42] The influence of British women hymn writers was clear from the outset; the first important American hymnbook, Asahel Nettleton's *Village Hymns* (1824), significantly retained British writers such as Anne Steele alongside American counterparts, such as Phoebe Brown. See J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) p. 462.

[43] Edward Dickinson's anxieties about his daughter's desire to learn no doubt contributed to her ambivalence about publication. 'He buys me many Books – but begs me not to read them – because he fears they joggle the Mind. (to T. W. Higginson, 25 April 1862, SL, p. 267.) Despite her assertion that

49-52), the hymn is itself a dialogic form for women hymn writers as they develop ways in which to negotiate the performative power of the hymn with its traditional emphasis on linearity and phallogocentric movement upwards/towards a centre of God which is a simple reflection of the speaker's (usually masculine) desires.

Dickinson and Hymns: How and Why?

Dickinson's preferred metres were the Common Hymnic Metre and the Common Particular Metre. The Common Hymnic Metre has alternating lines of 8/6 syllables and the Common Particular Metre has syllable lines of 8/8/6 (so 4/3 metrical feet alternating in the Common Hymnic Metre or 4/4/3 metrical feet in the Common Particular Metre). However, although Dickinson is clearly guided by these forms, her metrics are rarely strictly regular. A good example is:

> A transport one cannot contain
> May yet, a transport be –
> Though God forbid it lift the lid,
> Unto it's Extasy!
>
> A Diagram – of Rapture!
> A sixpence at a show –
> With Holy Ghosts in Cages!
> The universe would go!
> (Fr 212, with ED's spelling and punctuation)

The first stanza of this poem, which conveys scepticism on the ability to 'contain' the divine, follows the common hymnic metre exactly with its alternating 4/3 metrical feet. However, in the second stanza the number of syllables per line differs to become 7/6. The irregularity of the metre encourages us to read the dash as a syllable, as we expect eight syllables until line three to this stanza confirms the seven syllable line. This achieves the dramatic effect of the reader having to linger longer over words such as 'diagram', thus positing an incredulity over its connection with the initial consideration of 'transport.' One cannot produce nor purchase a 'diagram' of the divine, though many preachers may try. The poem argues that the divine ('transport') cannot be contained or described, but does so within what is recognisably a hymn; a

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'publication is the auction of the mind' (Fr 788) Dickinson's preparation of poems into packets or 'fascicles' was a form of self-publication.

form which traditionally 'contains' expressions of one's relation to the divine with a simple, formal, and regular structure. Dickinson's poem, however, disrupts that regularity and simplicity in order to illustrate the impossibility of holding or containing the 'transport' which links the poet to the Divine. Paradoxically, then, the effect of Dickinson's conceptual and metrical deviations rely upon the structure they explode outwards from. Yet while they depend upon the genre's association with regularity and simplicity, they also re-shape the 'hymn' for the reader as something which includes variation and experimentation. In other words, Dickinson's 'atheisms' and 'irregularities' become part of a reformulated hymn, a version of praise which is her own. The hymn is reclaimed by Dickinson as an ideal, and heterologous space which accommodates difference. Her use of the hymn form can therefore be read as utopian, as presenting to the reader an example of the possibilities for what praise can look like.

Ingram and Newton have argued that hymns invoke the power of many in agreement about the shape and experience of God (usually in the form of the congregation or worshipping community) and that this power symbolically defines the hymn as a hymn: '[...] it has been the proof of long practice which has become decisive: the congregational voice has transmuted poem into hymn.' (Ingram and Newton, p. 2.) Their explanation of the process as 'decisive practice' is telling of the power of congregation and affirmation. It would appear then, that a poem becomes a hymn through the power of agreement on who or what God is, on what is 'Christian,' or a proper mode of expression of 'a speaker's relation to God.' Dickinson's poems interrogate this process by undoing the oppositional thinking which has allowed such inherently exclusionary processes to proliferate. Moreover, as will be illustrated in Chapter Four, hymns by women contemporary with Dickinson similarly express the 'shades' and 'holes' which cannot fit with (and therefore also represent moments of escape from) such formal structures.

Dickinson's use of the hymn common metre thus always implies a challenge to the notion that religious faith is something which is 'agreed,' simple and known. The hymn common metre works in her poems to undermine such definitions on matters spiritual by enhancing it out of all proportion, much in the same way as Dickinson conveys her observation of a preacher's sermon in the following poem;

He preached upon "Breadth" till it argued him narrow –

The Broad are too broad to define
And of "Truth" until it proclaimed him a Liar –
The Truth never flaunted a Sign –

Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence
As Gold the Pyrites would shun –
What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus
To meet so enabled a Man! (Fr 1266)

Although there are more syllables in this poem, both stressed and unstressed, than in the previous example above (here alternating lines of twelve and eight syllables) the 4-3/4-3 metre of this poem enhances the preacher's inability to convey 'simplicity' by drawing out the repetitive hollowness of 'broad' and 'truth,' highlighting also the inability of language to capture the essence of such an all-encompassing knowledge of the divine. In contrast, the poem also reaffirms the need for a relative 'simplicity' when approaching the divine, going so far as to reproduce linguistic as well as cognitive absences; spaces where the divine can't be expressed or known. The parallel formation of the first two lines of the second stanza convey that simplicity is paradoxically also the essence of authenticity which eludes the most confident preacher, the 'gold' which does not belong with 'counterfeit' goods; the rare qualities which make gold more desirable than the 'pyrite' (the yellow mineral with fools' gold as its non-technical name) are overlooked and 'shun[ned]', as the preacher here shuns the imaginative space to contemplate the divine, which simplicity allows. The invited pun on pyrite/pirate further conveys the absurdity that pirates would never shun gold and therefore the preacher shunning simplicity is equally as misplaced. The imaginative space that the preacher shuns in this poem is echoed frequently in poems such as 'I'm Nobody! Who are you?' (Fr 260) which assert not so much self-abnegation or denial of physical pleasure, as a denial of the societal status which such 'counterfeit' knowledge of the divine promotes. As will be shown throughout this thesis, Dickinson's style and thematics invoke so many elements of hymns, such as the experience of divine 'revery,' and the concern with the individual's position within a congregation/church/community, that the concern with hymns goes beyond an interest in the formal effects of using the hymn metre as a 'regular' metre which registers deviation and conflict.

Dickinson's use of the hymn is multi-faceted in that it functions as an implicit critique of both the domestic ideology which posits a sentimentalised/idealised

version of the home, with woman as the moral centre and close to the paternal God, and also the public/political rhetoric which proliferates a masculinised, militaristic version of God. It also connotes both an ideal space in which particular versions of the divine inscribed and enclosed within can be challenged, and an alternative mystical space in which Dickinson illustrates that the divine cannot be enclosed or defined, but always escapes.

> Over and over, like a Tune –
> The Recollection plays –
> Drums off the Phantom Battlements
> Coronets of Paradise –
>
> Snatches, from Baptized Generations –
> Cadences too grand
> But for the Justified Processions
> At the Lord's Right hand. (Fr 406)

In the above poem Dickinson describes the enduring power of the tune. Rendered in the hymnic common metre, each line alternating between tetrameter and trimeter, the poem enacts the highly effective connection between meaning and form. Reading the poem out aloud confirms that the hymn form being utilised serves to both display and perform the experience of recollection in hand and is itself the 'tune' which beats 'over and over.' Written in 1862 during the second period of the American Civil War, Dickinson's 'tune' calls into question the role of music in religion and war, but also queries the militaristic aspect of hymns which extol explicitly masculinised versions of the divine. The fragmentary 'snatches' and 'cadences' of the 'tune' are likened to and connected with the accoutrements of war and kingdoms ('drums,' 'coronets'), thus conveying the importance of music as an integral supportive, cohesive mechanism for both the 'Baptized Generations' and the 'Phantom Battlements' described in each stanza. Dickinson invokes the 'Grand' hymns often sung during battle or afterwards to honour the war dead as a way of 'justifying' the sacrifice of their lives in war for the greater, higher cause of God's divine purpose.[44] However, her use of the trimeter in the initial and alternating lines exploits these associations by reproducing an elegiac echo of those who fell in battle. Thus the poem

[44] For example, Julia Ward Howe's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' (1862) became an anthem for Union troops during the Civil War, see Janet Gray, ed., *She Wields a Pen: American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (London: J. M. Dent, 1997) p. 67.

plausibly reproduces the mode of a battle hymn honouring the war dead and the lives of those who have achieved their rightful and final resting place at the Lord's right hand as reward for dying in the line of duty.

However, the speaker's sense of separation is not measured against personal or envisaged human loss, but by her loss of (or impaired) hearing. The poem begins with the word 'Over' which echoes the speaker's despondency while also conveying a sense of distance and reverberation of sound. The repetition of 'over' with 'and' in between serves to slow the line down and stretch it out, so that the lingering and trailing quality of the tune/recollection is performed audibly. The 'Recollection' that the speaker in the poem describes but does not go far to explain might as easily be from early childhood as from an idealised pre-birth or resurrected, post-death, heavenly state. As a whole, the rhythm of the poem conveys a sense of the speaker's separation from the source of sound, and therefore also from the idealised state of either Christian resurrection or political, princely victory. Dickinson's 'loss of hearing' in this poem conveys both a lack of identification with the idea of Christian redemption and a critical awareness of the power of the hymn as a mode of public devotion frequently used for the purpose of social cohesion.

As with other Dickinson poems where the idea of Christian redemption or paradise is invoked, there is a palpable sense of separation and distance between poem and speaker because the version of the redemption offered is inadequate. Echoing the Calvinist doctrine of Election and Predestination, the 'tune' of Christian redemption is obscured from the speaker due to Calvinism's creed of the selection of the few and concomitant exclusion of the many.[45] The poem touches uneasily on this as the sacred tune indicative of heaven is relegated to the 'Baptized,' 'justified' few who are also at the 'Lord's Right hand.' Dickinson accentuates this separation by the sudden turn from the preceding trimeter of 'cadences too grand' to the tetrameter in the third line of the second stanza in which the word 'for' is emphasised and signals a shift between the speaker's access to the sacred 'tune' and the 'justified processions' of those who are already redeemed. Furthermore, the coherence of the tune identified in the first stanza is broken into lesser 'snatches', and then more formally into 'cadences too grand' in the second, and is finally subsumed into the dominant rhythm of the poem

[45] Predestination and Election are defined as: 'The Divine decree according to which certain persons are infallibly guided to eternal salvation. It is presupposed in the Gospels, e.g., Mt. 20:23, where Christ is reported as saying that sitting on His right and left is reserved 'for them for whom it hath been prepared of my Father.' *DCC*, p. 463.

itself, further accentuating the broken quality of the tune which has reached the speaker's world.

This poem was written at the peak of Dickinson's poetic career, during her most prolific period. In it she displays an acute awareness the power of its traditional form, normally reserved for Christian devotion, to convey both an original poetic voice and resistance against the forces of separation and exclusion perpetuated by religious orthodoxy. Dickinson's subtle and powerful manipulation of the hymn form is not derived solely from an understanding of the effects which metrical emphasis or de-emphasis has on meaning. Although the compactness of the genre lends itself to being a structural platform for Dickinson's metrical variations,[46] it is the associations of the hymn as a sacred form which promotes social cohesion that makes Dickinson's use of it so striking. By invoking the purposes and meanings implicit in the hymn as a devotional genre, as against her own experience of spirituality, Dickinson levels a series of challenges to the cohesive core of Protestant hymnody.

Although much can be gained from analysing Dickinson's prosody in terms of the pressure it places on the hymn's parameters, as other critics have done,[47] this study analyses Dickinson's engagement with the hymn symbolically; that is, in terms being an ideologically loaded genre and a traditionally sacred devotional space in which to articulate one's relation to the divine. Dickinson's association of traditional hymns with an oppressive Christian dogma is conveyed strongly in another poem which makes the use of 'tunes' explicit. This time a winter afternoon is compared with 'Cathedral Tunes':

> There's a certain Slant of light,
> Winter Afternoons-
> That oppresses, like the Heft
> Of Cathedral Tunes –
>
> Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
> We can find no scar,
> But internal difference,
> Where the meanings, are –

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[46] The topic of Dickinson's manipulation of hymnal metrics is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, in relation to the hymns of Isaac Watts.

[47] See for example, Christanne Miller, *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) and Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich.*

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death - (Fr 320)

Primarily, the poem attempts to trace the origin of feelings of despair, which appear to arrive, almost as a seasonal change 'from the air', like the change in light in winter. However, in likening winter light to a cathedral tune, the poem captures the oppressive weight ('heft') of religious dogma in Church practices. Although as a New England Congregationalist, Dickinson would not have attended cathedrals as a child, the scale of a cathedral organ rather than a country church organ or piano lends weight to the metaphor of oppressive religious orthodoxy and invokes simultaneously a Puritan's dissenting relation to an Episcopal mode of worship. The 'listening' landscape, like a church congregation, is altered ('internal difference') by the change in tone which winter brings, perhaps a change from the optimism of spring and birth, to the reminder of death and possible salvation or damnation that might be exacted thereafter. Although in reality the seasonal change is a natural, cyclical process, the transition from birth to death in Dickinson's portrayal of winter is conveyed with deliberate and horrifying linearity. Once death has arrived, the message the 'tune' appears to bring is that there can be no turning back; 'tis like the Distance/ On the look of Death.' The poem produces a dialogical tension between the finite, linear journey of mortality, the transition from this world to the next implied in the weight of 'Cathedral tunes', against the cyclical, endlessly regenerative reality of the changing seasons. One is mapped onto the other with momentarily horrifying consequences. The congregation, or nature, is temporarily stunned by the prospect of stasis instead of the natural, flowing energy. The 'slant' of light, like a blade that wounds, not only recalls Christ's suffering and crucifixion but also induces suffering in the speaker that is in turn produced by the scene before her. However, unlike the wound in Christ's side which provided material evidence of his resurrection to the disciples, the congregational 'we' whom the speaker speaks on behalf of, cannot find a corresponding wound. There is no evidence ('we can find no scar') to trace the

damage or 'hurt' which the reminder of death in the 'tune' of the dying season has inflicted.

Although the speaker maintains that 'none may teach' this apprehension of 'despair,' the fact that it is conveyed in terms of a Church ritual (it is the hymn tune which arrives through the 'air') implies a connection between religious dogma and the pain of human suffering. The light which arrives from above effects a change, and symbolises the moment of heavenly judgement upon which salvation or damnation rests. However, the poem concludes by returning to the cyclicality of the seasons, over what has been a temporary disruption. When the particular light-effect brought on by winter finally recedes, there is perhaps an opportunity for hope. The passing despair brought on by the light is, after all, only 'like' the distance on the look of death, not actually death itself. In this way, the poem illustrates how 'despair' becomes an effect of particular uses of religious dogma, such as Calvinist fear of judgement or damnation, as expressed in popular hymns like those of Watts. It also conveys Dickinson's poetic counter to this dogma, which makes evident the temporary and subordinate position Christian dogma and its 'tunes' occupies in relation to nature's ultimate indefatigability, and by implication also in relation to human feeling, which is intimately connected to nature's cycles.

Where 'Cathedral Tunes' in poem Fr 320 are associated with the weight of internalised despair, in Fr 891 the hymn is invoked as a part of the heavenly 'new fireside', the new 'Home' of relation and friendship:

> I learned – at least – what Home could be –
> How ignorant I had been
> Of pretty ways of Covenant –
> How awkward at the Hymn
>
> Round our new Fireside – but for this –
> This pattern - of the way –
> Whose Memory drowns me, like the Dip
> Of a Celestial Sea –
>
> What Mornings in our Garden – guessed –
> What Bees – for us – to hum –
> With only Birds to interrupt
> The Ripple of our Theme - (Fr 891)

The speaker associates the new rituals of friendship and love with those of traditional worship ('How awkward at the hymn') and describes a new mode of being ('This pattern – of the way -') in which experience is unfettered and 'rippling'. Such freedom is reflected and enacted (again, invoking hymn singing) in nature ('What Bees - for us - to hum -'). In contrast with poem Fr 320, the hymn is invoked in this poem to convey an alternative mode of relation which is, for the speaker, divine.

Dickinson's work challenges the parameters of the hymn, not only for demarcating social cohesion, but also the limits and boundaries within patriarchally conceived notions of the divine and of praise. Traditional distinctions between hymns and poetry are also predicated upon assumptions about the nature and form of religious worship and defining features of such worship, such as the articulation of faith in and praise towards God. However, the distinction between hymns and poetry is less clear than the proliferation and amount of study devoted to the study of hymns suggests. Since the eighteenth century, the distinction between hymns and the poetic and lyrical expression of religious lyrics has been increasingly less clear. Poetry, if it is executed in the hymn style with similar metre and themes, and is concerned with the negotiation and expression spirituality, cannot be entirely divorced from the realm of hymnody.

There are some, albeit few, poems in the Dickinson corpus which are not in the hymn common metre: there are early experiments with longer verse lines, such as Dickinson's 'Valentine' poem (forty lines in rhyming couplets), and later poems which tend towards the economic aphorism such as Fr1720 and 1727, which are only two lines long). Such poems show that Dickinson was clearly capable of writing in other verse formations, but her decision to use the hymn common metre predominantly suggests a level of engagement with that genre which inevitably includes, but also goes beyond, formal concerns such as metre. As established earlier with reference to a woman's place in the domestic sphere, hymns were associated with feminine submission to the (patriarchal and patriarchally conceived) divine and that association makes it a particularly attractive genre for Dickinson, whose poetry describes, recapitulates and re-inscribes versions of the divine through her own experience of it. By alluding to the hymn, a genre of worship, as she does in Fr 891 and also in Fr 320 with her reference to 'Cathedral Tunes', Dickinson is able to both interrogate and critique religious culture by enclosing and disguising personal

rebellion whilst also highlighting it, and providing trajectories for alternatives through such dialogism.

Hymns and Performativity

An important aspect of hymns[48] is the series of questions generated by their intended power to invoke unity and social cohesion that makes them highly performative. The act of writing a hymn invokes the participation of a shared community and anticipates listeners and those who would engage in singing together, despite whether or not the hymn is actually put to music and sung.[49] The ways in which a hymnic text asserts or elides conclusive statements about God takes also a position on hierarchical structures and the associated values upon which orthodox religion resides. Such values are encoded within the schema of the hymn form in various ways. Francis O'Gorman includes four Victorian hymns in his anthology of poetry and outlines in his annotation the 'qualities of a good hymn' which he argues should be:

> Consistent in theme, but not repetitive; progressive in the development of ideas (and moving towards a climax) but not confusingly rapid or overweighted with thought, and with a clear meaning to each line, even if enjambment is used (and, of course, absolutely metrical). [50]

In this sense, hymns in general, (and therefore also Dickinson's critical use of hymn structures and motifs) are performative. In a sense which is distinct from the standard use of 'performative', for example in relation to performing an oath, Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture is performative in the sense that it engages with the assumed stylistic expectations of a hymn, as outlined above, and ruptures them linguistically and conceptually, thus performing a correlative, performative disruption and renegotiation of a hymn's symbolic values. The extent to which they meet with expectations of what a 'good hymn' should be, as those outlined above, correlates

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[48] Other notable aspects, such as the use of typology in hymns, and their place in popular culture have been explored elsewhere. See George P. Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art and Thought* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) and David S. Reynolds, 'Emily Dickinson and Popular Culture' in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* ed. by Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 167-190.

[49] As discussed earlier, with Newton and Ingram's definitions, see above.

[50] Francis O'Gorman, ed., *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) p. 566.

with the degree of satisfaction both the writer and the listener/singer feel with the mode of devotion being expressed. A crucial aspect of Dickinson's use of the hymn is its ability, like the mystical text,[51] to make visible the moments of disagreement which the speaker in her poems often articulates, with the representation of relation to the divine which Protestant hymnody asserts through the 'development of ideas' 'moving towards a climax' and with the 'clear meaning' that they seek to convey. Thus Protestant hymnody can be described as 'linear,' and as possessing a unilateral movement from the speaker towards the divine, which is necessarily free from rupture, 'confusion,' or 'overweighted thought.' The performative aspect of hymns is important as it also relates to the ways in which the hymn writer regards their position, and worthiness of their hymn writing, as good work. As Chapter Three will discuss, Isaac Watts's regard for himself as a producer of praise, as a writer of hymns, is something which also enables him to take lyrical and sublime 'flight' which cannot be divorced, at times, from a dedication to poetic autonomy which is essentially counter to the Calvinist and Puritan requirement for simplicity and piety in art.[52]

A feature of hymns related to their performativity is that they are often perceived by their writers as a suitable form of labour; as the ultimate goal of the Evangelical hymnist is to spread the 'good news' of the gospels, of Christ's resurrection and the possibility of immortality through faith in and duty towards God. The hymn, more than any other genre, posits a self-reflexivity on the nature of articulation through writing because of the work ethic that Protestant Christianity in particular emphasises. The notion of industry is a central concern for Puritans, as epitomised by Watts's popular verse for children, 'How doth the busy bee,' which Dickinson's engagement with orthodox religion explores and frequently parodies.[53] A hymn writer's relation to the work she/he creates differs somewhat from that of secular poetry because of the moral expectations that the particular branch of religion the writer chooses to follow places upon the genre. For example, Unitarian hymnody seeks to emphasise the unified nature or essence of God, as opposed to the Trinitarian concept of three distinct but essentially linked aspects of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the hymn writer seeks to convey such a unity in both the scene she/he describes

[51] The praxis of mystical discourse in discussed in the following chapter, and in relation to Michel de Certeau's definitions.
[52] Chapter Three discusses Watts's writerly self and self-reflexive mode.
[53] Dickinson's relation to the mode of morally defensible 'industry' as depicted in Watts's verse 'Against Idleness and Mischief,' commonly known by its first line 'How doth the busy bee,' is discussed in depth in Chapters Five and Six.

and the attitude towards the self that they convey.[54] The hymn form simultaneously has expectations placed upon it through its usage within established Conformist or Anglican practice. The relative simplicity of the hymn common metre conveys the assumption of praise to a Christian God, but Dickinson's use of it invokes these expectations and assumptions only to rupture and radically reconfigure them.

Recent scholarship in Dickinson studies which aims to locate Dickinson's work within and in relation to nineteenth-century literary and popular culture inevitably attends to the forms of Protestant hymnody that are present in her work and the modes which make it performative. Critics such as Jay Ladin and Christine Ross see the hymn form as one of many, but not the primary influence on Dickinson's poetic style.[55] In order to connect Dickinson's mode with that of American twentieth-century modernist writers, Jay Ladin utilises Bakhtin's terms 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' to describe Dickinson's dialogic voice, and the ways in which her poems use and fuse both modes of discourse which either recapitulate or resist socially formulated hierarchies, producing what Ladin describes as a 'centrifugally weighted balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces' within the poems.[56]

Bakhtin's terms are useful here as they describe a movement away from the centre outwards (centrifugal) and a driving force towards the centre (centripetal) that can be applied to the 'I-Thou' model of address in traditional hymnody. Bakhtin writes:

> Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).[57]

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[54] Unitarianism became a popular 'secular' religion in the nineteenth century, that is, a Protestant sect which appeared as a comparatively 'secular' alongside the conventions of Evangelical Protestantism for example because of the rejection of the Trinity and emphasis on the pervasive, uni-personality of God to be found, for example, in nature. The work of Eliza Lee Follen, the popular Unitarian hymn writer, will be examined in Chapter Four.

[55] Christine Ross, 'Uncommon Measures: Emily Dickinson's Subversive Prosody', *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 10:1 (2001) 70-98.

[56] Jay Ladin, "So Anthracite to Live:' Emily Dickinson and American Literary History', *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 13:1 (2004) 19-50. (p. 28.) Ladin cites Bakhtin's terms which are related to the discourse of the novel in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) pp. 272-273.

[57] *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) p. 272.

He then goes on to describe the 'contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language'. (Bakhtin, p. 272.) The dual and competing forces of Dickinson's poetics can be seen, as Ladin has shown, in relation to the structure of hymnody. Ladin agrees with David Reynolds that the pattern and structure of English hymnody provides Dickinson (as it did other women poets) with a method to contain disparate elements of her many literary influences.[58] Ladin argues that Dickinson's poems incorporate centripetal aspects derived from the prosody of Protestant hymnody, because of the association of them with thought and feeling moving towards a reachable, and easily accessible 'centre' of God. Movement towards reaching the centre of God and of defining the divine can be seen as a centripetal or 'unitary' force; however, the drive to see and reach the divine and achieve spiritual transcendence in the act of singing hymns can be described as a centrifugal movement extending away from the self towards the divine, which is usually described as being 'above' the self. However, Dickinson's poems animate both forces, and collapse the traditional 'I-Thou' distinction by using the hymn as a mode of expression which articulates the divine in the self as much as in relation, allowing the possibility for space and dialogic movement between centripetal and centrifugal modes. Moreover, by restoring the centrifugal aspect of hymn address and forging a multiple and diverse relation which is connoted by flight imagery and non-static metaphors, instead of replicating the linear movement upwards to a fixed God-head, Dickinson's poems highlight further the absence or space which is left when the centripetal impulses of patriarchal hymnody and orthodox religion's relation to God the Father fail. The desire to reach a centre of God often leads to a u-turn, a turning outwards and away from the self that leads to the quality of incompleteness or rupture which is often found in traditional church hymns.

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, even Watts's boldly devotional hymns include instances where such a movement is problematised by the speaker's limiting, human and temporal position in relation to God's timelessness, as evidenced in hymns such as 'Sight through a glass, and face to face,' in which Watts employs Pauline imagery to describe his separation from God. Watts bemoans the 'interposing days'

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[58] David S. Reynolds, 'Emily Dickinson and Popular Culture,' p. 189. Reynolds concludes his analysis of the influence of popular culture evident in Dickinson's poems, such as temperance literature, by writing; 'She appropriated the iambic rhythms and simple verse patterns of English hymnody, which had been famously utilized in the Isaac Watts hymns she knew from childhood, as controlling devices to lend structure and resonance to these disparate themes.'

which mean that he has to tolerate 'a glass between' him and God. (*HSS*, II, 145: 502)[59] In this way, even Watts's hymns incorporate a description of travelling along a path that is primarily only *ideally* centripetal, held in place by the speaker's faith in a centrifugal movement from the self towards God. Crucially, perceiving God as a fixed point to get to, rather than as present and dispersed within and without each tangential dimension, including those of the self, is a central concern in representations of the divine and theological interpretation. Such models describe the way in which Dickinson's poems negotiate hymn space to perform the movement of diverse and multiple relation which moves simultaneously both outwards towards the divine and inwards towards the divine, thus dissolving the 'I-Thou' model of address. Her admission that 'when I try to organize – my little Force explodes –and leaves me bare and charred -'(To T. W. Higginson, August 1862, SL, p. 178.) suggests that her poetic force fed upon the destruction of such methods of organisation.

The structure and premise of hymns, in that they articulate the speaker's relation to the divine, the created towards the Creator, serves to collapse both categories, as the speaker's relation to the 'centre' is always suspended, always in process, as opposed one movement either away from it or towards it. In this way, whilst Bakhtin's terms are useful for describing movement in Dickinson's linguistic modes and assimilation of cultural influences, however, another model needs to be invoked in order to describe the mode of the hymn, which is, contrary to Ladin's claim, also, both centripetal and centrifugal, and therefore also is Dickinson's relation to it. The following chapter assesses alternatives to the 'I-Thou' model of relation in hymnody and considers Certeau's notion of heterologies as one such alternative.

Dickinson's interpretation of the imagery and form of hymnody does not present itself as being an easy option. Moreover, Dickinson makes a difficult choice to connect expression of spiritual experience with the modes of religious orthodoxy, more difficult than for established male poets such as Bryant or Longfellow, for whom the separate-spheres ideology would not influence interpretation of their hymns as being the exemplification of ideal domesticity and Christian morality. As nineteenth-century commentators on hymns such as Mrs. Pitman illustrate, the hymn is something that is often associated with ideas of social cohesion, allowing for the

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[59] Isaac Watts, *The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts* (Philedelphia: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997) p. 502. From *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707-1709), book II, Hymn 145. Hereafter abbreviated to '*HSS*' followed by hymn and page number as appears in the cited 1997 collection of Watts, '*PH*'.

articulation of spiritual praise across social division.[60] Dickinson's engagement with the popular form of hymnody, and the precedent for heterodoxy within the terms of conventional Dissent and the creative autonomy set by Watts, articulates a voice which is not only or merely 'heretical' in the context of its response to evangelical Protestantism, but is also one which is stimulated by hope as much as it is by religious doubt. The heterologous, performative space of the hymn form is something which paradoxically allows hope to be enacted, repeated and perpetuated. That is to say, in Dickinson's critical engagement with orthodox religion we can see the expression of a struggle for a sense of 'unity' and community that could not be ascertained without a series of problematic collisions.

Dickinson famously remarked that her 'business' was 'circumference;' 'Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that – My Business is Circumference - '. (To T. W. Higginson, July 1862, SL, p. 176.) In a similar way to the modes of writing or speaking about the divine to be found in mystical discourse (which will be discussed in the following chapter) the effort to describe a pattern as opposed to defining what that pattern might contain or explain to the reader is perhaps prescriptive for understanding Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture. Dickinson's poetry shares with mystical discourse a reluctance to define or rely upon a locus or centre when articulating spiritual experience. Moreover, although a subversion of and challenge to the modes and assumptions of evangelical Protestantism is produced in Dickinson's hymn-like poems, so also is a new form of devotion: a dedication ('Business') to highlighting interconnections within, and the relation between, self and world ('Circumference') through the medium of poetry. For Dickinson, poetic expression and spiritual experience are symbiotic.

The ability to inscribe the divine in language is something that occupies a large area in feminist theology, philosophy and literary criticism. Feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva draw upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of subject formation in relation to the symbolic order where language is paramount and inherently a patriarchal construct which confines and restricts a woman's relation to the divine, as she has not undergone the same subject formation as a male, in order to identify a feminine 'jouissance' or Other or 'abject'

[60] See E. R. Pitman, *The Lady Hymn Writers*, p. 19, as cited earlier, p. 40.

(linguistic ruptures) which the symbolic order cannot accommodate.[61] In the following chapter, the work of Luce Irigaray and Michel de Certeau will be discussed in relation to the articulation of spirituality as community expressed in feminist theology. Although Certeau's work is not explicitly 'feminist',[62] the works of both Irigaray and Certeau to be examined in the following chapter share a concern with mysticism that is rooted in issues of specificity and practicality. This will provide a theoretical framework to read against the representations of spirituality in Dickinson's poetry and her relation to the hymn form as a dominant structure whose 'mirror' is fractured, and also re-envisioned, not as a single, unified reflection, but as a mosaic with multiple refractions all held in relation to each by the mirror itself. In other words, the theoretical writings of Irigaray and Certeau, which draw on psychoanalytic models of subject formation and of 'the other' in different ways, present an alternative to the mirror of false representation of the symbolic which can also be seen in Dickinson's re-visioning of the hymn and assertion of spiritual experience.

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[61] See Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women,' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 57-88, Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/ Forays', and Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', both in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds., *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1997) pp. 91-103 and pp. 201-216.

[62] However, Certeau associates 'feminine discourse' with the mystical in his concept of 'heterologies', which is the practice of voicing the other; 'it is still a theology (a discourse of the male, of the unique, of the same: a henology) that excludes the mystical (an altered feminine discourse: a heterology).' *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, p. 165.

Chapter Two

Theorising Hymnic Space: Language, Subjectivity and Re-Visioning the Divine

Why – do they shut me out of Heaven?
Did I sing – too loud?
But – I can say a little "minor"
Timid as a Bird! (Fr 268)

The previous chapter provided an outline of the tradition of hymnody and indicated the opportunity for seeing the frequent protests in Dickinson's work as defiant opposition to such a tradition. Traditional hymnody has been appropriated to privilege and recapitulate patriarchal and hierarchical versions of the divine and to promote ideas of 'social cohesion' that reflect such structuring. The explicit challenge and protest exemplified in the stanza above is pointedly positioned by Dickinson within the context of singing, in relation to one's entrance to 'Heaven', where the speaker's comparatively 'minor' voice and role, as one 'shut out' from both the dominant discourses and social organisation of spirituality, can be registered and described with technical precision. Although Dickinson's technical disruption of traditional hymn metrics is a marker of her engagement with such a tradition (as will be considered fully in the following chapter in relation to the critical reception of Dickinson's use of Wattsian hymnody) the level of Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture can be seen as extending beyond this in important ways. In order to assess the gravity and complexity of Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture, an understanding of the way in which Dickinson uses the hymn as a dynamic space, in a manner that offers comparisons with a mystic's relation to language and form, is instructive. As established in the introduction, Dickinson's use of hymnic space is something that both alludes to the modes of traditional hymnody but also generates space in which the divine can be re-imagined.[1]

This chapter works towards a consideration of Michel de Certeau's writing on 'Mystic Speech', via feminist conceptions of the divine in theology and Luce Irigaray's writing on belief and the female divine, to formulate a theoretical basis for hymnic space, which will be referred to and used throughout this thesis in relation to the expression of and connection between spirituality and writing in Dickinson's work. Certeau and Iriagray are used because of their relationship with absence, something that is primarily connected to the qualities that their writing shares with

[1] See reading of Fr 483 in Introduction, pp. 14-19.

mystical discourse.[2] Tracing Irigaray's ideas of the female divine (viewing Irigaray's writing itself to a certain extent as a mystical discourse) through to Certeau's writing on mystical discourse, this chapter will explore the formulation of a theory for hymnic space which is akin to the mystic's ability to use language in a way which both conveys experience of the divine and yet simultaneously does not impose limits upon or confine the divine through such methods of expression. Mystical discourse is used in this chapter and referred to throughout the thesis with a particular emphasis on its ability to make absences visible. However, before describing the linguistic and literary aspects of expressing the divine in these two writers, this chapter will first consider the hierarchical nature of hymn address and then consider the ideas of community in feminist theology to establish the alternatives to patriarchally conceived notions of the divine in theology, and identify points of contact between these and ideas of relation in Dickinson's vast performative body of 'alternative hymns.'[3]

The Act of Naming: Hierarchies in Hymn Address

Graham Ward (2005) describes the hymn as being 'a response to the reception of what is given,' and identifies this process, which he sees as being at work in the hymn, as being ultimately an 'act of naming:'

> One of the main shifts within the hymn is from the language of form (morphe and schema) to the act of naming. The act of naming is made to participate in the form of revelation – for the name revealed, and then confessed, is God's own name, Lord. Furthermore, its concern with representation and human consciousness is worked out in terms of a poetic performance. [...] In other words, the hymn re-presents. It is not separated as an act from the action it tells. It is a poetic enactment reflecting upon three enfolded forms of representation – the divine representation of God in Christ, the exemplary nature and vicarious representation of Christ's self-giving for the Philippians, and the act of naming and speaking as a response to the reception of what is given. The hymn is characterised by a self-reflexive meditation upon the theological,

[2] Both writers have origins in philosophy and psychoanalysis and frequently display a mystical style of writing which lends itself to inter-disciplinarity. Ward describes Certeau's 'oeuvre' as 'a continual [...] journeying from one [...] academic discipline to another, crossing, recrossing and confusing disciplinary boundaries.' *The Certeau Reader* ed. by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) p. 2.

[3] I paraphrase Valentine Cunningham's estimation of Dickinson as an 'alternative hymn writer' as discussed in the Introduction, p. 8.

> ethical and linguistic imitation – salvation, the appropriate behaviour of those being saved and language. The kenotic economy turns, then, upon [...] words associated with mimesis [...].[4]

The notion of the hymn as being both an 'act of naming' God, and also as a response to what 'is given' has crucial implications when accounting for the different versions of the speaker-God relation depicted in hymns, especially those written by women. By Ward's definition, a hymn is characterised by a 'self-reflexive meditation,' which supposes that the version of self being reflexive is traceable and known, just as God must be traceable and known within the traditional hymn. However, if the hymn is a reflection, a 'poetic performance', then there is also, to a certain extent, always a sublimation, or masking, of experience of the divine at work in the hymn as well. A palatable version of experience of the divine is reproduced within the hymn with the point of being (and in terms to be) understood by others. If a recognisable term such as 'Lord' or 'God' is reproduced by the 'act of naming,' then the point of the hymn has been achieved. Indeed, the act of naming God appears to be the point of the expression of the hymn, and the self-reflexivity, the process by which such a conclusion, such a version of God, is reproduced within it is often subsumed by this act of naming in traditional hymnody. Therefore, if the point of the hymn is not for the comprehension and vicarious experience of others to reaffirm a shared faith (i.e. a congregation or community of worshippers) then the hymn, by this definition, would be unintelligible and ultimately pointless. The fact that the hymn is perceived as being mimetic, and mirror-like, and as a traditionally sacred genre with an implied revelatory authorial intention which cannot be challenged is inextricably bound to the power of language and 'act of naming' which it preserves.

The 'I-Thou' model of address[5] in traditional hymnody is something that connotes a relation that is linear and teleological, invoking vertical (and it is hoped reciprocal) movement between the speaker and God. As in this example from Watts:

> My God, my life, my love!
> To thee, to thee I call;
> I cannot live if thou remove,
> For thou art all in all. (HSS, II, 93:469.)

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[4] Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) p. 185.

[5] As will be discussed on pp. 65-70, this hierarchical model for prayer is considered by Daphne Hampson in terms of its inadequacy for feminist relations to/versions of the divine.

Although the sentiment is that God is everywhere and is 'all in all', the relation of 'I-Thou' which the speaker repeats serves not to demonstrate the 'all in all' but only the nature of the relation being described. With Ward's notion of the hymn involving mimesis in mind, the hymn therefore acts as the mirror of representation that reflects both particular versions of the divine and assertion of subjectivity which are both inherently exclusionary. One cited definition of the hymn is that it displays 'clear meaning' that should be both 'progressive', 'consistent' and result in a 'climax'.[6] Although Dickinson was not aligned to a particular religious group and we would therefore not expect her poems to divulge 'clear meaning' about the divine, her use of the hymn form and imagery of flight common in hymnody suggests an attachment to the communal aspect of the devotional mode but her poetics reinscribe an alternative version of the divine which goes against the teleological elements of the hymn as the one cited above.

As the following chapters will explore, although the 'I-Thou' address in traditional hymnody is one version of relation, Dickinson's poetics of flight and bee imagery serve to carve out an alternative, multiple and multivalent relationality through poetics which are anti-teleological and open. While some traditional hymns are relational in the sense that they invoke community and communal 'I', or 'we', the emphasis on diverse relationality as opposed to a linear, teleological relation negotiates the dual 'I-Thou' and shifts emphasis away from phallocentric versions of the divine. In this way, Dickinson's use of hymn metre signals identification with a particular group and traditional forms of worship and also establishes her separation from them. She refuses to offer a 'legitimate' self and uses the style of the hymn and associated imagery to highlight her deviation from Non-Conformist and Evangelical churches and also the extent to which her re-visioned metaphors of transcendence differ from that of traditional hymnody. Dickinson draws on notions of childhood correction, morality and development to register her comparative 'disobedience' and also her own separation from depictions of the recuperative self. She refuses to 'tell' her own devotion directly ('Tell all the truth but tell it slant' Fr 1263) because the terms which are on offer muzzle and constrain – instead, she produces the unexpected, appropriating the forms/terms which aim to legitimise her, thus evading genuine opportunity for such legitimisation to occur. Perhaps one of the reasons

[6] Francis O'Gorman, ed., *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, p. 566. O'Gorman's definition of a hymn, as cited in the previous chapter, p. 51.

Dickinson's work perplexes many critics who aim to classify it is because her resistance to such classification was and is political. The speaker in Dickinson's hymnic poems plays with the pointers of a legitimised self whilst using them at the same time to register defiance and deviance. Such pointers range from the frequent use of the hymn common metre to construct a 'legitimate' frame around her poetics which signals a 'traditional' devotional mode whilst also highlighting the deviations from what would be expected in a traditional hymn; the use of particular imagery traditionally associated with religious devotion and spiritual transcendence (and especially 'angelic', pious females) such as wings and associated imagery of flight ('Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice -/ I, just wear my Wings - ' Fr 236); and also the use of bee imagery (also signalling non-static flight) which both conveys the notion of 'justification' for work/writing which the hymn requires, as it invokes the model for the Protestant work ethic ('His labour is a Chant-/ His Idleness - a Tune - ' Fr 979) and also serves, simultaneously, as a trope for the radical alternative spiritual flight of her own 'erring' poetics ('Fame is a Bee' Fr 1788).[7] In this way, her alternative 'hymns' enact a worship and praise that is born out of the rebellion which they articulate, against the normative orthodoxy of her religious, literary and political culture.

'Traditional' hymns (a label, which as established in Chapter One, is used here to refer largely to the work of 'canonical' hymnists, such as Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley) have been both conceived of and appropriated by their various authors and hymnal editors to mould theology and to colonise the devotional space of the hymn with assumptions about linearity and fixity with regard to the speaker-God relation.[8] This has affected the ways in which many hymns, including those written by women, have been read as reasserting ideas of a specific type of social cohesion that supports a God-Man-Woman hierarchical model. As will be discussed in the following chapter, most critical examinations of the influence of Watts's hymns on Dickinson's verse focus upon the extent to which Watts's metre presents a 'regularity' to be subverted.[9] Such a 'regularity' of metre correlates also with the apparent transparency and clarity (and therefore also a linearity of argument and fixity in perception of the divine) of

[7] 'Erring' is Mark C. Taylor's term for discourse which navigates linearity and opposition in language, thus producing an alternative discourse akin to mystical writing which voices the 'other.' See Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) (pp. 8-9.)

[8] See previous chapter, pp. 27-34 for discussion of this process of appropriation.

[9] See for example, Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*, pp. 138-139. Martin identifies a 'rigid regularity' and 'pious certainty' in Watts's hymns.

the depiction of spiritual 'truths' in Watts's hymns. For example, Shira Wolosky's 1988 study on the place and function of rhetoric and biblical tropes in Dickinson's poetry presents the argument that Dickinson 'makes explicit' the problematic relation between figuration and Christian truth in Watts's hymns. In other words, the supposed clarity in Watts's depiction of biblical events and figures to convey spiritual truth is undermined by Dickinson's use of similar conventions, phrases and idioms that do not convey a similar effect.[10]

Graham Ward's definition of the hymn as a genre that involves 'poetic performance' and the notion of mimesis (Ward, *Christ and Culture*, p. 185.) is crucial in understanding Dickinson's use of the form. The writings of Certeau and Irigaray to be examined in this chapter highlight the performative aspect of mystical discourse and writing the 'other' which can be compared with Dickinson's engagement with the hymn, invoking community and multiple relation through non-static metaphors of flight. The communicable and received knowledge (or the 'response to the reception of what is given' as Ward describes in *Christ and Culture*, p. 185.) apparent in traditional hymnody, such as in the example of Watts's hymns in the following chapter, provides Dickinson with a structure to highlight the discontinuities and absences juxtaposed by her own experiences. Dickinson's poetic meditations on the divine are frequently connected with gaps and absences ('Can the Dumb - define the Divine? / The definition of Melody – is - / That definition is none - ' Fr 849) and in this sense her poetic strategies are akin to the non-saying of the divine in mystical discourse. However, despite the non-saying and 'gaps' the poetry reproduces, it also produces challenges to religious orthodoxy and performs resistance within language through engagement with hymn culture and the associated modes and form of expression on the divine. In challenging the vertical linearity of hymns, Dickinson's poems make a significant 'act' within language, performing subjectivity, and thus inscribing her own version of the divine. Reading Dickinson as a subversive hymn writer brings into sharp focus the importance of writing as an act that is performative. The assumption of addressing and communicating with the divine that the hymn form contains, and which Ward's definition describes, presents a particularly strong case for its performativity and for viewing it as 'poetic performance'. (Ward, *Christ and*

[10] Shira Wolosky, 'Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts,' pp. 214-232 in *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 61, June, 1998. p. 216 Wolosky lists several examples of phrases from Watts alongside similar formulations used by Dickinson, which have the effect of undermining the cognitive ease and depiction of 'truth' in Watts's use of particular images.

Culture, p. 185.) By using the hymn form, Dickinson 'act[s] in language'[11] and both engages with a past discourse and registers the effects of the present upon it, producing a fecund site for an immanence of her own, and for the expression of her own version of the divine in poetry.

Feminist Theology: Re-visioning the Divine through Relation

The implications of the hierarchical model of relation of 'I-Thou', which is common in prayer and a central feature of traditional hymnody, is also a focus in much feminist theology. Re-visioning the definition of a hymn inevitably involves a radical reconsideration of its central defining quality, that is, the depiction of the speaker's relation to God through the 'I-Thou' address. Hymns by women are of particular interest in this respect, as the depiction of God is negotiated around the associations of gender and the limiting binaries proliferated by orthodox religion that serve to reinscribe hierarchical structuring.[12] Much of recent feminist theology's search for an alternative to a patriarchal, phallogocentric version of the divine has led to discussions of alternative metaphors and symbols for the divine which invoke the qualities of relation and community. Some feminist theologians rely upon theological symbolism, whilst others attempt to develop their own metaphors. Such developments in feminist theology provide an important example of an engagement with religious forms and symbolism, and the need for an alternative to those of an established religious tradition, whether theologically based or otherwise. 'Liberation theologian' Sharon Welch, argues for:

> [...] a search for alternative symbols and structures of religious life that might effectively challenge oppressive manifestations of faith (symbols, rituals, polity, doctrines) and that might meet, in less oppressive ways, some of the needs being met by the problematic religious discourse. The truth of such theological construction is not

[11] As will be discussed on p. 75, Sabine Sielke's term for the 'intertextual networking' she identifies in Dickinson, Moore and Rich. See Sabine Sielke, *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore and Rich* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) (p. 228.)

[12] For an example of the binary oppositions inherent in language and proliferated within Christian theology, see Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, pp. 8-9.

> measured by its 'coherence' or 'adequacy' but by its efficacy in enhancing a particular process of liberation.[13]

Welch finds her own appropriate metaphor in 'beloved community', that site of relational inter-subjective power which does not depend upon an externalised 'God':

> An appropriate symbol for the process of celebrating life, enduring limits, and resisting injustice is not the kingdom of God; it is the beloved community. The kingdom of God implies conquest, control, and final victory over the elements of nature as well as over the structures of injustice. The 'beloved community' names the matrix within which life is celebrated, love is worshipped, and partial victories over injustice lay the groundwork for further acts of criticism and courageous defiance.
>
> (Welch, pp. 160-161.)

Welch's symbol, or metaphor of the beloved community is problematic in that it stands for both the dissolution of, and transcendence of, social boundaries including those constructed around gender and class, but also for the resting with what she calls the 'conflicts of social life and the limitations of nature' that 'cannot be controlled or transcended.'(Welch, p. 159.) Such a model seems to reconstruct conflict as much as it attempts to renegotiate it.[14] Mary Daly and Daphne Hampson similarly set out to describe possible alternatives to a patriarchally conceived God that are not based upon the 'transcendent monotheism of an all-powerful God'[15] as promulgated within the western Christian tradition.[16] Hampson argues that such a version of God is incompatible with feminism and feminist theology, as it reinscribes 'a certain social paradigm and a particular understanding of the human being' (Hampson, p. 151.) which is inherently hierarchical and patriarchal. Although the Christian God can be perceived in ways other than all-powerful and transcendent, such as within the imagery of the Trinity and the Incarnation, she argues that these are also incompatible with feminism, proliferating hierarchical models (Father-Son) of social ordering, and also self-abnegation, or *kenosis*, which she argues:

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[13] Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethics of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) p. 158.

[14] For further discussion on Welch, see Grace Janzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) pp. 218-226. Janzen's main criticism of Welch is her concern with 'truth' and the problematic notion of 'relative truth' as opposed to the effects of a religious symbolic. (p. 223.)

[15] Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) p. 155.

[16] See also Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.*

> [...] does not build what might be said to be specifically feminist values into our understanding of God. Such feminist themes as that for example of mutual empowerment of persons would seem to be absent from the Symbolism of Christian theology.
>
> (Hampson, p. 155.)

The notion of a post-Christian 'mutual empowerment of persons' which is compatible to feminist theology is compelling, and is something which Hampson's writing makes conceivable toward the end of the book by moving through two sub-headings, 'The Shape of God,' and 'Perceptivity,' in which the importance of prayer and the referential quality of the word 'God' are considered. The potential of and possibilities for reconceptualising the anthropomorphic/dialogic 'I-Thou' model for prayer, which Hampson argues is dominant in the West, is considered by Hampson, to the point where God and self become indistinguishable:

> Nor should one limit the possibility of prayer to a situation conceived as dialogue between an I and a thou. As one's intellectual understanding of what the word God connotes changes, so too may one's practice. It may well become more natural (perhaps building on sensibilities which were earlier present in one's prayer but not dominant) to speak of resting in God. One may think of oneself as being open and present to what one conceives to be a greater reality than one's self, knowing oneself as loved and upheld. I should not now want to speak of worship of God, which has hierarchical connotations. I tend not to think of God as 'thou.' But I should have no difficulty in saying, with Julian of Norwich, of God, that God is one 'in whom my soul standeth.' Furthermore I am - as a feminist interested in coming into my own – excited by the possibility of taking up the daring words which Catherine of Sienna is reputed to have uttered: 'My real me is God.'
>
> (Hampson, p. 169.)

The 'I-thou' model which Hampson refers to in prayer is made visible in the hymn, and it is this linear dialogue which can be seen as re-shaped in Dickinson's poems which refer to, make use of, the hymn form as a genre which is traditionally designated as a space for worship. Crucially, it is the absences and gaps created by the 'I-thou' model[17] which mystical discourse makes visible. Furthermore, the collapsing

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[17] Hampson draws upon the 'I-Thou' model considered in Martin Buber's (1878-1965) *I and Thou* (*Ich Und Du*) (1937). Buber's notion of the 'I-Thou' relation as 'I' relating to others as another 'I', that subjectivity is relational, is compelling but also problematic for feminist theoretical approaches to language and the negotiation of binaries. Buber's terms for encounters with the divine reinscribe the 'I-Thou' model which Hampson views as unhelpful: 'There is no I as such but only the I of the basic

of the 'I-thou' model in prayer which Hampson conveys, ('My real me is God') bears affinities with the ideal 'herself-God,' and achievement of subjectivity that Luce Irigaray has described. Hampson describes herself as 'religious, but not a Christian.' (Hampson, p. 172.) Such feminist 'religiosity' takes the form of being perceptive of God through experience, which is not thought through patriarchal models or Christian 'myths':

> Women have thought their thoughts within the context of a patriarchal society, dominated by patriarchal religion. What I think we can say is that some of the thought forms which have developed, not least within feminism, in recent years, may be peculiarly suited to expressing what we mean by God. Thus a realisation of relationality and of connectedness may well allow us the better to conceive how it is that prayer for another is effective.
>
> (Hampson, p. 173.)

Hampson projects 'relationality,' 'connectedness' and the effectiveness of prayer as qualities of her own version of spirituality which is 'religion,' but not Christianity.

Further alternatives to the 'I-Thou' model have been put forward by other feminist theologians such as Elisabeth Johnson, who builds upon theological symbolism. Johnson explores 'female metaphors' for describing the divine by utilising a triune model that is based ultimately upon Christian Trinitarian doctrine to underscore a vision of the divine rooted in relation and mutuality. She writes:

> When language about the triune God in female metaphor is spoken from an explicitly feminist theological stance, it becomes clear that central aspects of classical Trinitarian doctrine are strongly compatible with insights prized by this perspective. As the sustaining ground and ultimate reference point for the human and natural world, the Trinitarian symbol for God may function in at least three beneficial ways. The God who is thrice personal signifies that the very essence of God is to be in relation, and thus relatedness rather than the solitary ego is the heart of all reality. Furthermore, this symbol indicates that the particular kind of relatedness than which nothing greater can be conceived is not one of hierarchy involving domination/subordination, but rather one of genuine

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word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It.' *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1970) p. 54. Although Buber's notion of the divine as experienced through relation and reciprocal address is important, this study focuses on the hierarchies generated by the 'I-Thou' model in hymns and its effects on Dickinson's poetry.

> mutuality in which there is radical equality while distinctions are respected.[18]

Such emphasis on relationality and a tripartite model of the divine serves to counter the teleological narratives of the Protestant view of God and Christianity which have been used to promote the 'solitary ego' of individualism and capitalist notions of industry.[19] Although Dickinson cannot be aligned with a particular traditional theology and practice, her poetics frequently build upon a principle of indivisibility that Johnson's triune female metaphor of the divine demonstrates.[20]

Grace Janzen's investigation of Christian theology and concern with the 'natality'[21] further belies the desire in feminist criticism and feminist theology to develop an imaginary, a form and mode of expression for the female divine, an 'embodied situatedness', which is practically applicable and resonant within the symbolic order. (Janzen, p. 218.) As Dickinson's poetry exemplifies, to develop alternatives within the symbolic order, to work creatively with language is required if such an 'embodied situatedness' is to be exacted. Although the models of community and relationality to come out of recent feminist theology's critique of the religious symbolic are important and instructive for establishing an alternative view of the divine that has theological grounding, the 'mystical' writing of Irigaray and Certeau offer insights into the linguistic and literary construction of subjectivity, and its connection with the Other/divine. And it is the connection between subjectivity, language and the divine that Dickinson's hymnic poems highlight and perform, thus projecting an 'embodied situatedness' within writing. Rather than thinking about 'perceptivity' or 'experience' in an abstract way, writing such as that of Irigaray and Certeau describes/performs ways in which language can potentially negotiate space for the other within the symbolic. Moreover, mysticism is understood in this chapter and throughout the thesis as being connected with and necessarily dependent upon an

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[18] Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse*, tenth anniversary edition (1992; New York: Herder and Herder, 2003) p. 216.

[19] The protestant work ethic will be discussed in relation to Dickison's bee imagery in Chapters Five and Six. For further background on the connection between Protestant theology and western capitalism, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930; London: Routledge, 2004)

[20] This quality of Dickinson's poetics will be developed fully in Chapter Six with the examination of 'revery' in ED's use of bee imagery.

[21] Janzen names the feminist symbolic 'natality' (birth) which is also a form of action, and argues that a 'feminist symbolic whose source and criteria are found in women's lives starts from the ethical, indeed from acting for love of the world'. Grace M. Janzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, p. 236.

'embodied situatedness', and as inextricably connected with language and subjectivity.

Mystical Discourse as Praxis

Janzen is keen to clarify the usefulness of mystical discourse in relation to social justice:

> Feminists have every reason, both historical and current, to be suspicious of an understanding of mysticism which allows that women may be mystics, but which makes mysticism a private and ineffable psychological occurrence and which detaches it from the considerations of social justice.[22]

The shape that mystical discourse takes cannot be separated from issues surrounding the development of subjectivity. As will be discussed further on, Certeau's notion of 'heterologies' describes a place for the 'embodied situatedness' appealed for by feminist critics such as Janzen. Daphne Hampson admits that theology predicated upon experience is difficult to convey to others, and that 'experience at second hand is easy to dismiss.'(Hampson, p. 170.) However, Dickinson's poems do not simply re-present experience or perceptivity, but rather, akin to Certeau's notion of heterologies, they reproduce a space in which thought on 'the other' is made possible, and in which the other is endlessly animated. Dickinson's hymn-poems enact a 'relationality' and 'connectedness' through invoking the participation of the reader and also the experience of relation, thus producing a reconfiguration of the hymn-as-prayer which manages to negotiate the 'I-thou' model of worship in a religion which is patriarchally conceived and asks to be 'named.' In other words, the 'the act of naming and speaking as a response to the reception of what is given' which Ward's definition of the hymn invokes[23] is avoided in Dickinson's alternative 'schema' for the divine ('And make much blunder, if at last/ I take the clue divine - ' Fr 1107).

Definitions of mysticism often emphasise the practice of going beyond what is 'normally' perceived in an understanding of the world and reality, suggesting an

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[22] Grace Janzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 326.

[23] For discussion of Ward's definition of the hymn, see above. Also Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture*, p. 185.

individualised and exclusive mode of aspiration or spirituality.[24] Yet, for many mystics, Dickinson among them, the world is itself a source of divine immanence. In many of her poems the speaker's relation to the natural world is evocative of divine immanence described in mystical writings. British novelist, poet and writer on mysticism, Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), provides examples of poems which are explicit about mysticism and the speaker's immanent relation to the world. Her poem 'Immanence' (1912) describes the mystical significance of the natural world, in which attention is paid to 'the little things,' the practice of everyday life:

> I come in the little things,
> Saith the Lord:
> Not borne on morning wings
> Of majesty, but I have set My Feet
> Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat
> That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod.
> There I do dwell, in weakness and in power:
> Not broken or divided, saith our God!
> [...]
> I come in the little things,
> Saith the Lord:
> Yea! on the glancing wings
> Of eager birds, the softly pattering feet
> Of furred and gentle beasts, I come to meet
> Your hard and wayward heart.
>
> (from *Immanence: A Book of Verses*)[25]

In Underhill's poem the ways and nature of God are described in a series of repetitions ('I come in the little things'). Repetition is a key technique of mystical writing, and can be seen in the writings of a broad range of writers whose work shares some or all of the features of mystical discourse, from Teresa de Avila, to Kathleen Raine.[26] Such a technique or 'system' seems to be at odds with the diffusive nature of the 'Godhead' in mystical writing as described in this poem, as it suggests a method

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[24] For example, *Collins English Dictionary*, 'Mysticism: 1. Belief in or experience of a reality surpassing normal human understanding or experience, esp. a reality perceived as essential to the nature of life. 2. A system of contemplative prayer and spirituality aimed at achieving direct intuitive experience of the divine.'

[25] 'Immanence' an excerpt quoted in; Brenda Blanch, ed., *Heaven A Dance: An Evelyn Underhill Anthology* (London: SPCK, 1992) pp. 7-8. Taken from the complete poem 'Immanence' in Underhill, Evelyn, *Immanence: A Book of Verses* (London: J. M. Dent, 1912)

[26] Although not categorised as a mystical writer, Kathleen Raine's poems often display the qualities of repetition and articulation of a mystical immanence through relation to the world. See, for example the poems 'Amo Ergo Sum' and 'Night Sky' pp. 62-69 in Couzyn, Jeni, ed., *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Women Poets: Eleven British Writers* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1998)

or structure towards reaching something which ultimately eludes definitive definitions. Rather than focussing on the 'essence' of the divine as a specific entity, as the 'I-Thou' model of prayer invokes, the emphasis on the 'little things' in this poem exemplifies the way in which the mystical and immanent is multiple and multivalent, and yet paradoxically, remaining 'not broken or divided.' Essence in this poem is in the very multiplicity and timelessness it conveys, as all action is rendered in being-in-action, in the moment ('glancing') and not confined to reaching an ultimate telos. The 'appointed hour' for love is always the present. Linguistic depictions of the divine in mystical discourse merely convey paths and trajectories for the divine, and avoid descriptions which privilege essence, fixity or linearity with implied 'goals.'

Dickinson's use of repetition (such as her repeated use of bee imagery as discussed in Chapters Five and Six) and the multivalency her economical use of language and the hymn form allows bears affinities with the methods employed by mystical writing such as that explicated in Underhill's poem. There is in this poem, as in Dickinson's poems, an emphasis upon partial sight ('glancing wings') as opposed to a clearly visible, singular and fixed vision and version of the divine. The partial sight and avoidance of full disclosure of the divine in Dickinson's poems (to be discussed in the following chapter) is akin to the non-fixity and instability of authenticity within language which the writings of Irigaray and Certeau both display.

However, in not privileging fixity, essence or linearity when describing the mystical trajectory of the 'other'/God, mystical discourse is inherently anti-hierarchical. This anti-hierarchical aspect is reinforced by another feature of mystical discourse, that is, the tendency for self-abnegation and naturally assuming the lowest position. In Underhill's poem, the speaker's dedication to self-abnegation and the lowest place ('The furrowed sod' and 'My starry wings I do forsake') echoes Christ's teachings about self-sacrifice in the New Testament. And yet the tendency towards a personalised version of God, or the dualistic, hierarchical relation between speaker and 'Other' found in traditional protestant hymns is circumnavigated. This aspect of mystical discourse and the implied individualistic approach opens up a dichotomy between the individual and the extension outwards of self to perceive the divine in relation, which (as described in feminist theology)[27] is inherent within the reality of the world including other human beings. Mystical discourse is both derived from and

[27] The emphasis on relation and community considered by theologians as discussed earlier.

centred upon the individual but is also connected, through immanent relation and the production of absences and an open space, to the rest of the world. Mystical discourse allows the space between the self and the Other to rest, suspended, creating a dynamic dialogism between what is sayable and unsayable, between shared, communicable experience and individual experience. Mystical discourse is useful for analysing Dickinson's use of the hymn because the relation between self and the Other is analogous to that between structure and agency which the hymn form invokes. In this way, Dickinson's structure of repeated imagery within the traditionally devotional space of the hymn, can be seen as heterologous[28] and as a form of action which endlessly enacts the alternative versions and experience of the divine, the absences made visible within such structure and poetics.

The history and nature of mystical discourse is a large area which cannot be presented in detail in this thesis,[29] and whilst connections between Dickinson's mode of writing and that described by Michel de Certeau and the mode of writing the female divine 'other' in the work of Luce Irigaray are both to be discussed in this chapter, the focus here is not to prove Dickinson as a mystic, but to demonstrate parallels between her mode of expression as against the assumptions surrounding the expression of experience of spirituality in traditional hymnody. Some aspects of her life, namely, the reclusive discipline with which she adopted the role of poet, have been likened to those of women mystics,[30] however, her writing does not follow the clearly delineated, identifiable set of 'stages' or elements of those associated with mystical discourse, so much as it bears affinities with the style and praxis of mystical discourse.

Divining The Other: Luce Irigaray

Although writing through (but also within) the terms of psychoanalytic theory which analyses subject formation in terms of gender and opposition and thus recapitulating a

[28] The term 'heterologous' is used by Michel de Certeau in 'Mystic Speech' to describe the individual's relation within community and will be examined later in this chapter.

[29] For further discussion on mystics and mystical discourse, see Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics of the Church* (1925) (London: James Clarke, 1975) and *Practical Mysticism* (1914) (London: Eagle, 1991).

[30] See for example; Gerda Lerna, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) pp. 181-182. Lerna links Dickinson's rejection of 'normal life' with women mystics such as Hildegard Von Bingen, Mechthilld of Magdeburg, Christine Ebner, Julian of Norwich and most directly with Isotta Nogarola, who chose to live only with her mother.

version of the 'I-Thou' hierarchical relation, Luce Irigaray's writing on belief and on the female divine provide useful examples of how the 'I-Thou' model of relation might be alternatively envisioned. She writes:

> Religion marks the place of the absolute *for us*, its path, the hope of its fulfilment. All too often that fulfilment has been postponed or transferred to some transcendental time and place. It has not been interpreted as the infinite that resides within us and among us, the god in us, the Other for us, becoming with and in us – as yet manifest only through his creation (the Father), present in his form (the son), mediator between the two (spirit). Here the capital letter designates the horizon of fulfilment of a gender, not a transcendent entity that exists outside becoming.[31]

Postmodernist and Post-Structuralist accounts of language serve to highlight its ultimate instability in relating definitive meaning. The implications this has for religion has generated much debate within feminist theology and feminist literary criticism, and also within literary criticism more generally.[32] Although the work of Michel de Certeau and Luce Irigaray connects them in some ways with the Post-Structuralist view of language and therefore also the Postmodernist tradition, their consideration of the ways in which 'the other' may be accommodated within society and within language respectively conveys ways of thinking which are rooted in specific practices. Dickinson's engagement with the imagery and form of hymnody is one such practice which allows 'the other' to come to the fore in ways that are similar to the methods described in the writings of Irigaray and Certeau. The relation between subjectivity and the divine is something which psychoanalytic and feminist theories of language highlight in their use of Freudian subject-formation models which explain female subjectivity as ultimately predicated upon lack and absence, and exclusion from the defining power of the phallus. Such theories are instructive in discussion of the hymn as it is a traditionally sacred form of writing on the divine, concerning both language and subjectivity within a traditionally phallogocentric discourse, and so it shares ground with Lacanian school theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' Cixous uses the term 'phallogocentrism' in her discussion of the type of language that proliferates binary oppositions that, in her

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[31] Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women,' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 57-88. (p. 63.)

[32] See Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, eds., *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992)

view, oppress women and men in its repression of multiplicity, indefiniteness, and ultimately feminine 'jouissance.'[33]

Psychoanalytic and feminist theories of language have been utilised by a few Dickinson critics in order to account for the ways in which her work negotiates symbolic ordering to achieve subjectivity.[34] Sabine Sielke utilises the work of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous in her study of female subjectivity which discusses the 'intertextual networking' of Dickinson alongside the poetry of both Marianne Moore and Adrienne Rich. Sielke argues that such 'networking' can be seen in the act of writing, which includes techniques such as mimicry and camouflage, which negotiate female space through past and present discourses, and 'perform' female subjectivity:

> [...] I want to conclude by redefining (female) subjectivity with Dickinson, Moore, Rich, Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous as a process that is never coherent and historically continuous but, rather, negotiates between deconstructive and (re) constructive modes as well as between past and present discourses. [...] Female subjectivity thus is a matter of intertextual networking, in and across time, performed not by language itself but by those who – both consciously and unconsciously – act in language and keep doing so in the future.[35]

Sielke reads Dickinson alongside other women writers who 'act in language', and as a poet who 'recognises subjectivity and history as constructs and rhetorical strategies' and 'appropriates dominant cultural rhetoric to invest it with new meaning'. (Sielke, p 17.) Although Sielke ultimately underestimates the call to inter-subjectivity in Dickinson's work by declaring that she 'dismissed history and transcendence for the temporality of writing,' (Sielke, p. 217.) such a position places emphasis on the specific cultures in which such subjectivities are constructed and can be transferred to an understanding of Dickinson's engagement with the hymn form. By using the hymn form and imagery associated with religion and moral correctness during the Civil War period (such as the bee, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six) Dickinson pointedly

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[33] See, Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981) pp. 245-264.

[34] For example, Helen Shoobridge, ' "Reverence for each Other being Sweet Aim:" Dickinson Face to face with the Masculine', *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 9:1 (2000) 87-111. Shoobridge uses Irigaray's *Ethics of Sexual Difference* to highlight the repositioning of the subject/ 'other' relation in Dickinson's 'Master' letters, thus renegotiating the sexual binaries associated with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

[35] Sabine Sielke, *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore and Rich* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) p. 228.

engages with the use of theology for political ends. In this way, Dickinson's poems demarcate a space between past and present discourse in the subject of the divine or 'other.' They also generate activity within this space by producing something new. For example, in poem Fr 979 (as discussed in detail in Chapter Six) Dickinson draws upon imagery associated with the Book of Revelations to confer onto the image of the bee an association with the Puritan, wearing a 'helmet' and a breastplate, defending faith in battle. By doing this she utilises past discourses on the divine (biblical text and also Puritan interpretations of scripture to defend war) whilst also connecting with it her own, present thoughts on the example of the divine in nature (as the bee connotes to some the idea of perfect community) and also its position within 'current', nineteenth-century uses of rhetoric on the Protestant work ethic, as the poem considers the bee's experience of producing in both states of 'labour' *and* during 'idleness':

> His Labour is a Chant –
> His Idleness - a Tune –
> Oh, for a Bee's experience
> Of Clovers, and of Noon! (Fr 979)

Rather than simply presenting Dickinson 'acts within language' (Sielke, p. 228.) to reposition discourse on the divine, and the poetic language created is itself endlessly active. The reader is left to consider the bee's 'experience' as described in the poem, the state of being-in-relation (such as that of the bee within its community) where pleasure and industry are both equally productive and equally valued. This alternative mode of relation to the world that Dickinson's poems trace remains a possibility to be considered, an inkling of the divine-in-action and the divine through multiple relation that her use of bee imagery makes visible without the dogmatic proclamation of presenting a version of the divine. Dickinson's poetics convey a mysticism as praxis which can also be seen in Irigaray's project of producing metaphors to describe the female divine which enact 'becoming space'.[36]

However, Sielke's use of Irigaray does not seem to extend beyond the notions of mimicry and camouflage as female subversion within symbolic order. Moreover,

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[36] Irigaray uses the term 'becoming space' to describe the formation of female subjectivity and the simultaneous realisation of the female divine in action. See Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women,' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 57-88. (p. 65.)

her reading of Dickinson alongside the work of Adrienne Rich serves to highlight what she calls a 'blind-spot' in feminist literary theory, that is, 'a sense of the position of the female subject as an agent of history.'(Sielke, p. 16.) Sielke argues for a new kind of investigation which might uncover the 'practice' of the poetry of Dickinson and Rich, the 'shape and temporality' of a female tradition, as opposed to their rhetorical refusals of patriarchal heritage.

Jan Montefiore's reading of Dickinson in view of Irigaray's notion of a female discourse is instructive, as she highlights the problem of locating the many guises she adopts in her poems within a theory of female identity:

> Dickinson's poems, then, are remarkably difficult to assimilate into a theory of female identity articulating itself through the writing of an Imaginary relationship between an 'I' and 'Thou', which could constitute a textual 'space' for specifically female meaning. They are too ambiguous and contradictory to be read as purely woman-centred texts. Dickinson uses such a variety of voices and positions to speak from that though she excels in poems which create an identity through reflection and opposition to a beloved, these seem characterized less by transcendence of gender than by irony, evasion and ambiguity. They are unsatisfactory if considered as poetic rendering of an Irigarayan female Imaginary: the only way in which Dickinson obviously conforms to Irigaray's account of female discourse being her indeterminable meanings and her contradictoriness.[37]

The 'contradictory' and 'ambiguous' nature of Dickinson's poetics are difficult to reconcile with a version of female identity, such as Irigaray's, which is predicated upon an 'I-Thou' model (which is also in this case the split between the female self and mother) because the poetics do not adhere to fixed and oppositional notions of gender. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, Dickinson's bee imagery is a trope for the suspension of multiple possibilities and therefore also the ultimate collapse of the 'I-Thou' model of relation which is constructed as oppositional in traditional hymn address. Whilst the commitment to 'contradictoriness' we find in Dickinson's poems allows for recognition of Irigarayan female discourse as Montefiore observes, the dissent against (patriarchal) orthodox religion through engagement with hymn culture in her work makes it possible to

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[37] Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*, 3rd edn (1987; London: Pandora, 2004) pp. 177-178.

move beyond Irigaray's terms for an understanding of Dickinson's poetics as a 'practice.' As will be discussed in a moment, in relation to Certeau's notion of heterologies, Dickinson's radical use of tropes associated with traditional hymnody serves to delimit an ideal (heterologous) space in which the other is articulated by highlighting the absences and experiences which traditional religious narratives and the implied hierarchical version of the divine can not accommodate. The persistent wrestling with contradictions that Dickinson's poetics inscribe bears affinities with alternative models for oppositional patriarchal versions of the divine as considered by feminist theologians, such as 'relation' and 'community' as described above.

However, Irigaray's positive and mystical turn on the notion of female lack or 'absence' as constructed through Freudian models of gender opposition, and the metaphors she uses to convey this in her writing about writing are useful for an understanding of the shape of the 'practice' and 'temporality'[38] of Dickinson's writing as they bear similarities with the motifs which evidence Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture.

Much of Luce Irigaray's work argues that female subjectivity is dependent upon articulating *jouissance*, (the effusive response to connection with 'the other'), which she sees as being connected with the divine and the key to women's 'becoming'. Utilising Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (itself derived from Freudian models), she forges a positive model by associating *jouissance* (that which the symbolic order cannot contain and which is associated with the feminine) in various descriptions with the divine. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) she argues that the ideal state for woman is to be 'herself-God,' that is, the ideal where woman is;

> no longer cut in two opposing directions of sheer elevation to the sky and sheer fall into the depths. I know, now, that both height and depth spawn – and split – each other in(de)finitely. And that the one is in the other, and the other in me, matters little since it is in me that they are created in rapture. [39]

The description of the 'two opposing directions' between 'sky' and 'depths' is evocative of the linearity of 'traditional' hymns, where the speaker-God relation as a

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[38] Sabine Sielke, *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore and Rich*, p. 16.

[39] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) pp. 200-201.

vertical movement is clearly defined and made visible, through metaphors of sight, transcendence and vision, within the hymn. Rather than utilising metaphors of transcendence which repeat the vertical reciprocity of 'I-Thou' and reconstruct exclusion and hierarchy, the metaphors of spiritual flight used by Dickinson and also other contemporary women hymnists (as discussed in Chapters Four, and in relation to bee imagery, Five and Six) connote instead a more diverse and inclusive relationality and signal the transcendence of hierarchical models of the divine.

However, despite utilising what is ultimately another version of the 'I-Thou' model, in which separation and lack are presupposed as a starting point for the expression of the female divine other, the metaphors Irigaray uses to connote spiritual flight are useful for reading alongside Dickinson's flight imagery as they demonstrate how divine space might be articulated. Such imagery, which Irigaray employs in the essays 'Belief Itself,' and 'Divine Women' will now be explored briefly in relation to the projection of an alternative 'horizon' for the female divine. In 'Divine Women' she describes the importance for women to have their own 'becoming space' (p. 65.) in which a version of a divine which is not conceived of phallocentrically can exist and provide women with a horizon, a mode of being, of their own. She describes ways in which the connection between subjectivity and the divine might manifest itself purposefully, asserting that;

> [...] as long as woman lacks a divine made in her own image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own.
> (Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 63.)

She utilises the framework of psychoanalytic theory, of a woman's problematic relation to the symbolic order, and describes woman's situation of being both of the womb and also defined culturally as emptiness or relatively 'empty' space in relation to the subject, the phallus that she lacks. Seeking to promote an alternative to the 'horizon of fulfilment of a gender' ('Divine Women', p. 63.) in traditional (male-centred) religious discourse, she imagines woman's gestational process in terms of a transformation from water to air; the watery origin of the womb where woman was once like a fish, and the space where woman outside of the womb can be like a bird, where the 'womb' of the air envelopes woman, thus describing this divine becoming

as occurring within an 'airy space,' where the 'mirror' of representation[40] can be countered:

> Though it may at times help us to emerge, to move out of the water, the mirror blocks our energies, freezes us in our tracks, clips our wings. What protects me from the other and allows me to move toward him or her is more often the settling of a space, an enclave of air rather than the interposition of mirrors and glasses whose cutting edge all too often threatens to turn against me. Once we have left the *waters* of the womb, we have to construct a space for ourselves in the *air* for the rest of our time on earth – air in which we can breathe and sing freely, in which we can perform and move at will. Once we were fishes. It seems that we are destined to become birds. None of this is possible unless the air opens up freely to our movements.
>
> To construct and inhabit our airy space is essential. It is the space of bodily autonomy, of free breath, free speech and song, of performing on the stage of life.
>
> (Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 66.)

Irigaray's notion of 'airy space' is crucial for this study's understanding of Dickinson's use of hymnic space as it demonstrates the possibility for utilising, or reclaiming, the notion of 'emptiness,' which has been associated with gender through the psychoanalytic womb-as-lack model. Dickinson's use of the hymn as a space in which to articulate her version of divine relation can be seen as a radical transformation of the hymn/'mirror' which reflects traditionally prescribed notions of the female supplicatory self in relation to a patriarchal/hierarchical God, into a fluid, processual, 'becoming space' in which the female divine (and therefore also subjectivity) can exist. Dickinson's use of imagery associated with flight and non-static movement (such as the wing and bee imagery considered in the following chapter and in Chapters Five and Six respectively) through which her own intimations of the divine can be expressed in a non-directive way recreates the ideal (poetic) space[s] which Irigaray argues is necessary for avoiding the 'mirror' of (false) representation and fostering a space in which opportunities for contact with the other swim freely. In Irigarayan terms, the hymn which represents/reflects back a version of the divine which is inherently hierarchical, patriarchal and exclusionary can be seen

[40] Although not made explicit, Irigaray's use of the 'mirror' echoes Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of subject-formation, where the mirror (real mirror or the 'mirror' of the patriarchal gaze upon the self) acts to reinforce socially prescribed notions of the female/male self.

as deflected and revisioned by Dickinson through her use of hymnic space as a mode in which to articulate her own experience of the divine.

Irigaray's use of the metaphor of a bird for woman's fulfilling inhabitation and negotiation of this space suggests ultimate freedom from the fixity of both social roles and symbolic language which seeks to define both woman and the divine. Earlier incarnations of the female divine 'horizon' or 'bird' can be seen in Irigaray's essay 'Belief Itself', where the angel, the figure associated also with nineteenth-century conceptions of ideal womanhood, is re-visioned to convey an alternative angelic 'flight' which does not seek to 'demonstrate', 'prove' or 'argue' the fact of its existence:

> Thus, seeking to capture the angel in the home, any home- be it house, hostel, temple, altar- and covering what lives there in the guise of the messenger is another kind of diabolic paralysis that freezes movements and words. To seek to cage up within the domestic setting something that has always flowed uncontained is like turning free soaring, rapture, flight into parchments, skeletons, death masks.
>
> If we do not rethink and rebuild the whole scene of representation, the angels will never find a home, never stay anywhere. Guardians of free passage, they cannot be captured, domesticated, even if our purpose is to see ourselves in them. They can light up our sight and all our senses but only if we note the moment when they pass by, hear their word and fulfil it, without seeking to show, demonstrate, prove, argue about their coming, their speaking, or appearance.[41]

Irigaray's equation of the oppression of the 'angel at the hearth' with the angelic divine is explicit. The angel whose word must be heard and fulfilled is also undoubtedly another version of Irigaray's 'horizon of fulfilment of a gender' ('Divine Women', p. 63.) for women that the bird and its 'airy space' later symbolises. Rather than demand representation ('demonstrate, prove, argue') the practice of the angel is to guard and negotiate the 'free passage' which both delineates and enacts the divine. Drawing directly from biblical symbolism (Exodus 26: 17-22) Irigaray transforms the image of the angel, traditionally a patriarchally-biased metaphor for divine grace (as in the example of the messenger Gabriel), into one that 'guards' and suitably delineates the ideal space of the divine. Such a reading of scripture which places

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[41] Luce Irigaray, 'Belief Itself', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 25-53. (pp. 42-43.)

emphasis upon the space between two angels that face each other serves to reinforce the mystical non-saying about the 'airy space' and 'absence' of the divine:

> So here, two angels face one another to guard the presence of God, who may perhaps be turning away in his anger or absence. The angels face one another over the ark of the covenant. Beneath them, the tablets of the law, and between them, between their wings, the divine presence that cannot be sensed or seen. [...] It seems to be setting up the future presence of God in the more airy element: he can come and go freely, the word that has already been offered and inscribed in stone is loosed, and a new covenant is prepared.
>
> (Irigaray, 'Belief Itself', p. 44.)

The 'free passage' of the divine is something that is necessarily open and not constricted by the demands of signification and language. Irigaray's use of angelic imagery (that is the unbounded flight of birds and angels within an 'airy space') serves to support a connection between the non-saying space of the Other which language leaves out and which the symbolic order cannot accommodate, and a version of a female divine which needs to be represented as a 'horizon' for women and for the achievement of female subjectivity.

Although the figure of the angel is perhaps more common in hymnody as a traditional 'messenger' of the divine, the bird is also commonly used to connote the divine and spiritual flight in hymnody, particularly women's hymnody, and it is something that Dickinson's bee imagery draws upon. The representation of 'flight' in Dickinson's work, which both connotes physical but also spiritual flight (as evidenced by her use of bee imagery in Chapters Five and Six), conveys an unbounded anti-linearity which goes against the linear ascending/descending movement and speaker-God relation in traditional masculine hymnody. As will be described in the following chapter, the speaker in Isaac Watts's hymns desires 'wings of faith' to 'rise' – to become like God, like the ideal of God he presents. Rather than describing praise as the invocation of an interaction between two forces of consciousness emanating from inherently oppositional directions, hymns can be observed in terms of a circular, and encircling, regenerative mode of expression, which explodes categories of opposition, neither pulling away from a centre or towards one. The mode which Dickinson and other hymn writers use can be seen as describing a trajectory which is never reached, portraying an endlessly regenerative cycle. Both Irigaray's metaphors of the bird/angel and Certeau's notion of 'mystic speech' are instructive with respect to the

notion of hymnic space in this thesis as they both work to move away from the oppositional model, towards a dialogic approach for describing encounters with and articulation of the divine in thought and language.

Although Irigaray's suggestions for representing the female divine in this essay provide useful metaphors for this study of the negotiation of traditional religious discourse and representation of the divine in Dickinson's poems, they also display an inability to support oppositions, where Dickinson's poems allow for expansion. For example, in order to 'imagine' God, Irigaray declares that 'the feeling or experience of a positive, objective, glorious existence, the feeling of subjectivity, is essential for us,'('Divine Women', p. 66.) and that 'no one has really taught us love of God. Only love of neighbour.' ('Divine Women', p. 68.) The tautological connection between a functioning community and the 'God in the feminine gender' that it depends upon in order to define and maintain itself is made explicit. Writing of the 'empirical parameters' in society that restrain women, Irigaray argues:

> Fenced in by these functions, how can a woman maintain a margin of singleness for herself, a nondeterminism that would allow her to become and remain herself? This margin of freedom and potency (*puissance*) that gives us the authority yet to grow, to affirm and fulfil ourselves as individuals and members of a community, can be ours only if a God in the feminine gender can define it and keep it for us. As an other that we have yet to make actual, as a region of life, strength, imagination, creation, which exists for us both within and beyond, as our possibility of a present and a future.
>
> Is not God the name and the place that holds the promise of a new chapter in history and that also denies this can happen? Still invisible? Still to be discovered? To be incarnated? Archi-ancient and forever future.
>
> (Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 72.)

However, Dickinson's radical transformation and reclaiming of hymnic space allows for the full resonance of the hymn with implied connection with community and the individual's relation to the community to come into being and exist also, within the poem. Dickinson therefore, allows the imagined space of God that Irigaray describes, the 'glorious existence'('Divine Women', p. 66.), to be connected, irrevocably, with community and 'love of neighbour;' the connection that Irigaray's essay 'Divine Women' does not accommodate. The hymnic mode of Dickinson's poems allows for Irigaray's notion of divine 'jouissance' to be suspended *in relation* to an invocation

and constant reminder of community which is also, for Dickinson, a form of labour. Bond-Stockton's reading of Irigaray's strategy to 'bend' psychoanalytic theories of female lack or absence 'back toward 'material opacity' and to cast lacking as a form of labour productive of pleasure' is useful as it underscores both the practice and performativity of Irigaray's writing.[42] As Chapters Five and Six will demonstrate, writing the divine is a 'form of labour productive of pleasure' in Dickinson as much as it is in Irigaray. The importance Irigaray places upon achieving the divine in order to achieve subjectivity is put into practice in Dickinson's use of the hymn form because it both traces and articulates the divine and subjectivity. The ideas of a 'becoming space' and an 'airy space' in which women can move, bird-like, escaping the negative cycle of mimesis and representation in 'Divine Women' is useful for examining Dickinson's use of hymnic space and bee imagery and ultimately her radical engagement with traditional religious discourse. Irigaray's notion of divine being is mystical in its emphasis on absence and space, and the circumnavigation of the divine as opposed to a linear, phallogocentric ideal. Although Irigaray's work on women's relation to the divine can be seen as mysticism as praxis, as it both describes and also enacts the ways in which a female divine can be articulated in language (which is akin to Dickinson's use of language and hymnic space), Michel de Certeau's 'Mystic Speech' provides a further understanding of the connection between mysticism and the act of writing and an instructive description of the practice of 'heterologies'.

Michel de Certeau and Heterologies

> Mystical would also be the relation of the poem to the religious tradition whose statements it presupposes, but uses in order to make them say the absence of what they designate.[43]

Michel de Certeau's essay on mystical discourse ('Mystic Speech') is useful to this study on Dickinson's relation to the assumptions surrounding Protestant hymn culture

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[42] Katherine Bond-Stockton, *God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Bronte and Eliot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) pp. xvi-xvii. Stockton's reading of Irigaray emphasises her insistence that 'escapes' exist for women within dominant constructions.

[43] Michel de Certeau, 'Mystic Speech' in *The Certeau Reader* ed. by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) pp. 188-201. (p. 205.)

due to its depiction of individual and mystic spirituality through engagement with orthodox spirituality. The connection between mystical discourse and poetry, which the essay and the excerpt above describe, bears a striking affinity with Dickinson's use of language, orthodox religion and the hymn genre. For example, poem Fr 655, which describes the life cycle of a butterfly or moth, simultaneously invokes a typical hymn subject in the life of Jesus and then also considers its reception within orthodox religion. The final stanza suggests the butterfly/moth, as an analogous to the divine in orthodox Christianity, becomes housed in 'cabinets' finally pinned down and on display - 'Abbey' and 'cocoon' being synonymous with this final resting place. However, the focus on the continual flight and evasiveness of the butterfly/moth in the poem's first three stanzas serves to establish and confer a non-saying and an absence of fixity and definition upon the divine:

> He parts Himself – like Leaves –
> And then – He closes up –
> Then stands opon the Bonnet
> Of Any Buttercup –
>
> And then He runs against
> And oversets a Rose –
> And then does Nothing –
> Then away opon a Jib – He goes –
>
> And dangles like a Mote
> Suspended in the Noon –
> Uncertain – to return Below –
> Or settle in the Moon -

The personified insect which 'dangles like a Mote' connotes the omniscient Holy Spirit and is finally connected with the life of Jesus in the fourth stanza with the Crucifixion which 'That Day' (with the poignant capitalisation of 'That') implies. In this way, the poem reverses the chronology of what we know of the life of Jesus as the poem 'ends' with the cocoon-state of the butterfly/moth, which invokes the 'sepulchre' of the 'That Day':

> What come of Him at Night –
> The privilege to say
> Be limited by Ignorance –
> What come of Him – That Day –

The Frost – possess the World –
In Cabinets – be shown –
A Sepulchre of quaintest Floss –
An Abbey – a Cocoon - (Fr 655)

The poem's first and final stanzas echo each other in the deferral of both 'beginning' and 'ending', and convey instead a cycle that could be endlessly repeated. The sacrificial 'parting' and opening out of the butterfly/moth's wings in the first stanza ('He parts Himself – like Leaves/ And then – He closes up -) is evocative of both the last supper and the Crucifixion. Similarly, the deathly stasis of 'That Day' which 'frost' and 'sepulchre' invoke in the final stanza simultaneously refer back to the beginning as the cocoon state (as the Crucifixion) also symbolises the moment before rebirth and renewal into the emergent butterfly/moth but also Holy Spirit. 'Evidence' of the existence of the divine in orthodox religion is readily available in churches ('abbey') through stories of the Crucifixion and yet Dickinson's description of the movements of the butterfly/moth 'at Night' is 'limited by Ignorance.' In other words, knowledge of the divine cannot be pinned down or known completely and the evidence of orthodox religion (like the Victorian taxonomical urge to name, pin and display an insect) is ultimately unreliable.

Dickinson's hymn-poems co-opt the assumptions of the Protestant tradition which popular hymnody in the nineteenth century was steeped in, and also employ a strategy of mystical 'openness' in their refusal to 'say' or describe the divine. In this way they highlight and moreover privilege the absences or gaps in traditional religious discourse and orthodox ways of thinking about the divine. The privileging of absence and non-saying in Dickinson's work and the aspect of leaving an open space for the reader is akin to the method of 'mystic speech' that Certeau describes. Certeau's perspective on mystical discourse highlights its anarchic power to make visible the absences and contradictions apparent in religious tradition by refusing definitions of the divine which constrict and attempt to shape it. Certeau's background is Jesuit and Christian and this is something that has been seen as shaping his mysticism.[44] Certeau's prose is itself dense and 'mystical' in preferring repetition and frequent allusion to absences and spaces within types of mystical discourses, to attempts to describe the divine, or the 'object' of mystical discourse. Despite the fact

[44] See Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, 'Introduction: Michel de Certeau, Theologian' in *The Certeau Reader* ed. by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) pp. 209-213.

that Certeau's position, to an extent, reasserts the view within early Christian mystical writing of an ultimately unknowable God,[45] (and in this sense cannot be seen as being wholly divorced from a hitherto established religious tradition), the effects of destabilising a 'knowable' God are ultimately radical:

> It is by taking words seriously, a life and death game in the body of language, that the secret of what they give is torn from them – and, as St. John of the Cross says in relation to the "holy *doctors*," to do that is to make them confess the secret of their "impotence," of what they cannot "give."
>
> (Certeau, p. 205.)

Certeau's recommendation against 'taking words seriously' would become a Post-modern polemic on aimless multiplicity, if it were not for the fact that the essay ends with a final suggestion as to the nature of the mystical, not of what leaves us bereft and directionless, but, more hopefully, with what it can provide:

> One more thing, perhaps, is mystical: the establishment of a space where change serves as a foundation and saying loss is another beginning. Because it is always *less* than what *comes* through it and allows a genesis, the mystic poem is connected to the *nothing* that opens the future, the time *to come*, and, more precisely, to that single work, "Yahweh," which forever makes possible the self-naming of that which induces departure.
>
> (Certeau, p. 205.)

Certeau's description of the 'mystic poem' could easily be applied Dickinson's most powerful poetic strategy that allows for such openness. However, as demonstrated earlier in poem Fr 655, Dickinson's commitment to openness is itself, like Certeau's, polemical. Rather than producing an impotent silence, Dickinson's non-saying on the divine is charged with transformation. Her versions of hymnic imagery and engagement with hymn culture assert challenges to the assumptions about and representations of the divine in orthodox religion, creating a new dynamic space within the poem. In this, Dickinson's poems go beyond the Post-modernism that sees all manner of openness as lack of direction. To 'induce departure' is to let go of all certainties, the ultimate sacrifice which re-inscribes itself, paradoxically, as faith. As

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[45] See for example: *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works* trans., Clifton Wolters (London: Penguin, 1978) p. 142, God is expressed as being ultimately unknowable, and to be 'nothing' and 'nowhere' is expressed as a path towards such a God.

the following chapters will demonstrate, by systematically denying the urge to describe and define spiritual experience, Dickinson's poetics forge a pattern of relation which mimics the 'cohesive' power of the hymn whilst offering, simultaneously a radical, mystical openness which is itself the space of relation, the 'clue divine.'(Fr 1107)

The connection Certeau makes explicit between mystical discourse and poetry in 'Mystic Speech' is illuminating because Dickinson's engagement with the hymn as a traditionally sacred form is something which both underscores and masks her own mystical poetics. Examining Dickinson's 'mystical' poems alongside examples of the hymn genre allows for both a reconsideration of the genre and its implicit assumptions about writings (and one's licence to write) on the divine and also allows for a re-envisioning of what a devotional form can do. Certeau's ideas about what poetry can do as a 'liberating space' is analogous to what a devotional form like the hymn could also do, and to what Dickinson's poems do:

> The poem – a cadenced repetition... - does not stop at deconstructing meaning and making it music: it is what allows the very production of meaning. The 'taste for echoes' awakened by the poem leads one 'to seek a semantic connection between elements nothing binds together semantically;' it makes possible the indefinite prolongation of this semantical research as an echo effect. It says nothing. It permits saying. For that reason, it is a true 'beginning.' It is a liberating space, where yesterday's readers – but 'we' also - can find speech. The 'canciones' did not lay down a meaning once and for all; they created a place of origin for 'love effects.'
>
> (Certeau, p. 204.)

The 'mystic poem' in Certeau's view allows for the production of meaning through what it does not say, and in this way produces an ideal, 'liberating' space of origins and beginnings which 'permits saying.' In a strikingly similar way, Dickinson's poems also have this mystical effect upon the reader, producing many beginnings through avoiding endings, allowing for much thought to flow through and from them. This quality to Dickinson's poetics places pressure upon the hymn form in which it is presented, urging the reader to compare the experience of reading such openness with what they know of the hymn. Dickinson's form challenges the hymn genre but it also allows for a re-envisioning of what a hymn could be. As the following chapters will demonstrate, and particularly in relation to her use of bee imagery in Chapters Five

and Six, Dickinson's readers re-experience the hymn genre not as constrictive and descriptive, but as a heterologous, liberating space.

Dickinson's use of the hymn form bears affinities with Certeau's notion of poetry as a heterologous space which accommodates for difference within scheme, for the individual's diversity within a community. Although the hymnic metre of Dickinson's poems serves to register grammatical, formal breaks and also semantic dissent, within the context of the individual's desire for autonomy and choice within religious orthodoxy, it also serves to reassert the ideal of an individual's relation within community that Certeau's notion of a heterologous space describes.

Although the writing and use of the other as a site of resistance in the works of Irigaray and Certeau discussed here does bear significant affinities, the emphasis placed upon the relation between discoursal spaces and history separates them. Irigaray's notion of a female divine does not seem to go too far beyond the terms and categories connected with the symbolic and representation which she describes as confining it. Although the concept of 'horizon' is useful and important to feminist affirmation of positive consciousness and the formation of subjectivity, it reproduces another (if radically altered and re-visioned) version of Lacan's 'mirror stage.' In this way, the practice recommended in 'Divine Women' does not go far enough to eschew the frameworks that are patriarchally defined. Although Certeau's concern with the other has its roots in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, his take on mystical discourse as 'heterologous' provides an alternative framework that places significant emphasis upon an individual's (i.e. a woman's) active role in historical processes, in which all discourses (even the 'broken' and 'fragmented' utterances of the mystic) are perceived in relation to their historicity. Therefore, although Certeau's writing on mystical discourse conveys similar elements of Irigaray's notion of the female divine in its appropriation of the 'other' as an ideal and potentially liberating position outside of the symbolic order, it is not 'siteless' and is firmly situated in relation to a specific discoursal space. Certeau's emphasis on the connections between discoursal spaces and historical processes allows for the positioning of 'heterologies' in relation to the discourses which produced them. As Godzich explains:

> This other, which forces discourses to take the meandering appearance that they have, is not a magical or transcendental entity;

> it is the discourse's mode of relation to its own historicity in the moment of its utterance.[46]

Therefore, connecting Certeau's notion of heterologous space to the hymn as a particular discourse takes an understanding of Dickinson's engagement with the hymn further than a matter of style, but can be seen as a direct engagement with the discourses both affecting the production of, and producing, hymnody. In other words, by viewing Dickinson's engagement with the hymn form as a site of discourses about spirituality and also about a woman's relation to the divine we can view her engagement with, and challenge to, those discourses. The power of Dickinson's mysticism comes in the ability of her poems to relate what is presented within them implicitly to what has gone before – in the representation of the divine in the tradition of hymnody she grew up with, but also within the context of her own position as a poet whose work seemingly arises out of 'nowhere.' The tension between the seemingly 'contextless' Dickinson, the 'siteless' mystic, and the woman poet, engaging with a specific tradition of sacred writing and the inscription of relation to and within the divine is brought to the fore in her radical engagement with hymn culture.

So when she asks:

> Why – do they shut me out of Heaven?
> Did I sing – too loud?
> But – I can say a little "minor"
> Timid as a bird!
>
> Wouldn't the Angels try me –
> Just – once – more –
> Just – see – if I troubled them –
> But don't – shut the door!
>
> Oh, if I – were the Gentleman
> In the "White Robe" –
> And they – were the little Hand – that knocked –
> Could – I – forbid? (Fr 268)

we can see that the full force of her confrontation rests not simply in the immediate questions of the first two lines. The hymnic common metre (alternating tetrameter and

[46] Godzich, Wlad, 'Foreword: The Further Possibility of Change,' in Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* trans. by Brian Massumi, 6th edn (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000) pp. vii-xxii. (p. xx.)

trimeter) is unbroken and strong, there are no deviations to register dissent, the initial lines are enough to do this. The 'Gentleman' in the 'White Robe' represents the supposed focus or mediator for religious devotion, where God and the male preacher are depicted as interchangeable and representative of the figure of authority responsible for the speaker-poet's exclusion. The phrase is deliberately genteel, highlighting the 'civilized' but also infinitely inadequate nature of the devotion and path to the divine practiced in orthodox rituals of worship that seek to be inclusive and encompass all in community. A rather flimsy 'door' which can easily be flung shut separates the speaker from the 'angels,' who, like a panel of judges will 'try' the speaker whose infantilised status adds proportion to the sense of inequality.

And yet, the interchange between speaker and supposed hierarchical structure of hymnody and religious culture is frustrated by inconsistencies in Dickinson's referents and cannot be either recapitulated *or* cast aside. Dickinson's protest in this poem is also an alternative hymn to the devotional mode of her own writing; although Dickinson derides the inadequacies of traditional worship by highlighting her own distance, being 'shut out' also enables further thought on the divine which isn't conceived of in terms of traditional religion and mediated by a 'gentleman'. In articulating distance from the divine to be found in traditional hymnody, Dickinson reinscribes her own desire to connect with the divine, and in this poem, by being able to 'sing too loud.' What the reader is left with is a re-visioned hymnic space, and an alternative hymnody in which the phallogocentric impetus of hierarchical structuring is broken and rendered impotent, whilst relationality and ways of reaching the divine through language are not sacrificed either. The uniquely heterologous quality of the hymn, which invokes community whilst giving voice to the individual, allows Dickinson to manipulate a position which not only allows for the 'doubleness' which Armstrong identifies in women's poetry of period,[47] but produces a third dimension of openness akin to that achieved in mystical writing. It is this third aspect, facilitated by her engagement with the premises and practices of hymn culture, which separates Dickinson's work from that of other nineteenth-century women poets and serves to imbue her work with a resonant creative power.

This chapter has foregrounded debates on alternative and feminist versions of the divine and notions of 'the Other' in the mystical writing of Irigaray and Certeau in

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[47] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics,and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 324. As cited earlier, p. 26.

order to demonstrate ways in which Dickinson's hymnic poems can be read as performing an alternative mystical theology of their own by inscribing the Other which is other than the patriarchally conceived God which feminist theologians such as Hampson and Daly perceive as limiting. Dickinson's engagement with the hymns of Isaac Watts as a model for dissent, autonomy and choice provides her with a relation to the hymn as a space in which dissent can be registered and used effectively. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, Dickinson's contemporary women hymn writers made a similar use of the hymnic space as a site where accommodation for describing distance from or embracing 'the other' could occur. Dickinson's mode of relation to traditional hymnody is not therefore not simply one of subversion, but, is one that re-positions the hymn as a heterologous space in which articulation of the divine could be expressed.

The ways in which 'mystical' is used in this thesis have been clarified in this chapter in relation to Certeau's notion of mystical writings as delineating absences and ruptures, whilst also operating within a heterologous space of relation to the historicity of discourses which produced them. With this in mind, rather than analysing Certeau any further, it is now necessary to examine ways in which Dickinson's engagement with the modes and tropes of 'traditional' hymnody can be seen in relation to an examination of the hymns she grew up with, firstly, in those of Isaac Watts.

Chapter Three

Making the Sublime Ridiculous: Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts in Dissent

This chapter will examine the different ways in which the hymns of Isaac Watts inform Dickinson's poetics and offer her a model for dissent and serve as inspiration for a re-envisioned mode of relation to the divine. It examines imagery (such as eyes (sight) and wings (flight) which are associated with spiritual transcendence, typical to hymnody and common in both Watts and Dickinson, and so demonstrates ways in which Watts's influence on Dickinson goes beyond simple matters of style. Moreover, Watts's background as a Dissenter in relation to the Established church is reflected within his devotional poems and hymns. In a similar way, Dickinson's poems articulate dissent in relation to representations of the divine within orthodox religion. The enlarged and 'sublime'[1] view of the world that is defended rigorously in Watts's hymns is frequently also counterbalanced with a lowered linguistic register and dependable metre. Dickinson's dissent is registered in her reluctance to name the divine and in her vigilance in avoiding being mastered by intimations of sublimity, Romantic or otherwise.

Dickinson's engagement with the work of Isaac Watts is something which needs re-examining because Watts's Non-Conformist, Dissenting position within the religious culture of his day has been overlooked when discussing Dickinson's use of the hymn form and her allusions to his work. Both sought to redefine God in ways that were more compatible with their own experience. In Dickinson's work this arrives as describing ways of 'seeing' the divine that were in opposition to the masculinised and reductive versions perpetuated by religious orthodoxy. For Watts, representing spirituality in a way closer to his own experience meant accentuating the 'broadness' of the 'road to heaven,' through simple verse forms which could be easily understood by those less literate than the clergy. It also meant extending the tenets of Calvinist predestination and election to incorporate his own more liberal views. Robert Southey writes in his 'Memoir of the Author,' an introduction to the 1834 version of Watts's *Horae Lyricae: Poems, chiefly of the lyric kind* (1706), that Watts had a 'spirit of charity' in which all (including 'heathens' and 'savages') shall be accepted, and given hope. He quotes Watts:

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[1] John Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1640-1740: Studies in the Thought and Poetry of Henry More, John Norris and Isaac Watts* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971) pp. 199-212. Hoyles draws attention to Watts's tendency for aesthetics of the 'sublime' in *Horae Lyricae,* linking this with his enlightenment 'free philosophy' which desires to rise above the microcosm to view the world, and humanity, at a distance, and thus achieving 'true sublimity.' p. 201. He cites Watts's poem 'Free Philosophy' as the finest example of his dedication to aesthetics of the sublime.

> I am persuaded there is a breadth in the narrow road to Heaven, and persons may travel more than seven abreast in it.
>
> (*PW*, p. 34.)[2]

This statement appears to contradict the Calvinist notion of the 'elect' society who are specifically chosen by God, and Southey is careful to assert that Watts's comments were borne from a 'spirit of charity,' rather than a 'loose latitude of opinion.'(*PW*, p. 34.) Watts was committed to the idea that everyone should be able to practice religious worship and the form of this worship should be easily accessible particularly for those who lacked a formal education. The dominant and balanced rhyme schemes, plain lexis, and definite beginning, middle and end that characterises Watts's hymns makes them easy to remember and recite. However, the lower register of language Watts uses serves to make the 'sublime flight' of his lyrical expression appear somewhat 'ridiculous'[3] at times.

Utilising the hymn form as a model for dissent serves to undermine the traditional religious 'sublime,' as it re-establishes the hymn as an ideal space which challenges the inaccessible stasis which 'sublime' proliferates. Ironically, despite Southey's championing of Watts, the transmission of the religious sublime showed itself through Romanticism, and the high poetic ideals of the (usually male) individual, which served to problematise subjectivity and therefore also spiritual as well as artistic expression for women writers of the period.[4] In utilising the power of the hymn to invoke collective subjectivity, Dickinson circumnavigates the Romantic ideal of individual expression in which nature/inspiration is fetishised as female.

Rufus Griswold's introduction to Watts's verse in a collection which Dickinson's family owned, and which Emily most certainly read,[5] implores the reader to consider Watts's verse as equalling Milton's:

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[2] Isaac Watts, *The Poetical Works of Isaac Watts; With a Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1866) Hereafter abbreviated to '*PW*'. Quotation from Robert Southey's 'Memoir of the Author,' an introduction to the 1834 edition of *Horae Lyricae* (1706).

[3] B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London: Epworth Press, 1942) p. 88. As discussed further on, Manning states that Watts sometimes makes the 'sublime ridiculous'.

[4] See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) Homans describes the 'gendering' of nature as the 'feminine other' and how women writers of the Romantic period had to negotiate this when writing as the Self –as-Other. p. 3. 'Romantic tradition makes it difficult for any writer to separate sexual identity from writing.'

[5] See Benjamin Lease, *Emily Dickinson's Readings of Men and Books* (London: Macmillan, 1990) p. 64. (Hereafter '*RMB*'). Lease notes that a copy of George Herbert's poem 'Virtue' was in the family library copy of Griswold's collection. Cheryl Walker also states that the book was owned by the

> They are not very carefully finished; but there is a remarkable sweetness and purity of thought in them. Perhaps the most successful of his poems are his 'Hymns for the Young,' which are admirably adapted for their purpose. His psalms and hymns have, for half a century, been used in nearly all the churches in that worship in the English language; and if popularity were a test of merit, Watts should be ranked with Milton.[6]

Although the points in Dickinson's poems where Watts is echoed frequently highlight the moments when such 'sweetness and purity' is easily reduced to parody,[7] and slapstick even, Watts's desire to translate his Dissenting spirituality to the masses nevertheless provided Dickinson with a model for dissent. Despite the recapitulation of hierarchical models of relation to the divine in Watts, the relative simplicity of his hymns and devotional poetry offered Dickinson a point of reference for a new kind of poetry, and crucially, for an expression of spirituality expressed in an innovative way. Dickinson and Watts received similar criticism because of their willingness to be innovative and to allude to ideas of 'simplicity.' Benjamin Lease (1990) observes the equally negative reception of Watts and Dickinson in their respective eras, and cites a nineteenth-century review (1891) of Dickinson's 'I taste a liquor never brewed,' in which the reviewer laments:

> There are no words that can say how bad poetry may be when it is divorced from meaning, from music, from grammar, from rhyme; in brief, from articulate and intelligible speech.
>
> (*RMB*, p. 51.)[8]

The child-like but tightly constructed rhythms in Dickinson's poems convey superficial 'easiness' that belies an appeal, by association, for a 'simplification' also of the divine in religious discourse. The notion of simplicity is problematic as one has a particularised view of what is deemed simple and what is over-complicated. (The Puritan desire for 'simplicity' in sixteenth century religious worship led to arguments

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Dickinsons in *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture Before 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) p. 165.

[6] Rufus Griswold, ed., *Sacred Poets of England and America* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848) p. 241.

[7] As discussed below, pp. 105-106, critics such as Shira Wolosky have highlighted instances where Dickinson parodies Watts. See, Shira Wolosky, 'Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts', *New England Quarterly* 61 (1988) 214-232 (pp. 216-7.)

[8] Lease cites article 'The Newest Poet,' *London Daily News*, 2 January 1891; in *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1968) (p. 27.)

about their narrow, literalised view of Scripture).[9] However, Watts was perceived during his time as being radical in his adoption of self-consciously simplistic language and attitude of autonomy with regard to worship. Manning argues, albeit somewhat dismissively, in his discussion of Watts that:

> Watts out-Wordsworths Wordsworth in his love of simple, everyday language; and as Wordsworth at times made the sublime ridiculous by his kindergarten expressions, so also did Watts.
>
> (Manning, p. 88.)

It is this element of 'ridiculousness' or perceived childish simplicity that Dickinson perhaps found appealing in Watts. Watts often uses simple language and images in order to convey his message, and it is significant that criticisms of 'disordered' or 'defective' rhythms and 'bad rhymes' were levelled at both Dickinson and Watts in their respective lifetimes. (*RMB*, pp. 50-51.) Manning goes on to say that Watts's language is 'at best...pure and transparent' and as 'Anglo-Saxon as Bunyan's own...but at its worst banal beyond belief.'(Manning, pp. 88-89.) Dickinson's use of sometimes blunt, 'Anglo-Saxon'[10] language frequently counterbalances any precious seriousness or morbidity, and places emphasis on worldly existence. Where Watts's hymns include references to bowels and worms, Dickinson's poems are filled with attacks on the body; eyes being put out, brains splitting, planks breaking and the 'heft' of 'Cathedral Tunes.'

In contrast to this view, critics such as Gordon Jackson and James Sutherland both describe Watts as an innovator. Jackson remarks:

> In his strictly poetical pieces Watts enjoys his experiments with blank verse, couplets, Pindaric odes, and even Sapphics, but always seems most at home in quatrains.[11]

Sutherland sees Watts's 'imaginative energy' as something that marks him out as a 'Dissenter in poetry as well as in religion.'[12] Although Sutherland's comments refer to Watts's use of the Pindaric form and not to his hymns, Watts's innovation in the

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[9] Kai, T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966) p. 47.

[10] Anglo-Saxon is a term used here to connote both an informal and relatively plain register of language associated with white Protestant culture in Britain and America.

[11] Gordon Jackson, ed., *Isaac Watts: Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999) p. xxi.

[12] James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948) p. 148.

area of hymns is also widely accepted, as he made the break from paraphrasing psalms to more lyrical expression in congregational hymnody. A similarly broad range of diction can also be seen in Dickinson's poetry, for example in poem Fr 347, where the painful remembrance of the past is signalled by birdsong which becomes 'not all Pianos in the Woods/ Had power to mangle me.'[13]

Watts and the Dissenting Tradition

Isaac Watts was a Congregational minister, part of the Dissenting tradition (or 'Independents') which had Puritan roots but allowed for further emphasis upon the congregation. Congregational churches were encouraged to choose their own ministers and create a congregation with relative autonomy from the Church of England. On the place of hymns in Dissenting worship, Horton Davies describes an increased sociable aspect:

> The Calvinistic Independents [...] shared [...] an exultation of reason and a concentration upon man as God's chief handiwork. The result was that there was a stress on the sociable aspect in worship. Whereas the chief stress in Puritan worship was on the downward, revelational movement of God in sermon and Sacrament, now a new stress was given to the hymns and to the importance of the congregation.[14]

Davies explains that Watts's hymns injected a subjectivity to fit with the new emphasis on the congregation, and the Christian community:

> [...] objectivity had characterized the metrical psalmody of the previous century. Now Watts sings "When *I* survey the wondrous Cross" or "Give *me* the wings of faith to rise" or "Come *we* that love the Lord." This subjective emphasis may be open to criticism, but it is the less heinous when it is recalled that for real subjectivity and wallowing in sentimental feelings we must turn to Victorian hymnody.
>
> (Davies, p. 100.)

[13] Example discussed in Chapter One, p. 25.
[14] Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690-1900* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) p. 99.

The emphasis on community can be seen in Watts's assertion of the importance of living an industrious life, and a life that is therefore also useful to one's community. The importance of industry and of 'useful' life can be traced to Calvin's assertion of St Paul's notion of industry. David Stannard (1977) notes Calvin's emphasis on an honourable occupation:

> [T]o Calvin the Pauline denunciation of 'disorderly persons' applied [...] to indolent and worthless persons, who employ themselves in no honourable and useful occupation.'[15]

The Puritans required usefulness for one's life within a community and held contempt for the individualistic mode of worship and hermit recluse. It was the Puritan's duty to live and to work usefully in the world, within the community and amongst fellow people. William Perkins, a Puritan divine, as Stannard records, spoke against monks, who:

> [...] challenge to themselves that they live in a state of perfection, because they live apart from the societies of men in fasting and prayer: but contrawise, this kind of living is damnable.[16]

The cultural legacy of the Puritans and Calvinism of her day is something which Dickinson no doubt was influenced by but also utilised in terms of her own position as a woman poet attempting to forge a life of writing for herself. Having identified for herself a vocation in writing, she perhaps saw this as a way of being 'useful' and 'industrious'. However, this 'usefulness' also offered her release from the expectations of her own society. The importance Dickinson places upon having a vocation and a useful life can be seen in her letters, where she is disdainful of women who desire only that their lives be 'taken up' in due course by a respectable male suitor.[17] It is no coincidence that this fear extends to achieving 'faith' in a particular God, as to achieve that kind of 'clarity' is something which Dickinson (and Watts) perceive as something which defines the human struggle and also the poet's 'occupation', as she terms her life as a poet in Fr 466. Such concern with validating

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[15] David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 25.
[16] Ibid, p. 26.
[17] See L: I, p. 210. June 1852, to Susan Gilbert: 'It does rend me, Susie, the thought of it when it comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up'.

work is something which Dickinson's use of bee imagery conveys, as will be discussed in detail in Chapters Five and Six.

Born to Dissenting parents, Watts belonged to and moved within Dissenting circles.[18] Donald Davie positions the 'axiomatic' thinking he sees in Watts's hymns as something connected with this family background and also his position as an Enlightenment thinker.[19] Dissenters, Calvinist and Puritan in heritage rejected the paraphernalia of Anglicanism and Catholic sensuousness. As Horton Davies explains:

> The use of the surplice, the kneeling for the reception of Holy Communion, the signing of the cross in Baptism, the blessing of the ring in marriage – those inevitable targets for the Puritan blunderbuss – were thought to be not only the outward and visible signs of Anglicanism's attachment to the past but tributes to its tolerance and sympathy with other branches of the Catholic Church.
> (Davies, p. 20.)

Watts's Puritan heritage as a Dissenter makes it likely that he, (as Dickinson does in 'Some keep the Sabbath') would reject the surplice and the bondage of doctrine, such as the notion of inherited sin, which it signified. Moreover, writing against such inherited religious values pervaded Watts's verse as much as it did his prose. Michael Watts (1978) observes:

> Watts objected to the monopoly which Jewish psalms occupied in Christian praise, 'with confessions of sins you never committed, with complaints of sorrows which you never felt; cursing such enemies as you never had; giving thanks for such victories as you never obtained; or leading you to speak...of things, places, and actions you never knew.'[20]

This rejection of a form of religion that offered vicarious experience and which bore little relation to personal experience is something which Dickinson perhaps found in Watts's Dissenting hymnic language, amongst the popular tunes so familiar with her friends, family and town community.

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[18] For further information on Watts's Dissenting heritage, see David Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpenden: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust Ltd, 1974) pp. 3-15.

[19] Donald Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 35.

[20] Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) p. 312. Watts cites H. Davies, *Worship of the English Puritans* (1948) pp. 176-7.

Critical Perceptions of Dickinson's Use of Watts

The influence and presence of Watts in Dickinson's world is evident in the fact that his works and teachings were widely available in nineteenth-century New England Congregationalist circles which Dickinson and her family would have been a part of. Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* (1892) gives us an outline of the dissemination of hymnals in New England, and we can see that a volume entitled *Watts and Select Hymns* published in 1823 held a prominent place there.[21] Noted American Congregationalist hymnographers roughly contemporary with Dickinson and no doubt also influenced by Watts's hymns were: Phoebe Hinsdale Brown (1783-1861), Samuel Wolcott (1813-1886), James Henry Bancroft (1819-1844), Emma. C. Willard (1787-1870), Eliza Lee Follen (1787-1860), Eleazer. T. Fitch (1791-1871) and Frances Jane Crosby Van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820-1915), amongst others. Connections between Dickinson's hymn-poems and the hymns of contemporary women Phoebe Hinsdale Brown and Eliza Lee Follen will be discussed in the following chapter. Watts's most prolific work, *The Psalms of David imitated in New Testament Language together with Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (first published in 1707 and reprinted in 1832 in Boston by Loring, Lincoln and Edmunds as *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*) gave him centre stage in New England Congregationalist circles. Watts's name became synonymous with congregational hymn singing which gained popularity during this time. The Evangelical Protestant revivals (in Dickinson's circle these were predominantly Congregationalist[22]) which accommodated versions of Calvinist, Trinitarian doctrine had also a Puritan heritage, and Watts's hymns were used to assist these revivals. Henry Wilder Foote (1961) argues that whilst the emergence of Leonard Bacon's volume *Psalms and Hymns* thirteen years later in 1845 was important, the earlier voice of Watts resonated strongly.[23] Johnson's biography of Dickinson (1955) tells us that both Watts's *Christian Psalmody* and *The Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* were owned by Dickinson's father Edward, and were 'sheepskin bound, inscribed with his name, and

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[21] John Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1907) p. 57.
[22] For an account of the Congregational societies and church practices familiar to Dickinson and her family, see Alfred Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 2001) pp. 27-36 and pp. 114-120. (Hereafter '*MWL*').
[23] Henry Wilder Foote, *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1961) pp. 213-215.

readily at hand for Emily's perusal.'[24] We also know that the Dickinson family library held a copy of Rufus Griswold's *Sacred Poets of England and America* (1848) which includes six of Watts's devotional poems.[25] The pervasive nature of Watts's influence on her can also be seen in her letters. One written when she was by then in her late forties recalls hymn phrases from Watts which she remembered from childhood, a time when she would have attended church regularly.[26] Richard Sewall (1976), Benjamin Lease (1990), and Alfred Habegger (2001), amongst others, have each provided suggestions for Dickinson's contact with Watts's didactic poetry for children, his moral philosophy, as well as his popular hymns.[27]

Martha Winburn England gives an informative account of the influential preacher Jonathan Edwards's promotion of Watts in his Northampton church in the mid eighteenth century, and of how this served to reinforce Watts's 'monopoly' over hymns for worship in the nineteenth century and beyond. She explains:

> Northampton, where Edwards preached, Amherst, where Emily Dickinson was born, and South Hadley, where she went to seminary, lie in the Connecticut River Valley in a seven-mile equilateral triangle. For many decades the Valley shared in this tradition fostered by Edwards, a tradition of private and social use of hymns, love of Watts, skilful singing, and amazing liberality in the reception of new music as it appeared.[28]

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[24] T. H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson; An Interpretive Biography* (New York: Atheneum, 1955) pp. 84-85.

[25] See *RMB*, p. 64. Lease notes that a copy of George Herbert's poem 'Virtue' was available to Dickinson in the family library copy of Griswold's collection. Cheryl *Walker* also states that the book was owned by the Dickinsons in *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture Before 1900*, p. 165.

[26] See L: II, pp. 593-594. To Mrs. J. G. Holland. ED recalls a line from 'When I survey the Wondrous Cross.'

[27] Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) p. 352. Sewall cites both Frederick Tuckerman *Amherst Academy: A New England School of the Past 1814-1861* (Amherst, MA: 1929) and E. W. Carpenter and C. F. Morehouse *The History of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts* (Amherst, 1896) for an Amherst Academy reading list which included Isaac Watts's *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741). Lease cites various family members recalling lines from Watts, as also cited in St. Armand, p. 158, and confirms that the Dickinson household library had copies of Watts's *Church Psalmody* and *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs.* (*RMB*, pp. 50-53.) Habegger suggests in *MWL* that Dickinson might have learned some of Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* at her church's Sabbath School during the 1830s. (pp. 100-101.) He also states *Watts and Select* as being Dickinson's church's hymnal in the 1830s. (pp. 118-119) and that Watts's philosophical work, *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741), was one of the key texts at Amherst Academy during Dickinson's time there (on and off for seven years, from 1840 to 1847). (pp. 142-143.)

[28] Martha Winburn England, and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers*, pp. 113-114.

Watts's central part in the increasing turn towards the individual's use of hymns for private use together with his visionary attitude to worship is thus important when analysing the influence of his hymns on Dickinson's poetry.

Watts's psalms and hymns expressed the Calvinist and Trinitarian views of his education[29], but Unitarians were interested in his later works that presented a precedent for conversion to Unitarian views. George Burnap argued that Watts's later prose and poetical works illustrated a clear conversion to Unitarian views of one, unified God:

> While he was acknowledging that the Trinity amounted to nothing more than one God in one person and two divine powers, thousands and thousands were appending a Trinitarian doxology to the Psalms of David on his authority, -" To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, three in one," when at the same time he himself had given up the personality of the Holy Ghost, and acknowledged that there was no Scriptural authority for addressing a doxology to it at all, any more than there is for addressing a doxology to God's arm or eye![30]

The fact that Unitarians were interested in 'revising' Watts's work to fit with their own theological beliefs might have furthered Dickinson's interest. Her literary mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson was a Unitarian minister, and she no doubt would have been familiar with Unitarian views and the controversy they proliferated within the Protestant Evangelical Revival culture of the 1830s and 1860s.

The scholastic use of texts during the mid nineteenth-century period of evangelical revival, such as Watts's *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741) which espoused using the intellect to support an orthodox religious way of life, was eschewed by middle-class 'cultivated Episcopalians,' who, as Habegger notes, may have disapproved of the use of texts which they perceived as reflecting a 'tasteless' land with its 'factories, equality and independence.'(*MWL*, p. 143.) Dickinson's engagement with Watts is therefore more complex than her simply alluding to him as an establishment figure. In allusion to Watts, Dickinson also 'lowers' her own poetic

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[29] Particularly the Doxologies – hymns dedicated to the existence of the Holy Trinity comprised of the 'father, son and holy spirit,' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), Book III, Doxologies; hymns 26-45, pp. 541-548 in *PH* and the Trinitarian aspect of his version of the Psalms in *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Applied to the Christian state and worship* (1719).

[30] George Burnap, *Popular Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered and Answered*, 5th edn (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Company, 1855) p. 166.

register well below the genteel poetry of domesticity issued by many of her contemporaries, and so her hymnic poems have more in common with the antebellum hymnist Phoebe Brown, than with the poems of contemporaries such as Alice and Phoebe Cary. This point is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The resonance of Watts's hymns in Dickinson's poetry is something upon which critics have agreed and it can be registered stylistically in the following: her use of common hymnic metre (4-3, 4-3); imperfect rhymes; compacted stanzas 'containing' the metaphor; harsh or abrasive register of language; 'simple' language combined with puzzling syntax; and the tension which exists in both Watts's hymns and Dickinson's poems, between abstractions and material things. Wendy Martin (1984) offers an informative illustration of her transformation of the rigid 4-3 4-3 hymnic common metre into 'slant rhymes, lively rhythms and colloquial language,' and identifies what she sees as being Dickinson's 'mocking' of the 'rigid regularity' and 'pious certainty' in Watts's hymns.[31] In contrast, Christanne Miller's section on the hymns of Isaac Watts in *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* (1987) focuses on Watts's 'loosely irregular verse':[32]

> From the Bible and from Herbert's poems and Browne's prose, Dickinson would be familiar with tersely conjunctive syntax, sentences that progress asymmetrically or through apposition and paradox, and paradoxical or cryptically metaphorical rather than extended logical developments of an idea. Closer to home, the psalms and hymns of Isaac Watts, as familiar to many New Englanders as the Bible itself, offered her these same characteristics in a meter she adopted for almost all her poems.
>
> (Miller, p. 141.)

The connection Miller makes between the irregular characteristics she identifies in other poets as well as Watts's hymns is somewhat misleading as it understates the widely held expectations of hymns, that they should be both 'consistent in theme' and 'progressive in the development of ideas.'[33] However, the comparative analysis of Watts's hymn ('And must my body faint and die? / And must this soul remove? / O, for some guardian angel nigh, / To bear it safe above!) and Dickinson's poem ('That

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[31] Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) pp. 138-9

[32] Christanne Miller, *Emily Dickinson; A Poet's Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) pp. 141-143.

[33] Defnition cited in Chapter One, p. 65. Francis O'Gorman, ed., *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, p. 566.

after Horror – that 'twas us,' Fr 243) provides useful insights into the influence that Watts provided for Dickinson, not merely, as other critics have argued, as a patriarchal figure whose modes she could reject and rebel against, but somewhat more crucially, for the ways in which his verse provided her with an example for the breaking of grammatical rules, rules of prosody, and also rules of taste, both literary and religious. She concentrates on Watts's 'harsh sounding phrases' and argues that when placed alongside his verse, Dickinson's own loose rhymes and cryptic metaphors seem 'less unusual'. (Miller, p. 142.)

Miller's discussion of the American Plain Style is useful as it demonstrates how the authority invested in the speaker could also allow room for deviance against God, and was therefore a potentially deviant space in writing:

> Thus the plain style frequently underplays its own importance and seriousness; even when it most anarchically expresses the perception of the individual, it maintains the guise of saying little, and that only matter-of-factly...Through reticence, indirection, and disguised claims for the authority of her word, Dickinson manipulates characteristics of the plain use of language in poetry that contradict Puritan convictions about the individual's relation to God and His Word. The style that affirms God's truth for the Puritans, and denies that God's power is the only good (while still celebrating it) for Thoreau, becomes ironic with Dickinson: while appearing to affirm or naively question, she denies the trustworthiness of any superhuman power. [34]

Miller acknowledges such influences on Dickinson's poetry and goes on to make convincing connections between Dickinson's various grammatical 'deviations' and twentieth-century feminist theories of language which espouse the negotiation of phallocentric, patriarchal language, as in the work of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous.[35] However, in this crucial section of her book Miller does not offer any supporting historical/cultural context for Watts, as a Dissenter, nor does she consider the effect this may have had upon Dickinson's representation of relation to the divine.

In her illuminating essay 'Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts' (1988) Shira Wolosky argues that Dickinson's interaction

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[34] Ibid, pp. 144-145. Miller cites Perry Miller 'An American Language,' in *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967) pp. 208-240 in her discussion of American Plain Style.

[35] Ibid, pp.160-186. See particularly pp. 182-183.

with Watts's work goes beyond the 'formal conventions' of metre, rhyme, punctuation, grammar and images. She observes that Dickinson 'manipulates unique phrases, openings, and idioms' found in Watts's hymns, and provides five comparative examples.[36] However, this essay also fails to offer a rigorous analysis of the cultural contexts of Watts's hymns and the different modes and purposes for which they were written. As a result, Wolosky's treatment of Watts omits the material basis necessary to demonstrate exactly how Dickinson's interest in Watts might go beyond such formal concerns. (Wolosky, p. 232.) She writes that Dickinson's intention to subvert the doctrinal assertions in Watts with the use of hymnal modes and tropes is not straightforward in its execution, and that Dickinson's use of Watts is therefore problematic. Wolosky includes various examples of such 'modes and tropes,' such as Dickinson's challenging use of synecdoche (where whole is substituted for part or vice versa) which, she argues, Dickinson disassociates from its doctrinal framework of symbolising a part and whole in co-existence, that is to say, the individual and God as being inseparable, and attaining 'wholeness' through death. She cites Dickinson's poem, 'The whole of it came not at once-/'Twas murder by degrees' (Fr485) and states that:

> The inability of the synecdoche to contain two distinct orders that clash rather than affirming each other emerges fully when Dickinson, obscuring the trope's theological context, treats only its figural pattern. The poem replicates the pattern implicit in the Wattsian figure of life as a pilgrimage to the next world: whole is balanced against part and attainment against the stages of its progress; wholeness is equated with death.
>
> (Wolosky, pp. 227-228.)

In contrast with previous treatments of the influence of Watts's hymns that Dickinson's poetry contains, Wolosky's uncertainty about Dickinson's apparent subversion of Watts can be taken much further. As this chapter will demonstrate, Dickinson's poems bear not only a subversion of Watts's hymns but also an alignment with the modes of the Nonconformist Dissenting tradition within which he wrote.

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[36] Shira Wolosky, 'Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts', *New England Quarterly* 61 (1988) 214-232 (pp. 216-7.) Watts's hymns cited by book and hymn number as they appear in *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1832) and Dickinson's poems by the Thomas H Johnson edition poem number, respectively: 2:77 & 1297, 2:116 & 1712, 2:122 & 370, 2:158 & 1491 and 2:53 & 1021.

Martha Winburn England (1966) argues that Dickinson's relation to Watts's hymnody was always to her an example of 'how she never would write,' and asserts that:

> Her statements on instructing children in uglification and derision are more impassioned than Alice's parodies of Watts's moralizing. It was 1862 when Alice's more sympathetic logician took her boating and silenced Watts's Busy Bee and laid out his Sluggard for his final repose. Emily Dickinson had been trying since 1850 to perform these last rites.[37]

England sees Dickinson as persistently rebelling against Watts's 'instructive' moralism as epitomised by his 'How doth the busy bee,' which became immortalised in the nineteenth century, as Lewis Carroll's use of it indicates. Significantly, England identifies the bee (along with her recurring consideration of the figure of Moses) as an image which Dickinson uses in order to parody Watts directly, and cites her 'Valentine' poem as the first example among a further many, for which she provides a list of poem numbers as they appear in Johnson's collection.[38] The scope of this image in Dickinson's poetry indicates the extent of her series of challenges towards Watts's Puritan views. However, England's view of Dickinson's relation to Watts is informed ultimately by her view of Puritans:

> She was a Puritan with a Puritan's attitude toward the Establishment, which is by definition a desire to purify it and recall it to the right ways. In her life, Watts had pre-empted control of the Establishment, and she saw a great deal that seemed wrong with Watts.[39]

England's account of Dickinson's estimation of Watts might be less accurate than was first thought. There is much in Watts that Dickinson could have taken seriously, and his position as a Puritan was not necessarily one always in combative relation to the Establishment, as England describes. England ultimately sees Dickinson as 'referring

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[37] Martha Winburn England, and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers*, p. 120.
[38] Ibid., pp. 122-123. England cites poem Fr 2 which contains the line from Watts 'How Doth the Busy Bee,' and lists another 23 instances of bees in Dickinson's poems, together with some of their different modes as they appear on different occasions, 'seducers, traitors, buccaneers.'
[39] Ibid, p. 120.

to his [Watts's] uprightness to define her angle of variation,'[40] and this 'uprightness' is connected for England with Watts's Puritanism. However, if by 'establishment,' we encompass traditional or normative literary and religious expressions of devotion, then Watts provided Dickinson with much scope for learning not only the art of 'sinking' language, and of parody, but also of autonomy and choice in relation to the 'establishment.'

Through a Glass, Darkly: Representation and Obstruction of the Divine in Watts and Dickinson

One way in which a speaker's relation to the divine is presented in Watts's hymns is through the use of imagery connected with sight. Watts's hymns convey a subjectivity that involves not only ability to perceive the divine but also that which 'obstructs' a view of it, thus reflecting the new subjectivity in hymns during the eighteenth century, whilst simultaneously articulating a Dissenter's attitude towards the formalities of Anglican worship.[41] During Dickinson's lifetime, not only Watts's hymns, but also his philosophical and theological prose pieces led to his name being almost synonymous with harsh Puritan doctrine and clear definitions of heaven and hell, as depicted in Watts's *The World to Come* (1738). In 'Discourse twelve – The Nature of the Punishments in Hell,' Watts takes for his inspiration the scriptural passage from Mark 9:46 'where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched,' which is reproduced at the beginning of the section.[42] He writes:

> There will also be raging desires of ease and pleasure which shall never be satisfied, together with perpetual disappointment and endless confusion thrown upon all their schemes and their efforts of hope... But if we should suppose these sensualities die together with the body, yet this is certain, the soul will have everlasting appetites of its own, i.e. the general desire of ease and happiness, and of some satisfying good; but God, who is the only true source of happiness to spirits, the only satisfying portion of souls, is forever departed

[40] Ibid, p. 121.
[41] As discussed earlier, see Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690*-1900, p. 100 and p. 20.
[42] Isaac Watts, *The World to Come: Or Discourses on the Joys or Sorrows of Departed Souls at Death and the Glory or Terror of the Resurrection to which is Prefixed an Essay toward the Proof of a Separate State of Souls after Death* (1738) (London: Richard Evans and (Edinburgh: John Bourne) 1814) p. 294.

> and gone; and thus the natural appetite for felicity will be ever wakeful and violent in damned spirits, while every attempt or hope to satisfy it will meet with perpetual disappointment.
> (*The World to Come*, pp. 305-306.)

Watts outlines a clear religious vision which is conceived in terms of a series of binaries; good/evil, body/soul, hope/disappointment, salvation/damnation. Ultimately, this description attempts to describe, not only a path towards God, but also the nature of God. Getting to God for Watts involves a series of choices between opposites, and this vision is clearly defined in each of his works, whether psalm, hymn, devotional poetry or prose. However, despite this sense of clarity in the way to achieve/perceive God, many of Watts's hymns describe the speaker's frustration at not being able to view God completely, invoking the Pauline image of obscured light in Corinthians 13.12, 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even also as I am known'. Although this conveys the separation of humanity from God, which is bound by mortality and corruptible physicality, Watts's complaint can also be seen in terms of the general feeling of resentment by Puritan Dissenters towards the Anglican Church and rituals that intervene between God and man and interrupt direct communication. Erikson observes:

> As a Christian, he [the Puritan] longed for an intimate experience of grace, a chance to touch and be touched by God directly [...]. He saw the ritual and ornamentation of the Church service as so much foliage obstructing his view of God, the intricate hierarchy of the organized Church as little more than an elaborate filter through which his expressions of piety had to be restrained. To the extent that he had any policies at all, then, the Puritan wanted to restore the church to the simplicity it had known in the days of the Apostles: he wanted to choose his own words in prayer, to worship in a plain setting, to scrape away the decorations and insignia, the rules and formulae, which had formed like a crust over the primitive core of Christianity.[43]

Watts makes many attempts to articulate the Puritan desire for unmediated relation with God through Pauline imagery favoured in Puritan aesthetics. However, there is

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[43] Kai. T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966) p. 47.

almost always a tension in his hymns between the need to lament a partial view of God and the desire for the knowledge of grace, and sight of heaven expressed in his didactic rational discussions about God and Christian life set out in his prose. Being able to 'see' the outcome of the spiritual pilgrimage, having hope in reaching Paradise is what defines faith, and is central to many of Watts's hymns, as is the imagery of the biblical book of Exodus, as White (1964) observes.[44] The most famous example is 'There is a Land of Pure Delight,' which recounts Moses' view of Canaan from Mount Nebo before his death, as found in Deuteronomy 34.1-12:

> There is a land of pure delight,
> Where saints immortal reign,
> Infinite day excludes the night,
> And pleasures banish pain.
> [....]
> O! Could we make our doubts remove,
> Those gloomy doubts that rise,
> And see the Canaan that we love
> With unbeclouded eyes!
>
> Could we but climb where Moses stood,
> And view the landscape o'er,
> Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
> Should fright us from the shore. (*HSS*, II, 66:449)[45]

For Watts, Moses represents hope in reaching the promised land, the spiritual landscape of heaven which, despite not reaching it in earthly terms, awaits Moses. Moses is invokes in this hymn as inspiration for living in hope, despite the 'gloomy doubts' which arise to challenge faith. However, in her treatment of the same biblical narrative in the poem below (Moses, and this scene, is alluded to again in Fr 179, Fr 1271 and as 'old Moses' in Fr 1342) Dickinson focuses on the knowledge of never attaining that hope. She portrays God's treatment of Moses (in showing him the promised land but then not allowing him to reach Canaan) as being in the manner of a childish contest in which 'boy should deal with lesser boy':

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[44] L. E. White, *The Imagery of the Hymns of Isaac Watts* (Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1964) pp. 90-109.

[45] Isaac Watts, 'A Prospect of Heaven Makes Death Easy,' Hymn no. 66. in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Book II,* p. 449. in *The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts* (Philadelphia: Soli Deo Publications, 1997) (Hymns and Psalms will be cited hereafter with an abbreviation of the volume [e.g. '*HSS*' or '*POD*'], book and/or hymn/psalm number, followed by page reference for the above collection ('*PH*') in which both *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) and the *Psalms of David* (1719) appear.)

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

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

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

On Moses – seemed to fasten
With tantalizing Play
As Boy – should deal with lesser Boy –
To prove ability. (Fr 521)

The idea of hope appears as a cruel affliction to mortals such as Moses in this poem, which conveys the idea that 'sight' (and the declaration of 'sight') is problematic to the enjoyment of the journey of one's life. The very idea of being able to perceive 'Canaan' is something which, in the speaker's view, undermines both God's credibility, and also that of those who purport to have 'seen'. Dickinson discredits the biblical narrative ('No Moses there can be') and likens it to a 'romance' to be mused upon in less 'sober' moments. The fixed knowledge or 'sight' of Canaan which is imparted by God but never fulfilled or attained is at odds with the meandering ecstasy which Dickinson's imagery of flight conveys in other poems.

The desire to achieve clarity of vision is repeated throughout Watts's hymns and can be seen further in the hymn 'Sight thro a glass and face to face,' which is an example of the struggle with Puritan aesthetics of opposition:

I love the Windows of thy Grace
Thro' which my Lord is seen,
And long to meet my Saviour's Face
Without a Glass between.

O that the happy Hour were come
To change my Faith to Sight!
I shall behold my Lord at Home
In a diviner Light.

Haste, my Beloved, and remove
These interposing Days,
Then shall my Passions all be Love
And all my Pow'rs be Praise. (*HSS*, II, 145:502-503)

Although the hymn bemoans an obscured vision and the obstacle of 'interposing days,' the speaker has the ability to see God through the 'windows of thy Grace' and thus claims knowledge of them in order to 'love' them. 'Interposing days' expresses the distance between God and the speaker which mortality has imposed, but also alludes to the obscuring effect of the interposing objects ('Without a Glass between') which make worship over-complicated, such as surplices and crosses, which a Dissenter would liken to the paraphernalia of the established church. Watts's expression of a Dissenter's desire for direct communication with God, and the bemoaning of 'interposing' obstacles[46] is something that Dickinson turns into a source of inspiration.

The influence of Watts is clear when reading his hymn alongside Dickinson's famous poem 'I heard a Fly buzz when I died.' Where the 'interposing days' in Watts present themselves as an obstacle to reaching the anticipated 'Home' of love with the Lord, the interruption of the 'interposing' fly in Dickinson's poem is not only a humorous subversion of the faith and 'wholeness through death' idea expressed in Watts, but is also a welcome salvation from such 'Sight' and a refusal of such notions of 'wholeness.' She writes:

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see – (Fr 591)

The 'Windows' of faith expressed in Watts are not only unreliable in Dickinson, but when she ventures beyond the 'glass' which separates life and death, faith and heaven, she experiences only a further blindness. As the windows 'fail', an assumed

[46] The notion of 'interposing' obstacles is a dominant feature of the hymns of Elizabeth Singer-Rowe, whom Watts knew. See Madeline Forell Marshall, ed, *The Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe(1674-1737)* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press)

darkness takes over. If the speaker can't 'see' or have faith before the moment of death, then death only comes as an end to this doubting via physical impossibility rather than as a final confirmation of Heaven or God. Both pieces echo Corinthians: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." But Dickinson's take on the metaphor serves to highlight the further 'darkness' or doubt she experiences when contemplating such fullness or knowledge. Paradoxically, it is this aspect of darkness, of not seeing, which provides empowerment and an alternative, renewed vision for the speaker. Not being able to 'see to see' places her beyond the agony of being presented with a view of a promised land that is withheld, and also beyond the confining scrutiny of her own 'death-bed' behaviour that the poem parodies.[47] In reconstructing a death-bed scene ('The Eyes around – had wrung them dry -/And Breaths were gathering firm'), Dickinson does not envisage the death of her mortal body so much as she charts the death of her commitment to the restrictive trajectory of religious faith, as set out in biblical narrative and conveyed by the frequent consideration of seeing God to be found in Watts's hymns. Therefore, although the poem conveys despair at the moment of death, as the speaker in the poem experiences her sight failing in its final throes, there is also a sense in which an unexpected perception is also achieved within the poem, something that the sudden introduction of the fly's noises serves to draw attention to.

Dickinson continues the theme of spiritual sight in Fr 442 which, in opposition to Watts's lamentations, configures darkness as conducive to a prismatic spiritual vision:

> I see thee better - in the Dark –
> I do not need a Light –
> The Love of Thee – a Prism be –
> Excelling Violet –
>
> I see thee better for the Years
> That hunch themselves between –
> The Miner's Lamp – sufficient be –
> To nullify Mine –

[47] Barton Levi St. Armand considers this poem, and other Dickinson poems, in light of popular nineteenth-century literature which focus on a person's ('death-bed') behaviour, before the moment of death, as a barometer for salvation. See St. Armand, *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society*, pp. 52-58.

And in the Grave – I see Thee best –
It's little panels be
A'glow – All ruddy – with the Light
I held so high, for Thee –

What need of Day –
To Those whose Dark – hath so – surpassing Sun –
It deem it be – Continually –
At the Meridian? (Fr 442)

Dickinson's view of mortality, that is, of the distance which separates her from 'Thee' is one which sustains and indeed facilitates the best 'sight.' The 'interposing days' which obstructed the speaker's view of the divine in Watts's hymn are in this poem depicted as years which 'hunch themselves' within the dark passage of time, between the speaker and the light of knowledge of the divine. In other words, like the unsaying in mystical discourse, the darkness, and unknowing illuminates the creative impetus of Dickinson's poetical/spiritual trajectory. So, although obscured vision in Watts is a trope for the Dissenter's relation to the church, and Dickinson's poems exploit this as a mode of dissent also, Dickinson's poems frequently disrupt the teleological process of reading hymn narratives such as those in Watts by reconfiguring obscured (or absence of) vision, paradoxically, as sight.

Watts uses imagery of obscured vision to bemoan the distance and obstruction the speaker senses between the 'I' and God (which can be associated with his position as a Dissenter) but he also, simultaneously, conveys sight of the divine with ease and confidence. In looking at Dickinson's poem 'Before I got my Eye put out' alongside his famous hymn 'When I survey the wondrous Cross,' we can see the way in which she critiques the comparatively easy act of 'surveying' Christ's suffering as promoted in Puritan ideology and conveyed in Watts's hymn, and at the same time, also undercuts the intensity of vision available to the poet. She paraphrases the final verse in Watts's hymn in order to rework the notion of spiritual devotion, and expresses the process in immediately provocative terms:

But were it told to me, Today,
That I might have the Sky
For mine, I tell you that my Heart
Would split, for size of me – (Fr 336)

The implication here being that it is impossible to achieve a comprehensive perception of God, represented in this poem by the sun. Moreover, she maintains that the gift of such 'vision' would be ultimately fatal; 'The News would strike me dead.' Paradoxically the 'Good News' becomes something to fear, as Dickinson brings into question the validity of those who claim to have such 'vision.'

Dickinson's memory of this particular hymn from her school days is interesting as it conveys her early inclination to the idea of writing. She wrote to Elizabeth Holland in 1877, saying, 'How precious thought and speech are! "A present so divine," was in a Hymn they used to sing when I went to Church.' Benjamin Lease's observation of what he calls Dickinson's 'inaccurate' recollection of a line from Watts's 'When I survey the wondrous cross' is interesting, because he fails to notice that her 'apparent' blunder (in Watts, emphasis is placed upon '*Love* so amazing, so divine' as opposed to the 'present' which is, for him, the natural world) provides us with a clue to the sentiments expressed in Dickinson's poem. (*RMB*, p. 51.) Dickinson's substitution of 'a *present* so divine' when discussing thought and speech is in fact not a blunder at all, but reveals a conscious association between the life of a poet and the idea of a divine gift. Her comment not only categorises the experience of the poet as being as a divine gift, with the ability to use language ('thought and speech') freely, but it also conveys that the idea of a 'divine gift' was the overall impression she had gleaned from her earlier reading and experience of the hymn. Dickinson's response to the hymn's final stanza, which claims, 'Love so amazing, so divine/ Demands my Soul, my Life, my All' is to become the poet who gives her 'All' in verse. Her 'All' in this case being to 'hammer out' her continuing dialogical response to the Word of religious orthodoxy which, paradoxically, never achieves the entirety or elusive 'circumference' which her own vision and poetic process constantly chase. This poem's association of spiritual awe with sunlight, or the sun's glare, carries with it the connotation of masculinity that devours, or scorches the feminine. Dickinson's concerns about restrictive ideas about gender and religious faith are frequently conflated, as her letter to her then friend and future sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, illustrates:

> How dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold, and who gathers pearls every evening; but to the wife, Susie, sometimes the wife forgotten, our

> lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world; you have seen flowers at morning, satisfied with the dew, and those same sweet flowers at noon with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun; think you these thirsty blossoms will now need naught but – dew? No, they will cry for sunlight, and pine for the burning noon, tho' it scorches them, scathes them; they have got through with peace – they know that the man of noon, is mightier than the morning and their life is henceforth to him.
>
> (June 1852, L:I, pp. 209-210.)

From this letter we can see how she equates being single with the 'shame' or degradation of being also a doubter. The masculine sun of 'noon' represents not only Christ, but also the husband, superior to his wife in the institution of marriage. There is also an equation of morning and 'dew' with femininity. Thus, 'thirst' is something she frequently associates with being separated from such feminine space as the morning dew suggests, which has not yet yielded to the conflagration and heat of the sun. Watts often uses 'thirst' with reference to sin, as for example in the following verse; 'Here consecrated water flows/To quench my thirst of sin.' (*HSS*, II, 119:487) Dickinson's allusion in this letter to the 'bride' or betrothed who 'gathers pearls every evening' also has a Wattsian tone which links the position of being married (and therefore being no longer problematic to society) with being pious or amongst those who believe. Her words remind us again of Watts's hymn:

> This is the field where hidden lies
> The pearl of price unknown;
> That merchant is divinely wise
> Who makes the pearl his own. (*HSS*, II, 119:487)

The poem 'Before I had my eye put out' begins with a pre-established mode of violence, which appears to be the speaker's reward for daring to behave as other 'creatures':

> Before I got my eye put out –
> I liked as well to see
> As other creatures, that have eyes –
> And know no other way - (Fr 336)

The gravity of the speaker's daily experience of spiritual perception is exaggerated in this poem to great dramatic effect. The notion of sight is established on two

contrasting levels of intensity: the poet's penetrating gaze which sees at once too intensely and dangerously, and the sight of the many, that is to say, the 'incautious' creatures, whose weaker vision leads them to no apparent harm. Typically, Dickinson fuses the act of spiritual reflection with physical experience in order to highlight how worldly existence is a fundamental pre-requisite to any kind of enlightenment, perhaps going against the Enlightenment based idea of 'sight' and reason evident in Watts.

Watts uses the word 'Creatures' frequently to describe the baser elements of humanity's disposition, which need to be transformed and redeemed through spiritual union with Christ, but the separation between the speaker and the other creatures in this poem is uneasy. The apparently objective, reflective speaker of the poem who, we are told, remains outside the scene ('upon the window pane') is not capable of sustaining the aloof objectivity from the intensity with which she is faced: at the end of the poem she is resigned to align her soul (in keeping with Watts's 'my soul, my life, my all') with the locus of spiritual intensity which the sun represents. In contrast with the difficult and even violent intensity of sight in Dickinson's poem, the sight in 'When I survey the wondrous cross' comes easily and readily to the speaker, who is able to gain, simultaneously, an objective distance from the scene, which provides him with an almost immediate spiritual insight, and an automatically devotional stance:

> When I survey the wondrous cross
> On which the Prince of glory died,
> My richest gain I count but loss,
> And pour contempt on all my pride.
>
> Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
> Save in the death of Christ my God;
> All the vain things that charm me most,
> I sacrifice them to his blood. (*HSS*, III, 7:525-526)

The hymn illustrates the point made in Galatians 6:14 that we should always remember the suffering of Christ: 'But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' Dickinson utilises this hymn in order to critique of the religious 'boasting' and the Puritan's seemingly 'easy' relationship with God that she perceives in her own

popular religious culture. The notion of the 'gift' of salvation is central to her poem and is a direct response to the final stanza in the Watts hymn:

> Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine
> Demands my soul, my life, my all. (*HSS*, III, 7:526)

Dickinson repeats 'mine' in order to reinforce her sense of incredulity that she cannot even begin to conceptualise the vastness that the 'realm of nature' implies with a superficial simplicity in Watts, let alone attempt to understand how she could be an integral part, as measured against nature's infinite scale:

> The Meadows – mine –
> The Mountains – mine –
> All Forests – Stintless Stars –
> As much of Noon as I could take
> Between my finite eyes

To look at the 'gift' of the world in all its awe is for her a painful prospect, and she contemplates each aspect part by part, just as Watts surveys the fragmented body of Christ: 'See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet/Sorrow and Love flow mingled down.'

The essential paradox of 'Before I got my eye put out' is that Dickinson, on the one hand, seems to be attacking the ease with which spiritual vision is achieved in Watts, and the orthodox Christian view of salvation that his hymns serve to reinforce. And yet on the other hand, the poem's final stanza, where the speaker places 'just' her soul (her 'life,' and her 'all') upon the window pane, re-enacts and reaffirms the essentially devotional mode at the end of the Watts hymn. She writes:

> So safer – guess – with just my soul
> Upon the Window pane –
> Where other Creatures put their eyes –
> Incautious – of the Sun –

Where others offer only a part ('eyes') of their physical selves, Dickinson *is* prepared to offer her soul, perhaps to writing (the effect of 'just' serves to underscore the speaker's sense of incompatibility with the souls Watts would want to be saved) but

isn't prepared to declare that she has achieved an absolute vision or knowledge of immortality. Echoing the demand for 'my all' in 'When I survey the wondrous cross,' it is precisely because of the expansive nature her consciousness and power of perception that she cannot offer less, or the 'Present far too small.' Dickinson's mode of devotion is to describe (albeit from the objective distance behind the 'Window pane' that the role of the poet affords her) her own vision of Paradise which, for her, can only be apprehended in the now, 'outside' of that vision.

Given that Watts chooses to highlight the Bible's caution of vain boasting in this hymn: 'Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast/Save in the death of Christ my God,' it is interesting that Dickinson should choose this particular poem to underline her self-characterisation as being different from other 'Creatures' (that distinctly Wattsian phrase) who 'know no other way.' The notion of sight is crucial to ideas about faith in Dickinson's nineteenth century religious culture, as community-based worship placed a person's relationship with God in public view. Dickinson is eager to criticise the many who achieve respectability through being seen, and having their religiosity perceived by others, but in doing so, projects a certain amount of superiority from her own position.

Ultimately, the poem seems to be another version of the sight prescribed in Watts's hymns. What might appear to be at first a critique of religious boasting and the Puritan's seemingly easy relationship with God, actually reinscribes a religious or spiritual awe. What is more, Dickinson seems to adopt what is essentially a defense of such boasting in Watts (where the hymn's second verse forbids all boasting *'save'* in the death of Christ my God) as an acknowledgement of the unrestricted license to describe one's mode of devotion which Dickinson's poem undoubtedly enacts. However, the awe in Dickinson's poem is arrived at by a process of engaging with the ideas of spiritual enlightenment or 'sight' conveyed in Watts's hymn and traditional religious doctrine. The process of re-simplifying spiritual experience is necessary to Dickinson in order to describe what is essentially a journey of (self-)discovery, and the assessment of possibilities within it.

The tension between obstructed vision and of seeing the divine is something that dominates Watts's hymns, but the claim to spiritual vision in the hymn 'My thoughts surmount these lower skies' is typical of the confidence in salvation his work displays:

My thoughts surmount these lower skies,
And look within the veil;
There springs of endless pleasure rise,
The waters never fail.

There I behold, with sweet delight,
The blessed Three in One;
And strong affectations fix my sight
On God's incarnate Son.

His promise stands forever firm,
His grace shall ne'er depart;
He binds my name upon his arm
And seals it on his heart.

Light are the pains that nature brings;
How short our sorrows are,
When with eternal future things
The present we compare!

I would not be a stranger still
To that celestial place,
Where I for ever hope to dwell
Near my Redeemer's face. (*HSS*, II, 162:513-514)

The ability of the speaker in Watts's hymn to achieve spiritual transcendence is conveyed in the capacity to think beyond the realm of worldly existence ('My thoughts surmount these lower skies'). The speaker's capacity for thought is the vehicle which enables him to penetrate the 'veil' of unknowing, of the mystical, surrounding the divine. Eager to achieve the ecstasy of (self-)recognition in the divine, the speaker's horizon for the divine is materialised into the 'Blessed Three in One' which is perceived within the 'springs of endless pleasure' which his mental 'sight' provides. Not only does this version of the divine recapitulate traditional Trinitarian doctrine, but it is described in a decidedly phallogocentric mode and reference of imagery.

In 'I dwell in Possibility' Dickinson locates the poetic process within the realm of the spiritual, linking poetic imagination with spiritual engagement, where access to imagination brings a renewed sense of spiritual vision. She writes:

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of Eye –
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise – (Fr 466)

This poem explicates the importance of openness, both in terms of imaginative openness to spirituality and the possibilities that a renewed vision implies, but also a more literal openness. Dickinson uses the metaphor of an open house for thinking through the space of possibilities, of letting the light in through many windows and doors, of receiving visitors and of 'spreading wide narrow Hands/ to gather Paradise.' Here Dickinson's role as poet ('occupation this') is described as 'gathering paradise,' that is gathering or capturing experience in the World. It is an act that is paradoxically dependent upon the limitations of the body, as metrical emphasis is placed upon the 'narrowness' of the hands in the penultimate line. If Dickinson's quest as a poet is to 'gather paradise,' then she relies as much as anything upon the 'narrow hands' with which she enacts it. Her interest in spiritual vision lies not in what may be recovered at the end of it, that is to say, in terms of an eternal 'truth' or 'answer' to life's questions, but rather, in the engagement with the physical world which the process of achieving it requires. The image of the Crucifixion, which the poem's final two lines evoke, implies that willed abnegation of all previously established and comparatively 'safe' modes of thinking with regard to matters spiritual; something which is necessarily required to achieve this paradise. The striking examination of detail in this poem is in stark contrast with the enlarged view of the world which Watts's hymns presents. Where the speaker in 'My thoughts surmount these lower skies' wishes to rise above the world, penetrate the 'veil' and obtain absolute vision of the divine and 'endless pleasure', Dickinson's gaze is both outward and inward and these two modes are mutually generative in the poem. The line 'Of Chambers as the Cedars/Impregnable of Eye' suggests an ideal space of multiplicity, of possibility, where the poet can possess the whole world. The cover which the many cedars together in the forest affords her resists the destructive gaze which may potentially seek the poet out, that is the phallic desire to name, which is equated here with the

comparative linearity of prose. From the vantage point of multiplicity the speaker in this poem experiences no limitations, hence what is potentially an enclosure ('Roof') becomes the limitless expanse of 'Sky'.

Although Watts claims a partial or obstructed view of the divine in some instances to articulate a Dissenter's antagonistic relation to the 'foliage'[48] of the Established church, the teleological thrust of his narratives is centred on the notion of absolute vision and knowledge. Whereas for Dickinson, to 'see darkly'[49] is ultimately a mode of revelation, as she asserts, 'Apprehensions – are God's introductions - / To be hallowed – accordingly -' (Fr 849). The ability to comprehend the divine is 'introduction' enough.

'Give Me the Wings of Faith to Rise': Poetics of Autonomy and Choice

If the articulation of obstructed sight, which also claims an unobstructed view of the divine, is held in tension in Watts's hymns, then the claim to spiritual transcendence which imagery of flight implies in his work is less ambivalent. Watts's use of wing and flight imagery conveys a Dissenter's sense of autonomy with regard to faith and a confidence in poetic expression of the divine. Biblical instances of the wing motif are common, conveying at different points the love and care of God, and the hope of human transcendence to reach God.[50] Wing imagery in Watts is something that is connected with both spiritual transcendence and autonomy with regard to asserting a subjective account of the divine. For Watts, this autonomy is connected with the linguistic and lyrical expression ('sublime flight') available to the hymn writer. Motifs of the Wattsian sublime are images such as wings, air or sky, and verbs which describe the spiritual 'sight' of the divine, or the act of experiencing commune with the divine which is described in terms connected with seeing.) John Hoyles argues that the association of spiritual flight and transcendence with reason in Watts's hymns

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[48] Erikson's term, as cited earlier, on p. 32. See Kai. T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, p. 47.

[49] As cited earlier. *Holy Bible: King James Version* p. 213. Corinthians: 13:12 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even also as I am known.'

[50] At least eight examples of the word 'wings' to connote limbs for flight, the image appears, amongst other places, in Exodus 19:4, Proverbs 23:5 and Isaiah 40:31, and especially in Psalms; 36:7, 55:6, 139:9. *The Holy Bible in the King James Version* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1972) p. 115

serves to connect the 'sublime' with Enlightenment philosophy of his age that championed reason as the route to real wisdom and spiritual transcendence:

> Watts's adaptation of the Hermetic tradition was influential. It made available to a wider public a Christianised neoplatonism, shorn of its cosmic intricacies, refined out of its Metaphysical framework, and capable of carrying a stereotyped form of lyrical piety, which lingered on in the effusions of the Victorian hymn-writers.[51]

The wing motif is something that appears frequently in Watts's hymns, as well as in many other hymns, and Hoyles identifies it as something which most clearly highlights his adaptation of the Hermetic tradition and appeared as early as 1694 in a tribute to Casimire.[52] However, Watts cannot be seen himself as hermetic or mystical as he draws from the tradition poetics of sublimity without any commitment to the ideas of man being made in the image of the 'kosmos', but, as Hoyles notes, 'only in so far as he wants to 'grow wings and soar into the air.''[53] As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the wing motif is frequently employed by nineteenth-century American women hymnists and Dickinson's use of the motif signals an engagement with this tradition, which the wide use and availability of Watts's hymns during this period undoubtedly helped to make prominent.

One of the most striking biblical examples of wing imagery is in psalm fifty-five, which, like many of the psalms, is addressed 'to the chief musician, on strings, for instruction':

> Give ear to my prayer, O God;
> and hide not thyself from my
> supplication.
> [...]
> My heart is sore and pained
> within me: and the terrors of death
> are fallen upon me.
> [...]
> And I said, Oh that I had
> wings like a dove! for then
> would I fly away, and be at rest.

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[51] John Hoyles, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1640-1740: Studies in the Thought and Poetry of Henry More, John Norris and Isaac* Watts, p. 205

[52] Ibid, p. 204.

[53] Ibid, p. 204. Hoyles quotes both Libellus X, *Hermetica*, V, 5 and also a poetic tribute to Casimire in latin by Watts.

Lo, then would I wander far
off, and remain in the wilderness.
Se'lah.
I would hasten my escape from
the windy storm and tempest. (Psalm 55, 1,4,6-8.)[54]

The psalmist prays for wings as an escape route into 'the wilderness,' away from the pain and terror inflicted upon him by deceitful friends. He does not ask to be alongside God, but simply that God hear his pain and desire to be away from the violent city dwellers, and above all to be 'at rest.' However, Watts's version of this psalm emphasises the speaker's disposition and ability as a vessel to transmit sound:

With inward pain my heart-strings sound,
I groan with ev'ry breath;
Horror and fear beset me round
Amongst the shades of death.

O were I like a feather'd dove,
And innocence had wings,
I'd fly, and make a long remove
From all these restless things.

Let me to some wild desert go,
And find a peaceful home;
Where storms of malice never blow,
Temptations never come. (*POD*, 55:99)

Watts's version emphasises the speaker's ability to articulate himself to God, and also the speaker's remarkable self-reflexivity and esteem; if 'innocence had wings.' Moreover, the Bible version's 'wandering' in the 'wilderness' is here more clearly defined and is domesticated into Watts's own vision of a 'peaceful home'. Watts's version champions a division between the 'restless things' and himself, whereas the biblical psalm is less certain about the place of peace which is envisaged. Watts's persona as a hymn writer and his vision of peace or heaven is conveyed boldly. Such comparison with the King James version of the psalm illustrates the transmission of the wing motif into Watts's language and highlights how Watts's wing imagery serves to articulate self-reflexivity and to outline his own idea of the finite heaven/ideal space he anticipates and envisions in his hymns. As will be discussed further on, Dickinson's use of wing imagery conveys a less clearly defined journey.

[54] *The Holy Bible in the King James Version* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1972) p. 663.

Watts's use of the hymn form serves to re-emphasise the linear structure he writes within, that is, within the framework of Protestant theology and a commitment to reason. Both Protestant theology and Enlightenment championing of reason imbue Watts's hymns and moral verse with a didacticism which Dickinson found cause to parody. The speaker's conceptualisation of God in Watts's hymns is necessarily unambiguous – knowledge about the presence of God is asserted and there is a clear upward movement in the speaker's articulation of himself towards God. The presence of wings in Watts's hymns signals the speaker's ability to achieve spiritual transcendence and commune with the divine. The speaker's knowledge of God confirms the ability to 'rise' and reason's part in such transcendence is rendered inconsequential as the all-consuming force of God's presence is articulated through the speaker's perception of Him.

In 1706, Watts's *Horae Lyricae, Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind* was published, comprising of three books. It signalled Watts's increasing desire to reconcile artistic, lyrical expression with devotional piety, a shift apparently inspired by the hymns and devotional verse of Elizabeth Singer Rowe, to whom a poem is dedicated, in book two of the collection.[55] Indeed, the second poem in book one of the collection, 'Asking Leave to Sing,' sets the tone for the volume by imploring 'indulgence of my tongue:'

> Yet, mighty God, indulge my tongue,
> Nor let thy thunders roar,
> Whilst the young notes and vent'rous song
> To worlds of glory soar. (*HL*, I:3)

The poem describes the relation between the divine and the poet, seeking the Muse 's wings and 'slender reed' to sustain the 'daring flight' of the linguistic artistry which enables a heaven on earth, albeit through God's grace, a 'heaven below' which is created with the pen:

> If thou my daring flight forbid
> The Muse folds up her wings;
> Or at thy word her slender reed

[55] *PW*, p. 266. Poem 'To Miss Singer (Now Mrs. Rowe)' from *Horae Lyricae*, bk II. Watts declares in the poem; 'Twas long ago I broke all but the immortal strings.' All citations for *Horae Lyricae* abbreviated hereafter as '*HL*', followed by book number and page reference for the above collection in which *HL* appears.

Attempts almighty things. (*HL*, I:3)

Watts's collection, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), which was published swiftly the following year, is also in three books. Even after the perceived shift in the focus of Watts's writing the emphasis remains on defending poetic expression. The second book in the hymnal comes with the heading 'Composed Upon Divine Subjects,' and the scope for Watts's self-reflexivity is apparently wider in this book, as what constitutes a 'divine subject' is slightly more loose than paraphrasing scripture which the first book does. Therefore, it is no surprise that the subject of wing-wearing is more frequent in this book than the other two. Watts's appeal is to see God and Christ in Heaven with the aid of wings provided by the Holy Spirit:

Descend from heav'n, immortal Dove,
Stoop down and take us on thy wings,
And mount and bear us far above
The reach of these inferior things (*HSS*, II, 23:417-418.)

The hoped for 'sight' and vision is then described in detail, as Watts is carried upon the wings of his own poetic flight:

O for a sight, a pleasing sight
Of our Almighty Father's throne!
There sits our Saviour crown'd with light,
Cloth'd in a body like our own.

Adoring saints around him stand,
And thrones and powers before him fall;
The God shines gracious through the man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all.

Oh what amazing joys they feel
While to their golden harps they sing,
And sit on ev'ry heav'nly hill,
And spread the triumphs of their King!

When shall the day, dear Lord appear,
That I shall mount to dwell above,
And stand and bow amongst them there,
And view thy face, and sing, and love ? (*HSS*, II, 23:418.)

Although Watts adds this caveat in the final stanza, of eventual transcendence which is hoped for but not yet reached, his 'sight' of heaven, and claim to transcendence, has been envisioned and achieved within the hymn. The wings appealed for in the first verse have been put on metaphorically, in order to retrieve the view of heaven and express it in verse for the communal, many singers. Watts's hymn invokes the 'I-Thou' relation and vertical reciprocity of traditional prayer in order to transcend 'inferior things' and to confer status upon his own 'vision' of heaven, which is itself a recapitulation of hierarchical structure where the 'Saviour crown'd with light' resides above his group of 'adoring saints'.[56] Wings are frequently appealed for in hymns by Watts, such as 'Give me the wings of faith to rise' which, as in 'My thoughts surmount these lower skies', the speaker desires to rise above the world and penetrate the veil which separates the divine from the speaker:

> Give me the wings of faith to rise
> Within the veil, and see
> The saints above, how great their joys,
> How bright their glories be. (*HSS*, II, 140:499-500)

Whereas the speaker in Watts's hymns desires absolute knowledge of the divine which resides above the world and represents a trajectory to follow, Dickinson uses wings to symbolise a material immanence derived from physical experience as opposed to the divine interchange between self and a knowable, perceivable God. Wing imagery is also used dramatically in the poem 'Easter Wings' by the metaphysical poet George Herbert, whom Dickinson read,[57] as a symbol of his capacity to 'rise' towards God and to become more like God through suffering: 'For, if I imp my wing on thine,/Affliction shall advance the flight in me.'[58] The poem is presented in two stanzas with lines gradually decreasing in length forming the shape of wings. Thus, the act of writing and spiritual transcendence are connected visually upon the page. Being bestowed with wings illustrates a shift from physical being to

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[56] The hierarchical structure of Watts's view of heaven is derived from St. John's view in *Revelations*, for example, Rev 4.2 'Immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.' Rev 4.4 'And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.'

[57] See *RMB*, pp. 62-65. Lease notes that Herbert's poem 'Virtue' appeared in the Dickinsons' family copy of Griswold's *Sacred Poets of England and America*. It also includes six hymns by Isaac Watts.

[58] John Tobin, ed., *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 38.

spiritual and angelic transcendence. Herbert's (and also Watts's) desire for wings is clear. However, Dickinson's use of wings differs from Watts as the speaker frequently acquires them herself, performing a self-baptism. The yearning and struggle for wings that we get in Watts is not apparent in Dickinson. In fact, wings are referred to flippantly as one of many items in a list of apparatus associated with spiritual transcendence and orthodoxy religion. Indeed, a poem by Dickinson containing an example of what Manning might categorise as exhibiting 'kindergarten expressions,'(Manning, p. 88.) is the one below, in which she uses images from the natural world around her to construct her own place of worship:

> Some keep the Sabbath going to Church
> I keep it, staying at Home –
> With a Bobolink for a Chorister –
> And an Orchard, for a Dome –
>
> Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice –
> I just wear my Wings –
> And instead of tolling the bell for Church,
> Our little Sexton – sings.
>
> God preaches, a noted Clergyman –
> And the sermon is never long,
> So instead of going to Heaven, at last –
> I'm going, all along. (Fr 236)

This poem wittily contrasts an affectation of child-like naivety against the serious paraphernalia associated with traditional forms of religious worship. Where the sound of the 'tolling bell' in the poem is elongated and sombre, the sprightly vitality of the bird's singing is placed in sharp contrast. The speaker wears wings already, signalling her apparent state of transcendence and freedom from the constraints of the surplice and the spiritual and physical restriction it represents. Such inclination to undecoration in worship echoes the Wattsian, Dissenter's distrust of obstruction, and can be seen elsewhere in Dickinson, for example; Fr 325, where 'symbols' and 'wardrobe' are 'needless' at sacrament, and Fr 328 where the ones who 'overcame' 'wear nothing commoner than Snow -/ No Ornament – but Palms -'. In these poems, true communion and victory lies in being able to overcome not only opposition and difficulty, but also the outward, worldly (artificial) ciphers of salvation and spiritual life. Where transcendence for others usually implies a deferred or anticipated state,

Dickinson's is located in the present. She states here that she believes in the journey towards salvation: 'I'm going all along,' but it is a parallel path to that which is prescribed by Puritanism, which traditionally involves the withholding of physical experience until the greater spiritual union with God is achieved through death. The path in Dickinson's poem is one that privileges the fullness of physical experience. The poem conveys with humour the individual approach to spirituality encouraged by Watts, in which it is possible for the 'noted Clergyman' (God) to preach or communicate directly with the speaker of the poem, who is able to experience 'Heaven' on a daily basis. This idea can be located in a poem from *Horae Lyricae*, where Watts states that:

> Heaven is my home, and I must use my wings;
> Sublime above the globe my flight aspires:
> I have a soul was made to pity kings,
> And all their little glitt'ring things;
> I have a soul was made for infinite desires. (*HL*, I: 50)

Where Dickinson appears to adopt Watts's autonomous view of worship by constructing her own place in the world and in poetry for spiritual reflection, equally, she also remains sceptical about any achievable mystical transcendence. Transcendence for Dickinson means rising above what is accepted or defined as a given truth, that is to say, it means remaining open to possibilities in ways of thinking. Dickinson could find readily in Watts this equation of wing wearing with spiritual transcendence, and also with poetic expression. However, as the previous chapter explored in connection with definitions of mysticism and alternative metaphors for the divine, immanent relationality places any achievable transcendence within the context of worldly experience. Dickinson's use of wing imagery signals bodily, material immanence rather than Wattsian spiritual flight with an implicit telos.[59] As will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five, Dickinson's use of bee imagery connotes a diverse relationality, thus making connection between poetry and industry, industry and revery, more explicit.

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[59] S.P Rosenbaum's concordance to Dickinson's poems shows that Dicknson used 'wing(s)' or 'winged' more frequently than 'flight,' further highlighting the poet's emphasis on the physicality of spiritual experience. See S. P. Rosenbaum, ed., *A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1964) each entry is presented alphabetically.

Reflection upon the nature of writing hymns is something that Watts frequently makes explicit. His vocation (and skill) as a hymn writer is inferred in many hymns, thus connecting the work of the hymnist with the Protestant work ethic. Whilst warning against idle pursuit and of 'vain boasting,' Watts's often considers the nature and quality of his particular skill, and paradoxically reproduces a version of such boasting within the hymn itself that exacts self-validation. Moreover, the hymn below conveys a form of self-consecration where, despite the appeal to God, the speaker chooses to dedicate his life to God through writing, and the conversion is measured in terms of the speaker's response to different types of music/writing:

> Mine ears are rais'd when Virgil sings
> Sicilian swains, or Trojan kings,
> And drink the music in;
> Why should the trumpet's brazen voice,
> Or oaten reed, awake my joys,
> And yet my heart so stupid lie when sacred
> hymns begin?
>
> Change me, O God; my flesh shall be
> An instrument of song to thee,
> And thou the notes inspire;
> My tongue shall keep the heavenly chime,
> My cheerful pulse shall beat the time,
> And sweet variety of sound shall in thy praise
> conspire.
>
> The dearest nerve about my heart,
> Should it refuse to bear a part
> With my melodious breath,
> I'd tear away the vital chord,
> A bloody victim to my Lord,
> And live without that impious string, or show my
> zeal in death. (*HL*, I: 11-12)

Self-consecration comes at the point of the speaker's decision to reconcile the uneasy division between the joyous response to the fruits of his Classical learning and the comparatively less stimulating experience of singing and hearing hymns. As found typically in Watts's verse, the speaker's responses to the music are described in bodily terms ('ears,' 'flesh,' 'awaken' and 'lie'). This emphasis on the physical aspect of spiritual experience is something which demonstrates Watts's commitment to a simple and easily understood language for the wide usage of his hymns, but it also

lends itself to readings which cannot accommodate the awkward adjacency between piety and graphic imagery, such as the bloody tearing out of heart strings in the final stanza, making the 'sublime ridiculous' (Manning, p. 88.), slapstick, even. Watts's use of language serves his desire to make hymns easily accessible, but it also conveys his autonomy with regard to devotional language. It is this autonomy that gave Dickinson the freedom to be critical of the principally organising structures. Such autonomy and choice can be seen in poems where she self-baptises, in relation to her status and position, from child or 'wife' to the singular, self-defined poet (such as Fr 194 'Title divine, is mine/ The Wife without the Sign -' and Fr 353 'I'm ceded – I've stopped being Their's'). The poem below, which is about a bird's initial experience of taking flight, can also be read as the experience of a spiritual journey which is self-generated. Invoking wings (again) ('feathers') this time Dickinson highlights the element of risk that such a journey of becoming involves:

> She staked her Feathers – Gained an Arc –
> Debated – Rose again –
> This time – beyond the estimate
> Of Envy, or of Men –
>
> And now, among Circumference –
> Her steady Boat be seen –
> At home – among the Billows – As
> The Bough where she was born - (Fr 853)

Dickinson's pun on 'arc' alludes to the journey of faith that led Noah to safe ground and spiritual fulfilment but also the arc or trajectory of flight which the bird gains by risking losing her feathers and her life if the attempt at flight is unsuccessful. The willingness to lose that which we have and see ('feathers') for something we cannot see, but which is ultimately more fulfilling (flight, and a place in omnificent 'circumference') is of course a metaphor for religious faith. However, remembering the explicit connection Dickinson makes between 'Circumference' and her 'business' of poetry,[60] the bird's object of being 'at home among the billows' (shifting the metaphor from air to water) echoes the confidence in poetry displayed by Watts's wing-wearing speaker; 'Heaven is my home, and I must use my wings;/ Sublime above the globe my flight aspires.' (*HL*, I:50) However, whereas the object conveyed

[60] As cited in Chapter One. July 1862, to T. W. Higginson: 'Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that – My Business is Circumference - '. (SL, p. 176.)

in Watts is to achieve spiritual transcendence, which is communicated through the writing of hymns, this poem describes the process of achieving selfhood Dickinson experiences through the vehicle ('steady Boat') of writing. In this way, Dickinson's poem invokes the woman poet's experience, perhaps specifically that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom she admired. Whereas Watts claims spiritual transcendence and vision, Dickinson observes and negotiates that which defines, constrains and 'estimates' her claim to herself and of 'circumference,' which is itself 'beyond the estimate/ Of Envy, or of Men -'.

'"Hope" is the thing with Feathers': Transcending the Word

Although Watts is confident of the 'sublime flight' and degree of creative autonomy which his poetics allow, he also derives comfort from the Bible, and in the hymn below, locates his spiritual enlightenment precisely within the 'written word' of the Holy Scriptures:

Laden with guilt, and full of fears,
I fly to thee, my Lord,
And not a glimpse of hope appears
But in thy written word.

The volume of my Father's grace
Does all my griefs assuage;
Here I behold my Saviour's face
Almost in ev'ry page.

This is the field where hidden lies
The pearl of price unknown;
That merchant is divinely wise
Who makes the pearl his own.

Here consecrated water flows
To quench my thirst of sin;
Here the fair tree of knowledge grows,
Nor danger dwells therein.

This is the Judge that ends the strife
Where wit and reason fail,
My guide to everlasting life
Through all this gloomy vale.

O may thy counsels, mighty God,

My roving feet command;
Nor I forsake the happy road
That leads to thy right hand. (*HSS*, II, 119:487)

Moreover, the reflection produced by the 'volume' of Scripture is described in plain, physical terms, where the 'Saviour's face' is perceived by the speaker 'Almost in ev'ry page.' The spiritual sight which is conveyed in this hymn is seemingly uncomplicated by doubt, interruption or opposition, in contrast with the frequent tendency to avoid assertions of complete vision/knowledge in Dickinson's poems. And yet, on closer inspection the speaker's confidence is never fully attained. 'Glimpse' of the first verse and 'almost' in the second do not articulate the absolute vision that the hymn is at pains to portray. Watts attempts to correlate the written word of the Holy Scriptures with 'knowledge' in the fourth verse, which is distinct from the 'wit and reason' which 'fail' in the fifth verse. In direct contrast to this hymn we can see that Dickinson uses the same common hymnic metre to write about her experience of the Bible, and how little it provides her with the 'guide to everlasting life' proclaimed in Watts's hymn. In contrast with Watts, the 'antique volume' cannot account for the speaker's sense of spirituality, nor provide a mimetic moment or horizon for the speaker that the frequent evangelical revivals in Amherst were supposed to encourage. She declares:

The Bible is an antique Volume –
Written by faded Men
At the suggestion of Holy Spectres –
Subjects – Bethlehem –
Eden – the ancient Homestead –
Satan – the Brigadier –
Judas – the Great Defaulter –
David – the Troubadour –
Sin – a distinguished Precipice
Others must resist –
Boys that "believe" are very lonesome –
Other Boys are "lost" –
Had but the Tale a warbling Teller –
All the Boys would come –
Orpheus' Sermon captivated –
It did not condemn - (Fr 1577)

Dickinson comically portrays biblical stories as 'tales' with characters and settings associated with 'civilised' notions of rank ('Brigadier' and 'Homestead') but also

from literary history involving notions of courtly or 'civilised' behaviour ('Troubadour') which might be found in other kinds of 'antique volumes.' She seems to be saying here that spirituality itself has become 'civilised' and the interpretations of the bible given in sermons has such an effect that does not 'captivate' in the same way that poetry can. The invocation of Orpheus places emphasis upon lyrical art, and is also placed in contrast to 'men' who wish to use religious dogma in order to 'condemn' others. The story of the bible and of spiritual experience is decidedly gendered in this poem, as it is 'boys' who are either 'lost' or 'lonely' in their relation to belief. The alternative to such a method of interpretation is offered at the end of the poem, in terms of there being not only a lyrical art to interpreting scripture, but also a preferred method of articulation in 'warbling.' The word 'warbling' here is significant in that it suggests the bird imagery which Dickinson often invokes when writing about worship (as we have seen above, pp. 45-49, for example, in poems Fr 236 and Fr 853) and it also carries with it connotations of the female singer.[61] In contrast to the assertion in the first stanza of the hymn by Watts above, where 'not a glimpse of hope appears/But in thy written word,' the Dickinson poem below conveys a new version of hope which is distinct from the written biblical text, and is the 'the tune without the words':

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I've heard it in the chillest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me. (Fr 314)

[61] For discussion of the connection between bird imagery and women poets, see Cheryl Walker, *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture Before 1900*, p. 15 and pp. 21-2. Walker explains the transmission of the Philomela story into nineteenth-century culture as the nightingale, the sister (Philomela) who was raped by her brother-in-law Tereus, had her tongue cut out, but conveyed the crime in tapestry to her sister. Elizabeth Singer Rowe frequently employs the image of Philomela (also her pen name) to invoke the singer in her hymns, see Madeline Forell Marshall, ed., *The Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737)*.

This poem conveys the ideal of Christian hope and the comfort it gives. The bird is a metaphor for the hope of salvation that 'kept so many warm'; always reliable to call upon; silent and perching. However, the use of the past tense in the second and third stanza ('kept' and 'heard') and the plodding metre of the poem invites a parody of such meekness and virtue. Moreover, whilst (in the past) offering altruism and comfort, this feathered version of hope, perching in the soul, does not require any thought or participation; 'never, in Extremity,/ It asked a crumb – of Me.' But the silent and enduring 'hope' also represents the point at which the division between 'I' and 'Thou' is collapsed; the angelic 'thing' with 'feathers' is within 'Me' which provides spiritual sustenance and is self-generating. Despite the fact that 'hope' is described as that which 'perches' it is ultimately another form of Dickinson's non-static metaphors, a poetics of flight; it is anticipatory, possessing the potential to explode outwards and take up 'Circumference' (See Fr 853 above).

Although both readings of a parody of Christian hope and exposition of the potentialities of the self are available, the bird metaphor and its associated imagery is something which Dickinson could not abandon due to its strong connection with singing and poetry, and the dialectic between transcendence and experience which metaphors of flight generate. Her commitment to expressing the 'tune without the words' remains central to her antagonistic relation to the inner life which Christianity prescribes, and also to the hierarchical 'I-Thou' relation available in traditional hymn culture. Dickinson's poetics of flight thus conveys a diverse relationality which describes negotiations of these two elements of hymn culture.

Summary

This chapter has illustrated that through analysing the work of Isaac Watts alongside Dickinson's poems, the way in which her ideas about faith and spirituality have been formed in a dialogic way, between the acceptable mode of religious discourse and the process of her engagement with it, can be made more visible to the reader. Watts offered Dickinson a way of measuring her own experience of spirituality against the dominant beliefs of religious communities within her own society. The seemingly paradoxical attitude she has towards him, in that she appears, on one hand, as

Wolosky argues,[62] to be reasserting the modes and tropes of hymnody which she aims to subvert, whilst on the other hand, to be drawing upon the imagery and convention of address in hymns as a basis for 'a continuing dialectic,'[63] can perhaps be seen as a reflection of Dickinson's perception of Watts, not only as the most popular hymnist of her day, but also as a figure whose work was necessarily innovative, radical and borne from a climate of religious and political dissent. Her connection with Watts offers the reader a reassessment of spirituality and world that is constructed out of a desire to radically alter pre-established modes of expression and ultimately exclusionist representations of spirituality. In this way, Dickinson manages to negotiate a political space for the project of redefining spirituality within the context of a popular genre, and one which was also (as will be discussed in the following chapter) deemed acceptable for women writers. Moving through Watts's use of imagery connected with the 'I-Thou' model of relation in hymns such as imagery of sight, the extent of his own protest as a Dissenter, bemoaning an 'obstructed' view of the divine can be observed. Moreover, his use of wing imagery demonstrates a desire for poetical (as well as spiritual) flight, and a developed sense of autonomy and choice with regard to worship. By analysing Dickinson's engagement with the motifs of sight and flight in Watts's hymns we can see the way in which Dickinson engages with Watts as a model for Dissent, and also as a model for autonomy and choice within orthodox religion. Whilst Watts's hymnody, in the main, represents the hierarchical structure of the 'I-Thou' that Protestantism prescribes, the modes of self-validation and the championing of poetic expression that his use of wing imagery signals also provides Dickinson with a model for the poetic transcendence of religious orthodoxy. Watts's 'sublime flight' remained rooted to the hierarchical and patriarchal premises of the speaker-God relation prescribed by Protestantism, but Dickinson invokes the hymn as a heterologous, discoursal space in which to challenge traditional, phallogocentric depictions of God whilst also asserting and representing an alternative version of spirituality. In order to contextualise the non-static metaphors for the divine in Dickinson's poetry as described in this chapter and also in Chapters Five and Six, the following chapter will examine the imagery used to convey the speaker-God relation in the hymns of two contemporary women hymnists.

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[62] As discussed earlier, on p. 105.

[63] Barton Levi St. Armand's phrase, as discussed in the Introduction, p. 8. (St. Armand. p. 158.)

Chapter Four

'The Prospect *oft* my strength renews': Spiritual Transport in the Hymns of Phoebe Hinsdale Brown and Eliza Lee Follen

The previous chapter demonstrated ways in which Dickinson's poetry is informed, in part, by the hymns of Isaac Watts that serve as a model for rebellion within her own social milieu and ultimately as an example of autonomy and choice with regard to religious worship. Although Watts's Dissenting position would be seen as orthodox within Congregational circles in New England, the room his hymns provided for such rebellion and 'dissent' provided Dickinson with a model for writing against the popular religious consensus within her own community. However, despite the popularity of his work, and the wide reaching influence of his hymns in nineteenth-century New England, Dickinson's experience of hymnody would not have been restricted to Watts. As the previous chapter demonstrated, criticism on Dickinson and the area of hymnody as an influence upon her poems has focussed exclusively upon Watts.[1] A more comprehensive understanding of Dickinson's relation to the hymn genre as a form of dissent and as representing an ideal, heterologous space in which the other can be articulated, can be gained by examining the modes and imagery of hymns written by women, which, like those written by Watts, were very popular in religious worship, and also partially occupied the genre of morally didactic hymns for children. This chapter examines the work of two women hymnists who represent the antebellum era of Dickinson's childhood, and whose publications were widely known during Dickinson's lifetime; Phoebe Hinsdale Brown (1783-1861) and Eliza Lee Follen (1787-1860). It argues that although both women were solidly aligned to religious groups (Protestant Evangelical and Unitarian respectively) their hymns often circumnavigate versions of the divine as espoused in the doctrine of those religious groups. Rather, in their works, the struggle to reconcile experience and subjectivity with doctrinal narratives produces an altered hymnic space in which dissent is visible and produces a dynamically re-envisaged version of the divine which deviates from hierarchical structures.

In this way, the hymns of Brown and Follen present an alternative to the dominant discourses that obfuscate female subjectivity and position a woman's relation to the divine in an inextricably hierarchical way. Ultimately, this chapter provides further context for the mystical and heterologous, non-linear and anti-

[1] As discussed in the previous chapter, the two most important essays in this area are; Shira Wolosky, 'Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts,' *The New England Quarterly* 61 (1988) 214-232 and Martha Winburn England, 'Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts,' pp. 113-148 in Martha Winburn England and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers.*

hierarchical writing on spirituality evident in Dickinson's exaggeratedly hymnic poems from the Civil War era. The self-reflexivity about writing and depiction of selfhood as defined through relation to the world which is evident in their hymns is something which Dickinson's poetry invokes. The chapter does not attempt to work within or offer an overarching definition of 'antebellum women's hymnody' (not least because of the differences between the religious affiliations of the women discussed here), but rather, it aims to show ways in which Brown and Follen were unconventional. The hymn form in both instances pressurises subjectivity to highlight ruptures within and challenges to the teleological reading of hymns (as described in Chapters One and Two) which privilege and recapitulate phallogocentric[2] depictions of the divine.

Although imagery of flight is common in devotional literature, the expectation of teleological linearity in orthodox religion is ruptured when transport, flight and journey are deprived of a telos or end point of transcendence above worldly existence. Rather, the imagery of transport, flight and journey used in the hymns by Brown and Follen, and in Dickinson's poems, convey the transcendence of orthodox religion. Perceiving journey as transport and process, not as a teleological and linear movement, bears similarities with the notion of community in feminist theology, which emphasises process and experience as part of community. Often in hymns by women the point of consecration is deferred or delayed and this is something which also bears affinities with mysticism (as described in Chapter Two, with reference to Certeau's notion of 'mystic speech,' and delayed or deferred meanings of the divine and also in Ladin's use of in Bakhtin's terms, as 'centrifugal' movement away from the centre, outwards, as described in Chapter One.)[3] Such observation of the tendency in Dickinson's poems to defer meaning, definition or climax is also reflective of the ways in which the hymn structure which traditionally encloses the speaker-God relation in a narrative from conflict to resolution is opened outwards in hymns by antebellum era women and in Dickinson's use of it. Although hymns were increasingly being used for private use during the nineteenth century as Hadden

[2] As described in Chapter Two, phallogocentric is used to describe not only male-centred language, but also the teleological reading of hymn narrative in which invocation and conflict moves always to resolution and union with the divine.

[3] Jay Ladin, 'So Anthracite to Live: Emily Dickinson and American Literary History', *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 13:1 (2004) 19-50.

Hobbs observes,[4] their performative, outward quality is undoubtedly at work in Dickinson's poems.

As demonstrated earlier in Chapter One, Dickinson's distinctively hymnic poems of the 1861-1865 Civil War period (those bearing a distinctive hymnic common metre) convey the poet's awareness of the place of hymns in war time and the cultural associations and uses of the genre to reinforce ideas of patriotism and promote social cohesion. Such traditional use of the hymn had served to redefine hierarchical structures implicit within orthodox religion, such as God-man-woman, and in turn provided support for the separate-spheres ideology which placed woman's position as the moral centre within the home. As already established, this view of hymns as promoting patriotism, social cohesion and the opportunity for a woman to express the feminine homely rhythms which reinscribed the separate spheres ideology meant that hymnody became culturally acceptable mode of writing for women.[5] However, antebellum women hymnists were challenging such cultural assumptions before the 'feminization' of American hymnody in the latter part of the century.[6] Given the large volume of hymns written by women in America during the nineteenth century, it is surprising how few collections there are; moreover those which do exist have never been updated.[7] Critical analysis of women's hymn writing in America is also sparse.[8] Susan Van Zanten Gallagher (2006) argues that hymns written by women of the antebellum era challenge the separate spheres ideology rather than reinforcing it, by depicting domesticity as being far from ideal and heavenly, but

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[4] June Hadden Hobbs, *I Sing For I Cannot Be Silent': The Feminization of American Hymnody, 1870-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997) pp. 173-174. Hobbs describes Fanny Crosby's use and memory of hymns during private devotional moments of prayer.

[5] There are of course many examples of women hymnists who did not replicate or produce 'feminine homely rhythms', a noted example is Julia Ward Howe's abolitionist hymn 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' which reinforces cohesion in terms of achieving victory in war.

[6] 'Feminization' is used by Hadden Hobbs to describe the way hymn writing became an acceptable and popular mode for women to write from 1870 onwards. As discussed earlier, see Chapter One, pp. 50-54, for full discussion of the effects of such 'feminization'.

[7] The British Library holds only two collected volumes of hymns by women and one bibliographical dictionary; Emma Raymond Pitman, *Lady Hymn Writers* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1892), Arthur E. Mills, *Women Hymn Writers and their Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1953) and Charles Eugene Claghorn, *Women Composers and Hymnists: A Concise Bibliogaphical Dictionary* (London: Scarecrow, 1984). J. R. Watson's essay 'Quiet Angels: Some Women Hymn Writers,' in *Women of Faith in Victorian Fiction: Reassessing the Angel in the Home* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998) ed. by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, draws upon material from E. R. Pitman's collection. (pp. 128-144.)

[8] Susan Van Zanten Gallagher's chapter, 'Domesticity in American Hymns 1820-1870,' in *'Sing Them Over To Me Again: Hymns and Hymnbooks in America* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2006) ed. by Mark E. Knoll and Edith L. Blumhofer, pp. 235-252., and Hadden Hobbs's book are important steps in rectifying the gap in the history of nineteenth-century American women's hymnody.

rather, as toil and hardship.[9] In a similar way, the disruption of the linear, teleological speaker-God relation in hymns by women of the antebellum era provides an interesting parallel with Dickinson's versions of it. Critics such as Jackson (2005) and Sanchez-Eppler (1993) have argued that Dickinson's poems challenge the reader's expectation of culturally prescribed notions of femininity in their appropriation/refraction of both the sentimental and domestic.[10] In a similar way, Dickinson's representations of spirituality and use of the hymn form can also be seen as challenging the discourses which construct a woman's relation to the divine through the role of the traditional female hymnist. The work of the female hymnist was sought by editors to reinscribe the equation of feminine spirituality not only with the domestic and sentimental but with the teleological, logocentric narratives of an implicitly hierarchical orthodox religion, whether Unitarian or Protestant Evangelical in emphasis. Examination of American women poets who wrote hymns during and after the Civil war era, such as Alice and Phoebe Cary,[11] proves interesting because of their engagement with metaphors of domesticity to situate female spirituality. However, as Jackson has argued, Dickinson, in turn, also challenges the reader's perception of such stereotypes. (Jackson, p. 222.) The challenge to the connection between domesticity and female spirituality appears to be more prominent in hymns written by women during the antebellum era, and there is also less frequently a concern with ideas of nationalism which became more prevalent in hymn writing during and after the Civil War period. For this reason, Brown and Follen will be examined as a precursory context for Dickinson's representations of spirituality which challenge both the use of hymns in war and also employ a re-interpretation/reclamation of hymnic space. First, however, it will be useful to look at critical reactions to the wider context of the writing produced by other contemporary women.

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[9] Van Zanten Gallagher, p. 236. Phoebe Brown is cited as an example.

[10] Jackson sees 'This Chasm, Sweet, upon my Life' (Fr 1061) as a challenge to the reader's perception of what the 'Chasm' would be; 'The materials the lines work upon are not simply the materials of conventional sentiment, but the discourse positioning that sentiment in relation to the reader.' Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*. p. 222. Karen Sanchez-Eppler argues in *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) that Dickinson's poems collapse the differences between liberty and bondage as upheld in abolitionist writing of the period, thus redefining the domestic realm.

[11] Each of these writers are featured in *Lyra Sacra Americana: Or, Gems from American Sacred Poetry* ed. by Charles Dexter Cleveland (London: Samson Low, Son and Marston, 1868). p. 62. 'Nearer Home' by Phoebe Brown explores home as a trope for heaven.

Other Contemporaries

Although illuminating work has been done on connections between Dickinson and other contemporary women writers,[12] nothing so far has been done on the relation between Dickinson's 'religious' poetry and that of contemporary women hymn writers. Paula Bennett's (2002) focus on imagery of sewing and traditionally female labour in Post-bellum women writers positions Dickinson alongside a tradition of women poets who negotiated the cult of domesticity to emerge as public figures. She claims Dickinson's 'refusal to identify' with them was 'a product of her own response to the internal and external forces informing her life and art.'[13] We know that Dickinson shared correspondence with Helen Hunt Jackson and was eager to learn of other contemporaries, seeking, as she did, information on the subject from Thomas Wentworth Higginson.[14] However, Bennett argues that in comparison with her women contemporaries, she seemed to have 'lacked a sense of social and political agency altogether.'(Bennett, p. 218.) Bennett considers Dickinson's seemingly contradictory stance in relation to her female contemporaries – on the one hand ambitiously desiring a rather masculine transcendent poetic identity, whilst on the other, immersing herself in the traditionally female domestic space of the home. However, Bennett does not acknowledge Dickinson's central concern with religion, and relation to hymnody, and therefore also ignores not only the body of hymns written by the women she considers, but also the legacy of the generation of Antebellum hymnists still resonant in Dickinson's social milieu. Moreover, connections between the modes of Dickinson's poetry and those of Antebellum hymnody suggests a far more social and political agency, and use of religion as a site of Dissent, less obscured by the lens of the cult of domesticity, through which much writing by women was seen, during and after the civil war period.

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[12] See Elizabeth Petrino, *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America 1820-1885* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1998) which analyses mainly Helen Hunt Jackson's influence on ED. Paula Bennett's study, 'Emily Dickinson and Her American Woman Poet Peers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* ed. by Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 215-235, focuses on Post-bellum contemporaries such as Lucy Larcom, the Cary sisters, Harriet Prescott Spofford and Rose Terry Cooke. Although contemporaries such as Lucy Larcom and Alice Cary also wrote popular hymns, Martin does not make note of this. See also Jay Ladin, 'So Anthracite to Live: Emily Dickinson and American Literary History', *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 13:1 (2004) 19-50.

[13] Paula Bennett, 'Emily Dickinson and Her American Woman Poet Peers,' p. 217.

[14] L:II, p. 480, September 26, 1870. ED wants to obtain Maria White Lowell's poems published posthumously in 1855. She also refers to Helen Hunt Jackson's poems; 'Mrs. Hunt's Poems are stronger than any written by Women since Mrs –Browning, with the exception of Mrs. Lewes.'(George Eliot) (L:II, p. 491.)

Cheryl Walker (1982) describes Dickinson's unique position among the women poets' tradition of her era, which, as she notes, displayed a concern with:

> intense feeling, the ambivalence toward power, the fascination with death, the forbidden lover and secret sorrow[15]

Walker argues that Dickinson's achievement came out of such a tradition but also 'far surpasses anything that a logical extension of that tradition's codes could have produced,' and explains Dickinson's best work as arriving quite simply from 'genius.'(Walker, p. 116.) There can be no doubt that Dickinson was a pioneer, as Walker argues, and poems which address the role of the woman poet and the self as a site of inspiration (e.g. 'The Heart is the Capital of the Mind,' Fr1381) were a crucial legacy to future generations of women poets. However, the 'tradition' Walker identifies ignores that of women's hymn writing. Paula Bennett (2002) has argued for a re-evaluation of the influence of Dickinson's female peers but she also ignores the role of women's hymnody and its relation to traditional theological assumptions and gendered configurations of the divine.[16] Although Walker and Bennett's analysis of 'tradition' alongside Dickinson's work might refer to that which inevitably includes hymns written by such women poets, hymn writing and the particular issues related to gender about the perception of God and the self they uncover are not discussed directly by either critic.

Alfred Habegger's important essay 'Evangelicalism and its Discontents: Hannah Porter versus Emily Dickinson' (1997)[17] places Dickinson's resistance to orthodox religion within the context of the Evangelical climate, people and institutions which 'laboured to convert' her, and examines the specifically female communities set up by and for women, in the example of Hannah Porter's Praying Circles. Crucially, Habegger measures Dickinson's poetic dissent in relation to this

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[15] Cheryl Walker, *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture Before 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1982) p. 116. Walker cites Maria Lowell, Helen Hunt Jackson, Lucy Larcom and Elizabeth Oakes-Smith as poets among the 'tradition' contemporary to Dickinson, although Dickinson's acknowledged influences were Emily Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. (pp. 111-112.)

[16] Paula Bennett, 'Emily Dickinson and her American Women Poet Peers,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* ed. by Wendy Martin. pp. 215-235.

[17] Alfred Habegger, 'Evangelicalism and its Discontents: Hannah Porter versus Emily Dickinson,' *The New England Quarterly* 70: 3 (1997) 386-414. See also *MWL*, pp. 28-31.

climate and confirms that Dickinson was in 'direct communication' with Porter.[18] However, he does not consider the influence the Circle's activities, such as gathering to exchange theological ideas and opinions, and significantly, the production of hymns, may have had on Dickinson's writing. As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this thesis (p. 21.), Habegger views Dickinson's relation to the women of the Monson Praying Circles who also taught her at Mount Holyoke as one of defiant resistance: 'silent, a non-act, a turning away,' against 'those who laboured to convert her.'[19] Rather than viewing the existence of female circles such as this as being an influence on Dickinson's development as a poet, Habegger argues that Hannah Porter represented an 'invasive community of devout women' whom Dickinson had to 'stand off.'[20] However, Habegger's view ignores the possibilities that such a community may have presented to her with regard to writing. Although Dickinson did resist conversion, she was far from resisting the preoccupation with theological concerns which occupied members of Hannah Porter's Circle. Nor did she resist the desire to develop her own subjectivity and spirituality which was often a product of such circles and which in her case became a vehicle for poetic expression. However there was also a wider context for female hymn writing, one that reflected social and political concerns.[21]

Any discussion of Dickinson's relation to hymnody would be unsatisfactory without an examination of the hymns written by women in her social milieu, especially those produced within the context of a specifically female community in which theology was debated. As we shall see, the concern with the act of writing which is present in many of the hymns by Phoebe Brown and Eliza Follen presents an example of women who, like Dickinson, considered both the vocation and 'industry' of writing as well as its transporting effects and means of articulating/achieving spirituality.

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[18] Ibid., p. 402. Habegger notes a letter Dickinson's cousin Emily L. Norcross wrote to Porter explaining that Dickinson intended to write to her but did not have time.
[19] Ibid, pp. 386-387.
[20] Ibid, p. 414.
[21] For example in the hymns of Fanny Crosby and Phoebe Cary, which I have explored in an article in relation to Dickinson, entitled: 'Hymns of Prairies and Wells: Sacred and Poetic Spaces in Fanny Crosby, Phoebe Cary and Emily Dickinson'.

Tracing the Circle: Brown, Follen, Watts and 'transport'

> I shall send you Village Hymns, by earliest opportunity.
> (March 27, 1853, to Austin Dickinson, SL, p. 101.)

Dickinson would have been familiar with hymns by Brown and Follen: Asahel Nettleton's *Village Hymns for Social Worship* (1824), which includes several of Brown's hymns alongside those of Watts, was commonly used in Dickinson's social milieu. (*MWL*, pp. 28-31.) Dickinson's playful reference to the hymnal in a letter to her brother Austin is indicative of the fact that hymns were used as a tool for moral guidance. The didactic nature of some of these hymns is evocative of the literature Dickinson would have been exposed to during her early years, and particularly during her time at Amherst Church's Sabbath School, where instructional songs, poems and hymns of Isaac Watts were used. Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* was a popular choice, and Follen's *Hymns, Songs and Fables for Young People* (First Published in 1831) bears similarities with Watts's text in structure but displays a (perhaps unfavourable to the Calvinist school) Unitarian's ideology. The Unitarian's revival of Watts, and Dickinson's awareness of Unitarianism (T. W. Higginson was an ex- Unitarian preacher) might lend itself to the supposition that she would also be familiar with Follen as a significant Unitarian woman writer. Brown's prose piece, *The Tree and Its Fruits, Or, Narratives from Real Life* (1836) was undoubtedly familiar to Dickinson, given the Calvinist-influenced lessons of 'solitude' and warnings against vice repeated throughout the text which would make it a favourite choice for a school with older students, and also the family connection with Brown through Betsey Fay's Praying Circle.[22] Both Brown and Follen, like Dickinson after them, would undoubtedly have been influenced by the hymns of Isaac Watts, given his enormous presence in New England during the early and mid-nineteenth-century Evangelical revivals as well as the use of his hymns for children within the Sunday School Movement and also within Unitarian churches. Their hymns date from the early 1830s, Dickinson's early childhood, which places them alongside Watts in the

[22] See Alfred Habegger, *My Wars are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 2001) p. 100. (*MWL*) Although Habegger does not mention the hymns of Follen or Brown, he stresses the emphasis on juvenile literature at ED's Sabbath School during the 1830s, where Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715) was used. He notes the Dickinson family's connection with Brown, on pp. 28-31.

period which Dickinson looked back upon as being a time when the comfort of Christian faith was the closest to her.[23]

The hymns of Brown and Follen connect Dickinson with childhood and therefore also with the period before poetry became an established element in Dickinson's world and identity. Although Dickinson mocks religious faith in letters, her memory and experience of hymns perhaps provided the link between the poetic, adult self and the childhood self of 'perfect happiness.' Given the emphasis which was placed upon religion in school education in the nineteenth century, hymns were likely to become incorporated into one's personal history, and it is likely that other hymns such as those written by Brown and Follen were carried along with, and revisited by Dickinson, just as much as Watts's.

Each of these hymn writers participated in religious groups and movements which became communities that produced writing and theological discourse, whatever their initial purposes were. Janet Gray points out the wider importance of such groups for women writers in nineteenth-century America:

> Women wrote in the context of their participation in groups and movements whose purposes extended beyond literary production.
> (Gray, p. xxx.)

However, as women's participation in public debate became more acceptable due to their engagement with the causes of abolitionism and the treatment of Native American Indians, so membership of such groups became a way for women develop their own writing and speaking, and commitment to the original cause gave way to the purpose of literary production itself. Many women were involved with the Sunday School Movement during the early to mid-nineteenth century, Follen and Brown among them, both of whom produced didactic and instructional hymns and prose for children and adults. Examining Dickinson's use of the hymn and imagery for spirituality or 'transport' alongside that of such antebellum women hymnists helps to create an historical context for Dickinson's use of the hymn as a form of dissent. It also provides additional supporting material through which to assess Dickinson's

[23] ED's letter to Abiah Root, 1846 (as quoted in the Introduction p. 15 above) conveys nostalgia for early childhood in which the poet supposedly experienced Christian faith; a faith taken over by a decidedly poetic calling. (L:I, p. 30-31).

relation to the hymn form beyond metrical deviation and subversion of Watts's use of biblical tropes.

One such trope is that of flight, or transport[24], imagery which Brown and Follen use to indicate a personal state of heightened religious awareness, thus pre-shadowing Dickinson's use of it to indicate her more mystic spirituality and non-linear, non-hierarchical style of thought and experience as reflected in her poems. The idea of transport can be seen in the emphasis both Brown and Follen place upon the notion of journey and experience; the 'gentle wing' which traces the ways in which the Holy Spirit 'flies' in Brown's hymn (below, p. 150.) or the 'pathless fields of air' (also below, p. 165.) which the soul takes in Follen's hymn, as opposed to focusing on the centre of God or end point of the spiritual journey.

The experience of, or desire for, spiritual flight or transport is commonly expressed in hymns and devotional literature and frequently takes the form of imagery of flight which connotes transcendence of the world and a clearly defined heavenly destination, as has been exemplified by the hymns of Isaac Watts (see pp. 39-51 above). Depictions of angelic flight in nineteenth-century devotional literature by women became a means through which the authors could rupture and/or recapitulate cultural stereotypes of the angelic feminine as the domestic locus of spiritual goodness, most famously promulgated by Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' (1854). The crux of the matter is the motif of the journey or 'voyage of faith', a notion common in masculinised hymn narrative and part of the 'myth of progress' in Protestant theology, which, by its very nature as a voyage, excluded women who, like Patmore's Angel, were confined within the domestic space of the home. June Hadden Hobbs explains:

> The journey or voyage of faith is a crucial shaping element, and those who cannot move are denied adult selfhood and mature spirituality.
>
> (Hadden Hobbs, p. 129.)

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[24] The notion of 'transport' here is distinct from the Romantic sublime, with its implicit gender division through which the Romantics related to a feminised nature as the source of poetic inspiration. See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson.* For a reading of Dickinson and conceptions of the sublime, see Gary Lee Stonum, *The Dickinson Sublime* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). Stonum argues that underpinning Dickinson's 'thematics of uncertainty' is 'an unwavering commitment to the sublime.' (p.189.) However, the roots of ED's anti-teleological mode, which goes beyond 'uncertainty', can be seen clearly in this female tradition of women's hymn writing.

The pattern of loss associated with the spiritual journey is equated frequently with the woman's position:

> Also significant to the myth is a pattern of loss and gain based on a theological economy in which spiritual progress requires loss of the world to gain a heavenly reward. In both sacred and secular terms, the pattern takes several forms, all of which suggest a commercial 'deal': the loss of immediate, sensory gratification in favour of a huge spiritual reward somewhere down the road; the repression of human nature to achieve a new, improved, regenerate nature; the sacrifice of relationships and endurance of affliction to reach a goal.
>
> (Hadden Hobbs, p. 129.)

In contrast with the journey motif, the idea of 'transport' associated with late nineteenth-century Evangelical hymnody such as Fanny Crosby's, refers to a mode of spiritual ecstasy which is akin to mystical experience. Such 'transport' invokes flight and complicate the linear, teleological movement of speaker/God and God/speaker found in masculine hymnody to produce an essential non-linearity which is a main characteristic of Dickinson's poetry. Comparable to such non-linearity is what Hadden Hobbs describes as the notion of 'relationship' evident in late nineteenth-century Evangelical hymns written by women. In these the hymnist challenges the concept of having to undertake an isolated spiritual journey by identifying with Christ and articulating a strong desire for communion. (Hadden Hobbs, pp. 134-135.) She describes the editorial censorship which met Fanny Crosby's portrayal of 'transport', rather than spiritual journey, to connote meeting with Jesus:

> The twentieth-century hymnal editor who changed Fanny Crosby's description in [...] 'our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see' to 'our wonder, our victory, when Jesus we see' missed the point. Transport is what the evangelical experience requires, and transport depends, finally, on the articulation of figures of speech that compare spirituality to sexuality, particularly to the sexual experience of women. [...]
>
> The mystical experience that Crosby called 'transport' is crucial to the authenticity of gospel hymns for evangelicals.
>
> (Hadden Hobbs, pp. 173-174.)

Transport, then, becomes a state of ecstatic pleasure which is not dependent upon a journey with a clear trajectory and telos. This is the version of 'transport' found in Dickinson, where it acquires affinity with mystical discourse because of the ways in

which Dickinson's bee imagery (a favourite trope for such 'transport') emphasises physical experience and sexuality as a mode of spiritual immanence. Dickinson's version of 'transport' thus also connects with the idea of community observed by Gray and Hobbs because it is dependent upon interaction and experience in the world. Brown and Follen's hymns articulate an alternative spirituality which is similarly defined through relation and so each poet deserves some specific consideration here.

Phoebe Hinsdale Brown

Phoebe Hinsdale Brown lived for some time in Monson, nearby to Dickinson's maternal grandmother Betsey Fay Norcross[25] and was a founder member of Hannah Porter's praying circle[26] and therefore an important member of the 'invasive community of devout women' Habegger describes. Many other members of Dickinson's mother's family became converted and involved with Monson's First Congregational church, including Emily's Aunt and cousins.[27] Brown was possibly the most famous woman hymnist of her time, as the multiple and repeated publication of 'I love to steal awhile away' indicates.[28] Brown's hymns were included in Nettleton's *Village Hymns* (1824) which was widely circulated in New England (Julian, p. 185.) and in Dickinson's community. At least as popular as Brown's hymns was the mythology surrounding her life of hardship, as Julian's entry on Brown includes biographical material included in Nettleton's collection which describes her disadvantaged social position at length. (Julian, p. 185.) Although Habegger's biography of Dickinson (2001) is in part concerned with the religious climate underscoring Dickinson's social interactions, namely by examining the church affiliations of Dickinson's friends and relatives from contemporary congregational records, and also traces the decay of Protestantism and its doctrines alongside

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[25] Betsey Fay married Joel Norcross, they were the parents of Emily Norcross, Dickinson's mother, who lived at Monson. For further information on Monson and Phoebe Brown, see www.monsonhistoricalsociety.org/emilydickinson.htm (date accessed 12/4/06) edited by Emma Ladd Shepherd.

[26] Alfred Habegger, 'Evangelicalism and its Discontents: Hannah Porter versus Emily Dickinson,' p. 391.

[27] Ibid, pp. 406-407. Habegger notes five Norcrosses were admitted to the church in 1829.

[28] John Julian, ed., *Dictionary of Hymnology*, p. 185. Julian notes the hymn's popularity and cites several instances of its inclusion in collections, for example; Nettleton's *Village Hymns* (1824), *Leeds Hymn Book* (1853), and Cleveland's *Lyra Sacra Americana* (1868). Other hymns by Brown appear in many other collections, such as Nason's *Congregational Hymn Book* (1857), *Parish Hymns* (1843), Linsley and Davis's *Select Hymns* (1841) and Hastings' *Spiritual Songs for Social Worship* (1832).

Dickinson's poetry, the connection between Dickinson and contemporary women hymn writers and female religious communities is once again not discussed.

Brown's hymns contain an unavoidable ambiguity which led her in some cases to have to edit them in order that they be suitable for publication, conform with a satisfactory hymn narrative and fit with the rationale of particular hymnals.[29] Likewise, each tale within her collection, *The Tree and its Fruits, or, Narratives from Real Life* (1836) (written within an Evanglical Protestant context) strains to reach a climax whereby Christian morality prevails and the sinner is grateful for the changes or conversions which have taken place. Many of them echo the moral seriousness and orthodox harshness of Watts's *The World to Come* (1738) or even *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715).[30] Although Brown's hymns appear to conform to the moral didacticism conveyed in this collection of tales, there are striking moments where they lack the spiritual clarity and resolution one would expect to find in Evangelical hymnody of the Great Awakening, where religious conversion was a primary concern.[31] Indeed, one of the first of Brown's hymns to appear in Asahel Nettleton's *Village Hymns for Social Worship Selected and Original: Designed as a Supplement to Dr Watts's Psalms and Hymns* (1824),[32] is included under the category heading of 'Missionary Meetings,' conveying the extent to which the 'performance' value attached to hymns supplied their context. Four of Brown's hymns appear in this collection and can be identified by a capital letter 'B' next to the hymn number. The fact that Phoebe Brown's hymns were placed in a collection which was to be a supplement to Watts's hymns suggests that such hymns would, in the eyes of the editor, bear a close connection with the style and missionary, didactical mode of Watts. Indeed, three of the four hymns included in this collection share Watts's concern with reaching or communicating with God, and also the plodding common hymn metre which is the hallmark of Watts. Brown's hymns also bear a remarkable

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[29] John Julian, ed., *Dictionary of Hymnology*, p. 185. Brown was asked to alter several hymns in order that they be included in collections such as Elias Nason's *The Congregational Hymnbook For the Service of the Sanctuary* (Boston: John. P. Jewett and Co., 1857)

[30] Texts by Isaac Watts, as discussed in the previous chapter (e.g. p. 107.)

[31] Jane Donahue Eberwein describes the two periods of religious revival referred to as the 'Great Awakening' in American history, the first being the 1740s, and the second, of Brown's era, beginning 1801and 'continuing for decades.' See Jane Donahue Eberwein, "Is Immortality True?": Salvaging Faith in an Age of Upheavals,' in *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Vivian R. Pollak, pp. 67-102. (p. 81.)

[32] Asahel Nettleton, ed., *Village Hymns for Social Worship Selected and Original: Designed as a Supplement to Dr Watts's Psalms and Hymns* (Hartford: Printed by Goodwin and Co., 1824) As Dickinson's reference to it in her letters suggests, a copy of this collection was owned by the Dickinsons. Hereafter abbreviated as 'VH' followed by hymn and page number.

resemblance to those written by Watts in their concern with the writing process, which in Watts, is the method of achieving spiritual transcendence.

The metaphors of journey and flight which are common in devotional literature[33] appear frequently in Brown's hymns, and not only in those written for sailors which carry particular resonance with the idea of the voyage. Under the heading of 'missionary meetings,' the hymn 'Go, messenger of love, and bear,' conveys a concern with the capacity of religious writing to transport, and, it is hoped, transform, the listener:

> Go, messenger of love, and bear,
> Upon thy gentle wing,
> The song which seraphs love to hear,
> And angels joy to sing.
>
> Go to the heart with sin opprest,
> And dry the sorrowing tear;
> Extract the thorn that wounds the breast,
> The drooping spirit cheer.
>
> Go, say to Zion, "Jesus reigns" –
> By his resistless power,
> He binds his enemies with chains;
> They fall to rise no more.
>
> Tell how the Holy Spirit flies,
> As he from heaven descends –
> Arrests his proudest enemies,
> And changes them to friends. (*VH*, 496:371-372)

The teleological movement from composition to transport to hoped-for conversion in this hymn appears upon initial reading to be straight forward, compounded by the Wattsian strength of its assured common metre. It is hoped that the 'song,' that is the hymn being composed, will bear witness to the triumph of Jesus over enemies who 'fall to rise no more.' However, the leap that the hymn makes between the method and manner of the song is disjointed and at odds with the oppositional nature of the narrative doctrine of Jesus's dominant 'power.' In contrast, the song's 'gentle wing', which is aligned with the Holy Spirit in the final verse, conveys a much less combative, linear objective than the two middle verses. Furthermore, the final

[33] George Herbert's poem 'Easter-Wings' is a noted example, where the poem itself is shaped as a pair of wings to connote spiritual transcendence. See John Tobin, ed., *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin Books, 2004) p. 38.

'resolution' of conflict in the final verse, that enemies should be 'change[d] to friends,' sits uneasily alongside the fatal bondage Jesus is described as inflicting upon his enemies in the third verse. So there is an identifiable unresolved tension in this hymn between the 'gentle wing' of the 'song' and the uncompromising drive towards conversion which it aims to portray. The hymn itself ostensibly flies upon this 'gentle wing', transporting the 'opprest' in the same way as the Holy Spirit 'flies.' Yet rather than transforming the listener and conveying images of absolute power, Brown's dashes (for which Dickinson's work became infamous) in the third and final verses draw attention to those moments when the individualised action of Jesus/God is described ('Jesus reigns'-/'he from heaven descends-'). Such action separates the speaker from the divine and leaves the reader/listener to contemplate the consequences of such action. Brown's writing itself takes over the privileged position of 'messenger,' bearing wings akin to the 'Holy Spirit' which also 'flies.' Therefore, although the verse attempts to describe the drive towards conversion that the hymn intends to implement, the transformative, teleological journey from sin to anticipated conversion is subsumed by the transporting, rapturous effects of the writing itself. This spiritual force seeks to soothe the sorrow of those 'opprest' and 'tell' of the Holy Spirit's 'flight' and restorative capacity without actually describing it. Furthermore, Brown's directives ('Go', 'Tell') imbue the hymn with a continuous and immediate mode of action which avoids descriptions of the point of ultimate conversion, thus suspending definition of the divine in a similar way to Dickinson's insistence in the poem 'A Transport one cannot contain'. (As discussed below, p. 173.)

Brown writes within the dominant discourse of Protestant Evangelical conversion, describing the hymn's journey toward the reader/listener without describing an end point of completion. In this way, the hymnist's experience of writing the hymn is conveyed more strongly than the experience of conversion itself. Hymnic space, traditionally colonised by hierarchical definitions of the divine is reconfigured in Brown's hymn to allow an openness which includes the speaker's subjectivity and self-reflexivity about the nature of her 'winged' hymn. The categorisation of such a hymn as a paean to the Protestant Evangelical missionary ('Go, say to Zion, "Jesus reigns"') or to sentimentalism ('changes enemies to friends') is complicated by the speaker's overt awareness of its mode of operation. The speaker's foregrounding of the hymn's religious context belies an anxiety about the effectiveness of the resolutions the hymn strains to bear. The powerful act of writing,

of unleashing subjectivity ('Go, messenger of love, and bear') and of extending it outwards, is the hymn's primary concern. The genre's association with communal experience supports Brown's ambition for her words, by harnessing that subjectivity and propelling it towards relation; an immediate relation between self and world which is both intimate *and* multiple and diverse.[34] The space between the religious tradition Brown writes within and her own spiritual experience is thus conveyed within and through the transporting act of writing of the hymn.

The transporting aspect and effect of writing appears frequently in Brown's hymns. Another example is 'How sweet the melting lay,' which appeared in Cleveland's *Lyra Sacra Americana* in 1868, under the heading 'Morning Prayer Meeting:'

> How sweet the melting lay
> Which breaks upon the ear,
> When, at the hour of rising day,
> Christians unite in prayer.
>
> The breezes waft their cries
> Up to Jehova's throne;
> He listens to their bursting sighs,
> And sends his blessings down.
>
> So Jesus rose to pray
> Before the morning light;
> Once on the chilling mount did stay
> And wrestle all the night.
>
> Glory to God on high
> Who sends his blessings down,
> To rescue souls condemn'd to die,
> And make His people one.
>
> (*Lyra Sacra Americana*, pp. 28-29)[35]

Considered by the editor as appropriate to connect with prayer meetings, this hymn describes the experience and act of praise and worship. However, the phrase 'melting lay' is self-consciously poetic and invokes a connection between the sound of hymns

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[34] As discussed earlier (Chapter Two) the term 'relation' is used by Elizabeth Johnson; 'the very essence of God is to be in relation, and thus relatedness rather than the solitary ego is the heart of all reality' in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse*, p. 216.

[35] Charles Dexter Cleveland, ed., *Lyra Sacra Americana: Or, Gems from American Sacred Poetry* (London: Samson Low, Son and Marston, 1868) 'XXII Morning Prayer Meeting,' by Phoebe Brown, pp. 28-29.

being sung communally and, once again, the speaker's ambition for the hymn itself. In describing the scene, Brown's hymn also extends praise outward, the scene of a transported community of worshippers transporting the writer herself in the process of writing. Far from describing a tightly constructed group or cohesive core, the 'united christians' are connected by praise which is described in terms of fluidity and elasticity, which is at turns 'melting,' and 'breaks;' 'breezes waft their cries,' and their sighs are 'bursting.' Brown's connection of the physical act of singing and producing sound with the biblical trope of water (connotative of the holy spirit) confers a strength of movement and power to her own writing and also undermines the importance of the linear, reciprocal movement between speaker and God found in traditional hymnody. Although the fact that God 'sends his blessings down' is repeated in verses two and four, the strikingly poetic description of the communal activity and experience of worship which unites Christians is the dominant aspect of the hymn. The continual need for praise and for unification which the hymn describes is not reached at the end; there is no explicit point of resolution. Rather, unification is conveyed as an ongoing process ('who sends his blessings down/to rescue souls condemn'd to die/and make His people one') where God's action ('sends') is always present and continual. This serves to forge a continuity of experience over the biblical account of the past, where Jesus 'once' rose, and wrestled on the 'chilly mount.'

In this hymn Brown articulates and performs her own version of praise, which, as its fluid description of communal praise implies, is the self (subjectivity) in relation. Far from offering a sentimental and idealised version of Christian unity and union with the divine, Brown's hymn situates the act of praise within the context of a negotiation with daily life and struggle, as Jesus himself did 'wrestle all the night.' Brown gives credence to her own act of writing by comparing it with the actions of Jesus, who, like her, (in the hours when work is done or before a day of work begins), 'rose to pray before the morning light.'

The theme of requiring time to one's self in order to achieve spiritual solace is continued in the hymn 'I love to steal awhile away', where Brown connects spirituality with struggle more forcefully. This, Brown's most famous hymn, was altered for its inclusion in Nettleton's *Village Hymns* (Julian, p. 185.), but it is not known whether Brown or the editor made the alterations, including the significant omission of three stanzas. It appears in *Village Hymns* as:

I love to steal awhile away
From every cumb'ring care,
And spend the hours of setting day,
In humble, grateful prayer.

I love in solitude to shed
The penitential tear,
And all his promises to plead,
Where none but God can hear.

I love to think on mercies past,
And future good implore;
And all my cares and sorrows cast
On him whom I adore.

I love by faith to take a view
Of brighter scenes in heaven;
The prospect oft my strength renews,
While here by tempests driven.

Thus, when life's toilsome day is o'er,
May its departing ray
Be calm as this impressive hour,
And lead to endless day. (*VH*, 285:219-220.)

However, as Van Zanten Gallagher has shown, the three removed stanzas were those which implied a fierce critique of domesticity:

Yes, when the toilsome day is gone,
And night with banners gray,
Steals silently the glade along
In twilight's soft array,

I love to steal awhile away
From little ones and care,
And spend the hours of setting day
In gratitude and prayer.

[...]

I love to meditate on death!
When shall his message come
With friendly smiles to steal my breath

And take an exile home? [36]

As the original stanzas in this version, and the remaining original second stanza from the Nettleton version show, the much sought bliss of 'solitude' is only found occasionally, and then it is to shed tears. As Gallagher argues, this hymn 'posits an alternative domestic space in heaven that will release the homebound woman from 'life's toilsome day.'' (p. 245.) Far from an idealised version of heaven at home, Brown's hymn offers a critique of domesticity as comprised of inevitable toil rather than bliss. As with many hymns the structure includes repetition of 'I love,' which although attempting to impose subjective voice onto the narrative of a woman's 'Private Devotion' the narrative it struggles to convey is problematic. Moreover, despite the fact that the speaker in this hymn appears anxious to convey satisfaction in achieving such solitude, it is the struggle and pains to achieve it which comes through primarily, just barely suppressed by the guiding, directive repetitions. Indeed, in order to make the hymn narrative even more forceful and less ambiguous than the version in *Village Hymns*, Charles Dexter Cleveland's treatment of the hymn appears with the significant change in verse four from 'the prospect *oft* my strength renews' back to 'the prospect *doth* my strength renew' as Brown herself had written in the original.[37] The fact that Cleveland felt it necessary to make such a substitution is telling, as this subtle change alone dramatically affects a reading of the hymn as offering a depiction of assured spiritual satisfaction ('doth') where 'oft' is far less certain.

The space between the speaker and the attempt to convey a traditional religious narrative of the divine is highlighted in another hymn by Brown, which appears under the heading 'the penitent' in *Village Hymns* and with a reference to Luke's gospel, vii, 36-50. The hymn alludes to the story of Mary Magdalene washing Jesus's feet, a narrative of penitence popular in Evangelical circles, allowing this hymn to correspond with the expectations of a hymnal conceived as a companion to Watts. 'As once the Saviour' invokes traditional hierarchical notions of God-man-

[36] Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, 'Domesticity in American Hymns,' p. 245. Gallagher's source for the pre-edited version of Brown's hymn is Charles S. Nutter and Wilbur F. Tillet, eds., *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church: An Annotated Edition of The Methodist Hymnal* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1911) Hymn #498.

[37] Ibid, p. 245, Gallagher cites the original stanza which includes 'doth'. Charles Dexter Cleveland, ed., *Lyra Sacra Americana: Or Gems From American Sacred Poetry*, p. 29. 'I love to seal awhile away' is numbered xxiii and appears under the title 'Private Devotion.'

woman by conveying the female supplicatory position in relation to the elevated Christ. Its subject is thus 'suitable' for a woman hymnist:

> As once the Saviour took his seat---
> Attracted by his fame,
> And lowly bending at his feet,
> A humble supplicant came.
>
> Asham'd to lift her streaming eyes
> His holy glance to meet,
> She pour'd her costly sacrifice
> Upon the Saviour's feet.
>
> Oppress'd with sin and sorrow's weight,
> And sinking in despair,
> With tears she wash'd his sacred feet,
> And wip'd them with her hair.
>
> "Depart in peace," the Saviour said,
> "Thy sins are all forgiv'n!"
> The trembling sinner rais'd her head,
> In peaceful hope of heav'n. (*VH*, 90:69)

Upon first reading the hymn's metrical pace pushes the narrative of penitence along on what is seemingly unshakable ground: the supplicant is 'asham'd' and lowly, but redeems herself in the eyes of Christ with her tearful penitence; her tears and hair 'wipe' the feet of Christ as he then 'wipes' her sins away, concluding with the directive, 'Depart in peace.' However, there are points at which Brown's rendering of the biblical scene deviates from the depiction of Magdalene's supplication in the Gospels, and the hymn's positioning of the penitent in relation to the figure of Christ is both shifting and paradoxical.

On the one hand, the hymn appears to connect Magdalene with Christ as the distance between them is narrowed by the very first word of the hymn, 'as,' which immediately makes a connection between Magdalene's actions and Christ's, conferring status upon her own action to seek salvation and connection with the divine. Conversely, the hymn also articulates the penitent's distance from Christ; conveying her difficulty in meeting His eyes, anticipating the Pauline imagery of obscured vision (frequently employed by Watts, as exemplified in Chapter Two). However, in the second verse subjective knowledge of the penitent's inability to 'meet' Christ's 'holy glance' interrupts the simple narration begun in the first verse,

thus privileging this moment as the central concern. The hymn declares that the penitent is 'ashamed' and that the sacrifice of tears (which is not tears, but expensive oil in Luke's Gospel) was 'costly,' conveying an intimate knowledge of the penitent's suffering. Christ's 'glance' is fleeting, momentary, and almost arbitrary. Moreover, the swiftness with which Christ's forgiveness is conveyed in the final verse suggests an implausibility which is then confirmed in the final line 'in peaceful hope of heaven,' where knowledge, faith or certainty are substituted with a decidedly less firm statement of 'hope.' That said, the supplicant's experience of 'hope' in the hymn is also consistent with the Pauline version of partial sight; even saved sinners are not supposed to be presumptuous, and the final 'hope' she is given is one of the divine three elements in the trio of 'faith, hope and charity'. The fact that the final word of the hymn is 'heaven' suggests a journey towards it, and the supplicant is also addressed directly by Christ, placing the speaker in a position of relative elevation. However, the pressure to recapitulate a traditional penitent narrative within the dominant structure of the hymn does expose gaps. The hymn's moments of identification with Magdalene's suffering in verses two and three convey a moment of heightened subjectivity, which suggests Brown's struggle to reconcile the dominant biblical discourse, equating female sexuality with sin and salvation with fear and condemnation ('trembling sinner'), with her own experience. The hymn's final verse is thus far from the satisfactory resolution to be found in the penitent narratives in Watts's hymns in which, for example;

> Life and immortal joys are giv'n
> To souls that mourn the sins they've done;
> Children of wrath made heirs of heav'n
> By faith in God's eternal Son. (*HSS*, II, 125:491)

Dickinson frequently derided such reliance upon biblical text as a way of reaching understanding about the divine; for her 'The Bible is an antique Volume/Written by faded Men'(Fr 1577). In a similar way, although the manifest content of her work is pious in a way that Dickinson's is not, Brown implicitly questioned the relation between rational approaches to the divine and emotional response to/through the 'presence' of the Lord. Her hymn 'Assembled at thine altar' begins with a plea for a greater understanding of the divine through the intellectual pursuit of 'study' of the bible ('Thy word') and through 'duty,' which is both the act

of reading and the enactment of the instruction of a dutiful life which the bible provides. However, the requirement in the second verse shifts from the speaker's participation to a desire for the Lord's presence ('Thy presence we implore'), which in turn would instruct the speaker on prayer and on how to 'love and praise Thee more.'

> Assembled at thine altar, Lord,
> We lift our hearts in prayer,
> Study the pages of Thy word,
> And learn our duty there.
>
> Grant us Thy Spirit's guiding ray;
> Thy presence we implore;
> Dear Saviour, teach us how to pray,
> To love and praise Thee more.
>
> So will our worship here below
> Resemble that above,
> Where saints unclouded glory view,
> And sing redeeming love.
> (*The Congregational Hymn Book*, p. 550.)[38]

Although the hymn is in some ways consistent with orthodoxy, and is a humble statement of 'our' inadequacy unless illuminated by God's grace, it also conveys a personalised struggle. The speaker conveys her own imperfect ability to both perceive the divine and to enact praise ('To praise thee more') and thus also implicitly criticises traditional ways of knowing or reaching the divine. Unlike the moments of obscured vision described in Watts's hymns as a physical distance from a perceivable God[39], the speaker's sense of obscured vision is not predicated upon a temporal, physical impossibility (the 'interposing days' of Watts's hymn) but rather, on a cognitive absence and inability to perceive the perfection of the divine with such clarity in the first place. The hymn Brown produces is merely a cloudy and clouded 'resemblance' of the heavenly worship or 'duty' prescribed within the rational 'word' in the first verse. Indeed, the speaker in Brown's hymn is not only unsure about her own relation to heaven's example of how to be devout, but is equally uncertain about

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[38] Elias Nason, ed., *The Congregational Hymn Book, For the Service of the Sanctuary* (Boston: John. P. Jewett and Co., 1857) p. 550. Hymn # 786 by 'Brown.'

[39] As discussed in Chapter Three, with reference to Watts's hymn 'Sight thro' a Glass and Face to Face' (HSS, II, 145:502-503).

the divine being represented. At the point of the hymn's composition, the presence of the divine is neither felt nor identified and the 'guiding ray' is not brought down to the speaker to enter into the relationship of love and 'praise' she desires.

Summary: Brown and Dickinson

As has been demonstrated, Brown's hymns convey a struggle to reconcile the traditional modes of expressing religious devotion usually found in traditional hymnody with the experiences of the divine felt and conveyed in and through her writing. Moreover, the culturally prescribed version of the devotional woman hymnist and biblical narratives and doctrines of sin and salvation in Protestant Christianity which position the female as inferior/sinful become obstacles to be negotiated in order to express her own relational experience of the divine and therefore also her own subjectivity. As a result, despite their inclusion in hymnals to assist revivals, Brown's hymns frequently portray a sense of struggle with traditional configurations of the divine, such as the 'guiding ray' that has not already illuminated the path for the speaker in the final hymn discussed above. Brown's hymns expose the limitations of orthodox religion to accommodate her own experience of spirituality and in this way present a precursor to the rupturing of expectations of hymn narrative in Dickinson's poetry. Like Brown, Dickinson used the hymn form, in the same way as she used domestic imagery, to challenge the reader's inclination to equate a given knowledge about hymns with what is actually presented in the poem.

Moreover, the emphasis which Brown's hymns place upon the act of writing and the explicit and implicit connection they forge between this and experience of the divine anticipates the self-generative and autonomous spirituality of Dickinson's poetry, of which 'Some keep the Sabbath going to Church' (Fr 236) is a marked example. Brown's descriptions of communal worship and praise as fluid and transporting (for example, in 'How sweet the melting lay') also provide an important precursory example of anti-teleological depictions of spirituality as the self in relation, which Dickinson's bee imagery conveys (as will be discussed in the following chapter). Her hymns provide Dickinson with a model for representing biblical narrative as incomplete or unsatisfactory, as the speaker's attempt to reconcile the subjectivity of her own experience of the divine with biblical narrative and the notion

of salvation through penitence is left unresolved, and we hear dissent in the representation of the domestic sphere as heavenly. These inherent problems rupture and challenge the teleological and 'simple' framework of the hymn. The space which Brown's hymns thus make visible is exploited in Dickinson's poems and transformed in into a heterologous space. The dominant 'framework' of religious narrative and patriarchally constructed narratives of God are subordinated by their dialogic relation to the force of Dickinson's subjectivity. The formal structure of Dickinson's hymnic poems encodes the discourses of traditional hymns, whilst subjectivity is always expressed always alongside, in relation to those discourses, opening up a space for the divine to be continually re-traced and re-imagined.

In poem Fr 316 the scene Dickinson describes replicates the speaker-God relation evident in Brown's hymns, particularly in 'As once the Saviour took his seat,' where the 'humble supplicant/Ashamed to lift her streaming eyes' is echoed in the 'awkward – gazing – face' of the speaker. However, from the outset Dickinson's poem explicitly exposes the linear structure of reciprocity between the divine and speaker as being problematic. Compounded by the hymnic common metre the expectation of hymn narrative is simultaneously delivered and ruptured in the poem's first two lines:

> If I'm lost – now –
> That I was found –
> Shall still my transport be –
> That once – on me – those Jasper Gates
> Blazed open – suddenly –
>
> That in my awkward – gazing – face -
> The Angels – softly peered –
> And touched me with their fleeces,
> Almost as if they cared –
>
> I'm banished – now – you know it –
> How foreign that can be –
> You'll know – Sir – when the Saviour's face
> Turns so – away from you - (Fr 316)

Immediately 'lost,' *because* found - Dickinson turns the notion of the lost sheep on its head and divine grace and salvation are figured in terms of a human relationship in which the speaker is cruelly chosen ('found'), then spurned ('banished'). This inversion of 'lost' and 'found' is used elsewhere by Dickinson, in poem Fr132; 'Just

lost, when I was saved!'). However, the 'transport' gained from the experience produces the poem, thus privileging creative experience over the orthodox notions of spiritual union with God that 'Jasper Gates' and 'Angels' connotes. Moreover, the speaker delights in being 'lost' as the position of being 'banished' enables the poem to come into being, and for subjectivity to be expressed. In other words, the fact that the Jasper Gates stand open (whether she chooses to venture near them or stay away) produces a knowledge of the self which surpasses the 'experience' of divinity being prescribed. 'Transport' in this poem is the speaker's ability to transform loss into creativity. The notion of 'transport' Dickinson connects with the divine in 'A Transport one cannot contain' can be connected directly with the notion of transport described in this poem which exploits the expectation of hymn narrative (being lost and then found) to produce a reconfigured notion of transport which does not depend upon religion's definitions of spiritual transcendence through the doctrinal revelation of an afterlife. The speaker's 'transport' exists and renews itself within the poem, even though she remains 'banished', as if to provide evidence against the conventional believer's idea of being 'lost' which the poem's initial 'If' immediately brings into question.

Eliza Lee Follen and the 'Useful' Hymn

The struggle to conform to traditional narratives of conversion or penitence found in Brown's hymns is also found in Eliza Lee Follen's work, together with a self-reflexivity about writing and idea of selfhood through relation described in terms of flight and transport. Follen wrote prose, poems and hymns prolifically, as well as hymns and songs for children. The daughter of the Unitarian minister Samuel Cabot, she was herself a Unitarian, and knew Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Dickinson's literary mentor and an ex-Unitarian minister) as well as the Cary sisters.[40] It is likely that Dickinson would have known of Follen's work, as her *Hymns, Songs and Fables for Young People* was popular and reprinted several times during Dickinson's

[40] Despite the volume of her work there are currently only ten entries in the British Library Catalogue. Wesley T. Mott, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography: The American Renaissance in New England*, third series (Boston: Gale Group, 2001) p. 141. Mott notes that Follen went to William Ellery Channing's (Unitarian) federal Street Church in Boston and knew T. W. Higginson and Alice and Phoebe Cary. Also that she was known for her anti-slavery writings. Her papers are in Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

childhood years and beyond, during the ante-bellum period (1825, 1831, 1846 and 1851). A collection of her poems appeared in 1839, entitled *Poems*, which included her own versions of psalms as well as hymns which initially appeared in various hymn collections, magazines, and books on Christian worship for children. (Julian, p. 380.) Whilst in England in 1854, she issued another collection for children, entitled *The Lark and the Linnet*. She was certainly a household name in Boston during the mid-nineteenth century. However, despite her nineteenth-century popularity she has received little critical attention. Janet Gray includes three of Follen's poems with a short introductory commentary in her 1997 edited collection of American women poets of the nineteenth century (Gray, pp. 3-6.), and has produced an as yet unpublished commentary on some of Follen's poems. There has been very little if nothing at all written on her hymns, and moreover, nothing at all on comparisons between Dickinson's poems and the influence of Follen as a woman hymnist.

Follen's allegiance to Unitarianism might lead readers to expect rather different representations of the speaker-God relation in her poems from that found in Brown's Protestant Evangelical hymnody. However, like Brown, Follen had an uneasy relation to the traditions of her church, an unease which can be traced in her poems. Unitarianism was seen by Protestant Evangelicals as heretical because of the denial of the trinity.[41] The rejection of the trinity and divinity of Christ in favour of the unipersonality of God in Unitarian doctrine[42] and the use of cryptic language when describing the divine, which was favoured by antebellum Unitarian preachers[43] might be expected to have an effect upon Unitarian hymnody.[44] However, as Walker Howe notes, the hymns of Isaac Watts and traditional Christian symbols were still being used in addition to new hymns. (Walker Howe, p. 171.) Therefore, the desire for new ways to convey the speaker-God relation in hymnody was countered by the reluctance to do away with the certainties of the Protestant tradition. Follen's work

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[41] Catherine A. Brekus, 'Interpreting American Religion,' pp.317-333 in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) ed. by William L. Barney. (p. 318.) Brekus cites Robert Baird's *Religion in the United States of America* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1844) (p. 606.) where Unitarians are described as 'unevangelical.'

[42] Unitarianism rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ in favour of the unipersonality of God. See *DCC*, p. 595.

[43] This aspect of Unitarianism is explained in the following chapter with reference to Howard Ware Jnr's opinion on the subject of preaching. See Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy 1805-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) pp. 170-171. Howe cites Howard Ware Jnr., 'Notes,' p. 59. (from *Works*, 1830)

[44] Ibid, pp. 354-355. Walker Howe cites two 'interesting' Unitarian hymnals; *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith* ed., Alfred Putnam (Boston, 1875); and *Hymns for Public Worship* , ed. J. S. Buckminster (Boston, 1808).

reflects this aspect of transition within Unitarian hymnody, but also exploits it to her advantage.

The moral didacticism of Watts's congregational hymns and songs for children fitted with the importance placed upon education in Liberal Unitarian and abolitionist circles such as Follen's. Her collection, *Hymns, Songs and Fables for Young People* (1851) is written primarily for children, but it also bears a dedication to parents. Her husband Charles Follen, writing on behalf of his wife, states in the Preface to the first edition that:

> the approbation of parents, she does aspire after, and most earnestly desire; this and this, alone, will satisfy her; without this, she would be the first to pronounce it an unworthy offering.[45]

The mode of this preface, which emphasises the volume's usefulness to parents, should be borne in mind when reading Follen's hymns, as they often struggle to produce a satisfactory educative voice. For example, in 'On Prayer', emphasis is placed upon the 'wandering' action of the dove as much as it is upon the biblical narrative of God's promise to Noah; moreover, the dove's return signals only a compromise ('pledge of peace with heaven') rather than a statement upon the existence of heaven. (*HSF*, p.16.) The role of educator provided a legitimate mode for literary output for women, as Charles Follen's remarks reassure the reader, and yet it is difficult to categorise the 'lessons' within the hymns as they often display a struggle with opposition, and a fluid, less didactic approach in their descriptions of God.

The majority of the hymns in this collection bear the hallmark of Isaac Watts, in that they often follow the hymnic common metre which makes them easy to recite and learn, and they also follow the straight-forward didactic diction and Christian sentiment of Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715). A good example of this is Follen's hymn simply entitled 'Hymn,' which, in the Wattsian tradition, takes flights in poetic register by placing the smaller elements of nature ('fly') happily alongside the traditionally more elevated ones, as epitomised here by the waterfall:

> It was my Heavenly Father's love
> Brought every being forth;

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[45] Eliza Lee Follen, *Hymns, Songs and Fables for Young People* (Boston: W.M. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1851) Preface, p.ii. Hereafter abbreviated to '*HSF*' followed by page number.

He made the shining worlds above,
And every thing on earth.

Each lovely flower, the smallest fly,
The sea, the waterfall,
The bright green fields, the clear blue sky,-
'Tis God that made them all. (*HSF*, pp. 14-15.)

Comparing Watts's 'Praise for Creation and Providence' in his collection *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715), we can see a similar movement in diction where a description of God's creation of 'mountains' and 'seas' is reduced, somewhat ludicrously in the third verse to 'filling the earth' with 'food:'

I sing the almighty power of God,
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
And built the lofty skies.

I sing the wisdom that ordain'd
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at his command,
And all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord,
That fill'd the earth with food;
He form'd the creatures with his word,
And then pronounc'd them good. (*PW*, p. 319.)[46]

Both hymns include a version of the obligatory verse on God's omniscient judgement of the child-reader as one would expect in hymns of this genre; in Follen's hymn, God 'sees and hears me all the day' and in Watts; 'He keeps me with his eye.' Although in this aspect both writers conform to Christian moral codes for childhood obedience, the mode in which the Creator creates and exists in Watts's hymn in relation to the child-reader is conveyed somewhat differently than in Follen's. Follen's God is described as creating, and bringing 'every being forth' through love, whereas Watts's God 'ordains' through 'wisdom' and 'goodness,' and his is an altogether more authoritarian description of the power of divinity. When 'love' does appear in Watts's hymn, it is within the form of 'beams,' rather like the phallic 'beams of light' he frequently employs in other hymns to connote God's presence. Furthermore, where

[46] Isaac Watts, 'Praise for Creation and Providence,' from *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* in *The Poetical Works of Isaac Watts* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1866)

Follen describes a familial relation between God and child ('He guards me with a parent's care/When I am all alone'), Watts's speaker is described as a mere inhabitant of God's realm and as God's possession:

> In heaven He shines with beams of love,
> With wrath in Hell beneath;
> 'Tis on his earth I stand or move,
> And 'tis his air I breathe. (*PW*, p. 319.)

Although it could be said that the differences between Watts's hymn of praise for creation and Follen's are to some extent cultural; that the poetics in each are influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, and sentimental, liberalised Christianity respectively, both are nevertheless, within the framework of Christian instruction for children and supposedly operating under the same theological assumptions and moral intentions of that framework. However, what makes Follen's hymns so interesting to look at alongside Dickinson's poetic responses to orthodox Christian notions of the speaker/God relation in traditional hymnody, is that they frequently provide similar and unexpected turns within the hymn structure, delineating a space for the divine to occur and be enacted through metaphors of flight. Even amongst her hymns for children, expectation of, and desire for, the divine is articulated by negotiating rather than reproducing phallogocentric representations of God.

Writing the Pathless Flight

On closer examination, Follen's hymns often fall short of the usually 'uncomplicated' nature of hymns written for children. In a similar way to Brown's hymns which describe a self-reflexivity on the act of writing, of constructing praise, Follen's hymns also privilege the act of writing. For example, in the hymn 'On Prayer,' the prayer is depicted as a dove whose repeated attempts at being heard by God displays an exemplary tenacity for the child-reader's human faith. The human spirit's attempts to commune with God is described as a 'pathless' flight:

> As through the pathless fields of air
> Wandered forth the timid dove,
> So the heart, in humble prayer,

Essays to reach the throne of love.

Like her it may return unblest,
Like her again may soar,
And still return and find no rest,
No peaceful, happy shore. (*HSF*, p. 16.)

The fact of the flight being 'pathless' suggests at once an ideal space which transcends the normative paths of right and wrong which dominate so much morally instructive juvenile literature. The notion of ideal space is connected here with the unrestricted play of thought and feeling which one would associate with childhood, which both 'fields' and 'wandered' connote. However, this ideal space is constructed within the hymn and the 'wings' of the hymn transport the speaker beyond the bounds of 'I-Thou' into an expansive relation with both world and self. Both the dove (prayer) and the heart are expressed in feminine terms and the hymn's third and final verses make the associative connections between gender roles and those prescribed within orthodox religion.[47] Feminine obedience and timidity are qualities which need to be overcome despite the command of God:

But now once more she spreads her wings,
And takes a bolder flight,
And see! the olive-branch she brings,
To bless her master's sight.

And thus the heart renews its strength,
Though spent and tempest-driven,
And higher soars, and brings at length
A pledge of peace with Heaven. (*HSF*, pp. 16-17.)

Invoking the Biblical story of the dove's return to Noah after the flood, signalling the promise of dry land and the fruition of God's promise to Noah and also the justification of his faith, Follen's hymn aims to illustrate the importance of maintaining Christian faith. However, Follen's gendering of the heart and the self/'master' along with the dove within the hymn takes the scene beyond Christian allegory.[48] Faith is described by its 'length,' and there is an uneasy, lengthy tension between the spirit/prayer and its attempted destination, 'Heaven,' which it aims to

[47] For Biblical emphasis on woman's status below men, see: Gen. 3. 16., I Cor. 11.3-16., I Cor. 14. 34.
[48] Follen follows her source with the dove, as it is gendered in Genesis 8.9 'But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark [...]'

make a 'pledge of peace' with. Heaven is masculinised and a desired reciprocity is not reached satisfactorily by the hymn's closure. Follen implores and encourages boldness and endurance ('bolder flight'/ 'higher soars') in the distinctly feminine heart/prayer within the hymn, in order that peace may, 'at length,' be achieved. Moreover, it is hoped that this peace might 'bless her master's sight,' suggesting a mutually restorative outcome from such perseverance. Not only is the spirit of prayer and its movement within the hymn gendered, but it is autogenetic and capable of producing the blessing for the self/onlooker which is described as masculine, and capable only of 'sight.' The spirit of prayer in the hymn is presented as an alternative to the bodily, physical act of sight which frequently frustrates the speaker in many hymns by Isaac Watts. The activity of prayer is described within this hymn as a struggle between gendered aspects of the human self and the divine; between the feminised prayer ('dove') and the masculine spirit that requires and awaits a response. In this way, the hymn's models of the spirit reverse and destabilise Protestant assumptions and Biblical representations of the female as an anticipatory receptacle awaiting the masculine, redemptive spirit which fills and completes her/it. In this way Follen is not only able to align herself with the masculine role of Noah, but is also able to effectively re-gender the mind to accommodate this duality, which appears as a pre-Freudian bisexuality.

Similarities can be seen between Follen's description of prayer in this hymn and those of Dickinson's in poem (Fr 483) that appears, at first reading, to be about the speaker's experience of feeding a bird and afterwards hearing its song of thanks to her:

> Most she touched me by her muteness –
> Most she won me by the way
> She presented her small figure –
> Plea itself – for Charity –
>
> Were a Crumb my whole possession -

The initial indeterminacy described by the speaker with regard to the origin of the sound, 'Twas as Space sat singing' combined with the gendered term for such 'to herself – and men - ' encourages a connection to be made between the bird, the singer of praise, and the poet herself. This describes the desire for reciprocity implied in the hymn form. Although Dickinson repositions the stereotypes of feminine Christian devotion to construct herself as both the masculine onlooker and also simultaneously

the receptacle of spiritual revelation, the poem articulates a transcendent moment when the 'bird' communicates with the speaker. The speaker adopts the role of master, initially, and is seduced by the bird's 'muteness' and diminutive, pathetic figure which is 'presented' to her in ceremonious fashion. It invokes the Eucharistic rite of taking the bread of Christ's body, which the bird takes rapidly and returns to the 'Sky.' The fact that the bird is already in a state of transcendence as it is capable of producing praise and knows what it wants and is not delayed in taking its desired nourishment, suggests further parallels with the poet-speaker. Moreover, to the speaker's surprise, it does not bend in supplication and thanks, despite the speaker's initial estimation gathered from its comparative size. The fact that the speaker declares initially that it was 'most..by..' and 'most..by..' suggests a conclusion that the speaker ended up being 'most' surprised and touched by the realisation of the song of praise after the event. The desire for reciprocity in Follen's hymn 'On Prayer' which also describes prayer as a bird, is dramatically reworked and enacted in Dickinson's poem by the subtle conflation of bird and poet.

Beyond Vision: Communicating the Divine in Follen's Hymns

In 'The Spirit Giveth Life,' the nature and practice of the hymn form as a mode of communication comes into play explicitly, where the speaker asks a series of questions about how God is visible. Importantly, the inquiry focuses on the speaker's responses to the sounds she hears about her, her perception being the vehicle for possible transcendence or commune with the Spirit. However, as becomes increasingly clear as the hymn progresses, the distinction between the active sounds within the hymn and the supposedly passive listener become decidedly blurred, conferring active, divine power upon the 'questioning' speaker herself:

> What was in the viewless wind,
> Wild rushing through the oak,
> Seemed to my listening, dreaming mind
> As though a spirit spoke?
>
> What is it to the murmuring stream
> Doth give so sweet a song,
> That on its tide my thoughts do seem
> To pour themselves along?

What is it on the dizzy height,
What in each glowing star,
That speaks of things beyond the sight,
And questions what they are? (*HSF*, pp. 17-19.)

The initial boldness of the first stanza, which sets the hymn up to be an enquiry into the manifestation of God in nature breaks up towards the last line's uncertainty of 'as though' as 'spirit spoke.' Where Watts would have perceived God unequivocally, Follen's speaker is more intent on pursuing likenesses of her own voice as a starting point for her enquiry. The 'murmuring' of the stream and the speaker's thoughts are conflated in the second stanza; moreover, the speaker's thoughts are 'poured into' nature's stream, communication apparently already established and a 'dizzy height' of sorts is already reached. In order to 'speak of things beyond the sight' Follen's choice of language points towards the rhapsodic and the non-verbal in nature, which in turn echoes the speaker's experience of God. References to the hymnic mode are frequent, where it is invoked by sounds in nature, the 'sweet song' of the stream, the ocean's 'roar,' and 'echoes,' and also the omniscient 'delicious melody' perceived by the feminine moon:

What in the gentle moon doth see
Pure thoughts and tender love,
And hears delicious melody
Around, below, above?

The 'melody' of the divine is all-encompassing and decidedly connected with femininity ('gentle,' 'pure' and 'tender') and yet at the same time has the power to 'bid the savage tempest speak' in the following verse.

Here Follen attempts to present a gender-neutral divine Spirit, 'It is the ever-living mind,' which is reminiscent of Romantic pantheism, as the opening lines of Shelley's poem 'Mont Blanc;' 'The everlasting universe of things/ Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves'.[49] However, this is counterbalanced with a depiction of the ever-living mind' as diminutive ('This little throb of life'), invoking the gendered, coy mode of the supplicatory female, as utilised often by Dickinson. Paradoxically, in its attempt to accommodate a reading which would satisfy the

[49] P. B. Shelley, 'Mont Blanc' (1816) in *Romanticism An Anthology*, ed. by. Duncan Wu, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) p. 845.

didactic Christian motive proclaimed in the collection's Preface, or a Romantic sensibility, the hymn increasingly retreats from 'saying' the secrets of the divine which the speaker boldly asserts and 'hears' autogenetically throughout most of the hymn:

> It is the ever-living mind;
> This little throb of life
> Hears its own echoes in the wind,
> And in the tempest's strife;
>
> To all that's sweet, and bright, and fair,
> Its own affections gives;
> Sees its own image everywhere,
> Through all creation lives.

Moreover, the 'little throb' is described as having to 'bid' reciprocity (a 'solemn tone') from the large, imposing 'everlasting hills,' conveying through metaphors of size the tension between the speaker's experience of spirituality versus the old, 'solemn' hymns of Christian and masculine Puritan orthodoxy. The all-encompassing 'delicious melody' of the hymn's earlier verses is presented with an obstacle ('hills') within and against the sky of possibilities ('boundless arch of azure') and therefore also of new languages ('accents all its own') and ways in which the divine can be communicated:

> It bids the everlasting hills
> Give back the solemn tone;
> This boundless arch of azure fills
> With accents all its own.
>
> What is this life-inspiring mind,
> This omnipresent thought?
> How shall it ever utterance find
> For all itself hath taught?
>
> To Him who breathed the heavenly flame,
> Its mysteries are known;
> It seeks the source from whence it came,
> And rests in God alone. (*HSF*, p. 19.)

The inclusion of the word 'solemn' is striking as it is placed in direct contrast to each of the other descriptions of sound in the hymn. Moreover, the concluding verse admits all 'mysteries' to Jesus without having declared them as such throughout the hymn.

Such 'mysteries' are evidently and keenly felt and described by the speaker herself. Whilst questioning, ultimately, how the 'Spirit/'mind' shall find 'utterance,' Follen simultaneously describes how the Creator 'speaks' through his creation. In this she ascribes divinity to the act of writing this hymn, and in which the speaker-mind speaks both to herself and to others of her experience of God. The depiction of God as breathing the 'heavenly flame' is no doubt an allusion to Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's tongues of flame on the apostles, invoking the ways in which the spirit informs, and breathes life into, the natural world. Such Pentecostal imagery leads the hymn to a strong climax and the plurality of the Trinity allows Follen this ending. Simultaneously however, the inclusion of 'Him' in this final verse appears, almost perfunctorily, and connection between the various evidences of God in the previous verses and 'Him' in the final verse is somewhat flimsily constructed. 'Him' does not satisfactorily contain or conclude the multiplicity of God as depicted by the hymn's emphasis on various and multiple strains and sounds. The hymn struggles to reconcile experience of and communion with God which is not gendered, with the child's entrance into Christian worship which conceives of God as 'Him.'

Follen's hymn to the 'Spirit' of God to some extent reinscribes the increasing popularity in the nineteenth-century to locate God in nature, and to articulate experience of God in terms of the natural world. However, her conspicuous concern with gender, as evidenced by the gendered terms for God and the devotional human which are reworked in her hymns for children, sets her apart from the Protestant Evangelical context within which she writes, and from Unitarian and Transcendental thinking also.[50] Follen's depiction of the 'Spirit' in this hymn makes movements towards the tenets of secularised religion, perhaps as a cover for the concern with gender which takes 'the Spirit' beyond a depiction of a genderless 'over-soul.' The experiential aspect of the speaker's encounter with the divine in this hymn provides connections with Dickinson's representation of spirituality which is similarly experiential. There are parallels to be drawn between Follen's 'spirit' or 'omnipresent thought' and the speaker's experience of hearing 'Space sat singing to herself- and

[50] Unitarianism and Transcendentalism as later discussed in the following chapter, with reference to Emerson's essay 'On Nature' and the concept of the 'Over-soul.'

men' in Dickinson's poem, Fr 483, as discussed above. Both Follen's hymn and Dickinson's poem ultimately describe the divine spark of poetic inspiration which emanates from nature but also from the within the self. Writing and spiritual experience are for both inseparable.

Crucially, by representing God in terms of being a presence within nature and also within the self, Follen's hymns challenge assumptions about gendered relations and descriptions of the divine. With their emphasis on other senses such as touch and hearing, there is an absence of 'sight' which sets her work apart from the decidedly more easy relation between God and man described in Watts's hymns. The rigid teleological distinctions and polarities between self and God, light and darkness, good and evil, are much less easy to define in Follen's hymns, despite the popular conception of them being didactic and instructional, as evidenced by their success during the nineteenth century. Although Follen's Unitarianism perhaps gives shape to the 'unipersonality' of God which permeates both nature and the self at once, her description of the divine in nature is both contradictory and dialectically charged, and influenced in part by the genre of educational texts such as Watts's songs and hymns for children, and even more so by a desire to articulate her own experience of the divine.

Summary: Towards Transport not Transcendence

The imagery examined in Follen's hymns conveys an idea of transport that is not confined to achieving transcendence in general abstract terms (a struggle that Watts's hymns often convey) but rather, transports readers beyond such transcendence, above the confining spaces of religious orthodoxy. Paradoxically perhaps, whilst appearing to be more palatable for the young reader, both Brown and Follen's depictions of the spiritual relation to God have more in common with the complex and rich suspension of oppositional thinking on the divine articulated in Dickinson's poems than with the linear relation to God presented in Watts's didactic hymns.

A transport one cannot contain
May yet a transport be –
Though God forbid it lift the lid –
Unto its Ecstasy!

A Diagram – of Rapture!
A sixpence at a Show –
With Holy Ghosts in Cages!
The Universe would go! (Fr 212)

For example, this poem by Dickinson, dated 1861, describes the necessity of not 'lifting the lid' on matters spiritual; spirituality must be kept separate from the commercial market which 'Show' represents, and drags spirituality into the realm of the visible, and into the arena of mere entertainment. And yet, Dickinson not only 'contained' her own spiritual discourse within poetry to give out to friends and relatives, but also constructed it within the confining form of the hymn, as the 4/3 common hymn metre of this poem illustrates. Not only is the non-saying of mystical experience ('transport') conveyed in a communicable melody, but also within a form associated with communal experience. 'Transport' can be seen as a trope for mystical experience because it designates a trajectory, and emphasises journey, as opposed to defining a goal or terminus, a heaven or hell. By engaging with a hymnal trope of flight in this poem, Dickinson makes the limitations and dead-ends of hymn culture visible, and by doing so is able to take spiritual discourse some way beyond those limitations, leaving space for an openness which cannot be 'contained.' The denunciation of religious charlatans in this poem not only condemns orthodox 'descriptions' of spirituality produced by various religious groups and individuals, but also acts to leave cognitive space open, thus allowing the reader to consider what exactly is meant by 'transport,' 'ecstasy' or 'rapture'. The poem thus enacts and reproduces heterologous space in which Dickinson's experience and agency acts upon the structure of religious tradition to make it 'say the absence' of what it 'designates'.[51] As the speaker's thoughts are presented in relation to orthodox modes of knowing, the poem provides the reader with absences and gaps upon the subject of the divine which remain unfilled.

Comparing Dickinson's work to that of contemporary women hymn writers provides a fruitful mode of enquiry to ascertain the examples of women's versions of

[51] Michel de Certeau, 'Mystic Speech,' in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. by Graham Ward, pp. 188-206. (p. 205.)

the divine and of worship which inevitably influenced her poems on religious and spiritual themes. It also provides ways in which to gauge Dickinson's relation to culturally sanctioned versions of a woman's relation to the divine in the figure of the female hymnist. Various modes of the hymn form which draw upon notions of childhood correction, morality and development are employed in Dickinson's poems to register comparative 'disobedience' and also from depictions of the recuperative/legitimised self found in much devotional literature of the period. As discussed in Chapter One, the cultural influences of the Evangelical revival and the new position for women precipitated by women's rights movements made the hymn a legitimate platform for the women writer. Writing hymns combines the inner, reflective mode of sacred devotional writing (largely of the seventeenth century) with the public, communal activity of congregational hymn singing. Dickinson's engagement with the hymn form, like Brown and Follen before her, is both social and political.

Whilst the attempt to conform to culturally prescribed narratives of salvation, redemption and penitence imposed by orthodox religion provides the woman hymnist with an opportunity to convey a spirituality which is expressed in terms of dissent, the fact that the hymns of both Brown and Follen often do not fit comfortably into such narratives conveys, simultaneously, an alternative version of and relation to the divine. Whilst operating within a culturally prescribed role of the female hymnist, the hymns of both Brown and Follen articulate a defiant subjectivity whose modes of expression is implicitly at odds with the logocentric mode and values of the doctrines they have been presumed to reassert unambiguously by hymnal editors such as Asahel Nettleton, Charles Dexter Cleveland and Elias Nason. Patriarchally conceived versions of the divine fail to offer the necessary 'renewal' for Brown and Follen. However, although experience of home or nature is not the panacea their affiliated religious cultures prescribe, the consciousness of the 'work' of the writing process which their hymns convey suggests that writing itself become the source of constant renewal of the self. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the negotiation of heterologous space in Dickinson's 'bee' poems is exploited fully in the connection the imagery forges between the role of the poet and the Protestant work ethic.

Chapter Five

'Repairing Everywhere without Design'? Tracing Dickinson's Bee Imagery

Fame is a bee.
It has a song –
It has a sting –
Ah, too, it has a wing. (Fr 1788)

Thus far the thesis has traced aspects of the hymn culture in Dickinson's social milieu and has suggested ways in which the anti-teleological and mystical spaces found in Dickinson's poetics have been formed dialogically, in relation to this culture. The 'I-Thou' model of relation, the connection between individual and community and also the aspect of usefulness and worthy work of the hymn have been taken into account. However, Dickinson's use of bee imagery serves to bring each of these aspects of hymn culture to the fore, and connects each aspect firmly with poetry and the role of the poet. A version of the traditional bird imagery found in hymns by women to denote spiritual transport, Dickinson's bees describe the paths to revery. Her bee imagery illustrates the connection in her poetics between this metaphor and the role of the poet, and in doing so makes explicit the imperative connection between two poles of orthodox Puritanism: of 'industry' and 'revery'. By connecting the Puritan work ethic with poetry, Dickinson not only confers the status of spiritual vision on her writing (as did the traditional hymnists such as Watts) but also forges a defence of her own position as a woman poet. Her bee imagery incorporates the Puritan rhetoric on industry and idleness that surrounded mid-nineteenth-century debates on the work ethic in relation to the woman question.[1] In this way, Dickinson also challenges ideas about 'usefulness' through casting her own vocation and subjectivity as a poet as a metaphorical bee that creates whilst also being 'idle'. Furthermore, the suspension of opposition in Dickinson's use of bee imagery allows for community and the individual to co-exist and resonate without one being subsumed by the other.

As will be discussed further, Dickinson's bee imagery draws upon cultural associations of the bee, significant ones being the association of the bee with ideas of community[2] and also with the name and genesis of the poet.[3] Crucially, the bee offers

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[1] Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974). pp. 182-209. Rodgers describes the critique of 'idle womanhood' in feminist works, such as *My Wife and I* (1871) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe criticised the conventions which forced middle-class women into marriages which fostered purposelessness in otherwise capable women of 'faculty'.

[2] E. Cobham Brewer, ed., *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* rev. edn (London: Cassell and Company, 1958) p. 113. The social, industrious character of bees is used to exemplify community.

[3] Ibid, p. 113. 'Bee' was a name for the poet, such as the 'Athenian Bee' for Plato. The story of bees settling on the lips of the poet when young was given for the association of producing words like

Dickinson an imagery of flight which is both able to 'transcend' religious orthodoxy and remain rooted in the experiential, worldly realm, expressing the anti-teleological approach to the divine in her work which is also compatible with feminist thinking on anti-patriarchal representations of the divine.

Crucially, cultural associations come into bearing when images are conveyed in an 'emblematic' fashion and are exposed to create dramatic impact as well as the poet's deviation from or concurrence with such moral, political, social and spiritual associations and assumptions. Associated with flight, and therefore also with birds or angels, Dickinson's use of the bee to connote transcendence is inventive not only because of the 'jaunty' or quirky qualities her bees are often imbued with, but also because of their association with spiritual community, communal life and the relation of the individual (bee) to the (hive) community. Although Dickinson's poetry includes many references to insects, such as flies, spiders and butterflies, which also have an emblematic quality to them, the bee is of special interest here because of the many occasions when it is connected specifically with tunes, melody, singing, and therefore also poetry, and Dickinson her self as poet. Moreover, not only did Dickinson refer to herself as 'bee' in letters, but, her final bee poem invokes fame and its troubling but transcendent nature; 'Fame is a bee/ It has a song /It has a sting/Ah, too, it has a wing.' (Fr1788) It is no coincidence that the qualities Dickinson's bees are frequently imbued with are remarkably similar to the ways in which Dickinson's poetic persona has been described by various critics. For example, in poem Fr 304, the bee who 'invites the race,' then 'Dips – evades – teases – deploys-' is a personification of the post-modern literary style which critics have seen Dickinson's work as anticipating.[4]

Whilst most Dickinson critics agree on the absence of a discernable pattern or design in her corpus of poems, Dickinson's use of the bee and its variations provides evidence of a sustained engagement with particular images which assume an emblematic or tropic quality. This chapter will demonstrate how Dickinson's poems reassert shape and continuity, somewhat paradoxically, through the sustained energy of dynamic changeability which the bee imagery in her poems represents. Although the representation of many of Dickinson's poetic images have this dynamic changeability, the bee is perhaps the finest example.

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honey. The name was also given to Sophocles (the 'Attic Bee'), Pindar, St. Chrysostom and St. Ambrose.

[4] See Mary E. Galvin, *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999) Galvin discusses Dickinson in terms of her 'trickster' quality, evading meanings divisively.

The bee is a dominant, rich and complex image in Dickinson's corpus of poems,[5] which carries associations with forms of religious worship, such as the communal singing of hymns, and therefore offers many opportunities to trace how Dickinson interrogates, subverts and challenges some of the modes and assumptions associated with orthodox religion. The bee also provides Dickinson with a different version of the traditional bird imagery popular in hymns and devotional literature to connote the soul's flight into heaven or communion with God; one which places emphasis on multiplicity and sexuality which are central to the notion of immanence as transcendence in many of Dickinson's poems. The bee's associations with social cohesion, labour, but also rebellion and disruption of religious culture provides an important link between style and form in Dickinson's poems. The hymn form of her poems re-enacts the devotional aspect of religion, whilst the bee itself often caricatures or disrupts official religious culture within the verse. Thus, the image of the bee reflects Dickinson's engagement with the religious cultural legacy of her time because it carries with it a set of implied oppositions, such as bee/hive; individual/community; part/whole; production/consumption; industry/revery; male/female; human/God; all of which reflect the oppositional thinking which was central to Puritan aesthetics exemplified in Watts's hymns.[6] Dickinson's bee imagery exemplifies the heterologous space of the hymn by invoking and suspending such oppositional relations but also by rupturing them. In this way, Dickinson's use of the bee image both echoes and also subverts the puritan requirement for piety in art:

> [...] for the Puritan, word and world alike were a shadowing forth of divine things, coherent systems of transcendent meaning [...] But where Romanticism celebrated the imagination as a path to spiritual understandings, the Puritan mind required piety. Believing that they would find either salvation or damnation at life's end, the Puritans demanded of all arts they cultivated – pulpit oratory, psalmody, tombstone carving, epitaph, prose or poetry in general – that they help them define and live a holy life.[7]

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[5] My research found that there are at least 85 instances of the word 'bee' in Dickinson's corpus, excluding cognate words and indirect references to bees or the life of bees.

[6] See Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *The American Puritan Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) for a discussion of the Puritan preoccupation with opposites such as light/dark, good/evil, man/God etc.

[7] Malcolm Bradbury and Richard Ruland, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 25.

Dickinson's bee is simultaneously a 'coherent system' for her own version of communicative action[8] and allegiance to a self-defined spirituality, and a denial and disruption of traditional (including Romantic) forms of religious devotion.

More often than not, when ideas about religion, the Church, or God are brought to the fore in Dickinson's poems, the image of the bee is excessively present, performing an essential aspect of, or acting as a counter to, those ideas. The bee's noises - its humming and 'tunes' - are evocative of hymn singing, and its smaller, industrious wings offer a sub/version of the angels and ideas of spiritual transcendence found in the devotional writings of Watts and Herbert. For example, in the earlier draft of 'Safe in their Alabaster Chambers' (Fr 124) which appears in Johnson's edition, the bee in the final stanza signals triumph over the stasis and death-in-life which the religious communities of her day (here represented by the actually dead; 'meek members of the Resurrection') endure:

> Light laughs the breeze
> In her Castle above them –
> Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
> Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence –
> Ah, what sagacity perished here! (THJ 216, 1859 version)

Paradoxically, the bee's 'babbling' connotes the divine energy which animates and is analogous to the Holy Spirit, and the 'sagacity' which is unintelligible to those who are focused upon formal rituals and 'safe' manifestations of spirituality.

Although there are many ways in which Dickinson utilises the bee image, analysing what appears to be the dominant modes in which the bee 'performs' in her poems is particularly useful way to gauge Dickinson's shifting relation to orthodox religion and ideas about spirituality. Connected, as it is, with ideas of 'singing' or making 'tunes,' it is difficult to separate the image of the bee from the consciousness of the poems' speaker. Often the bee figure is complicit with the speaker's sensibilities, or occupies/represents a particular position (liberty, revery, multiplicity, community) that the speaker also wishes to reach. Therefore, a methodical or 'axiomatic' approach can be seen in Dickinson's exploration of spirituality via her bee imagery.

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[8] 'Communicative action' is Jurgen Habermas's term but here it also connotes the desire to invoke community which is connected with spirituality.

Although no single critical work has provided focus exclusively on the representation and use of the bee image in Dickinson's poetry, because of the many instances in which it does appear as a dominant image or primary focus in her poems, many critics have inevitably incorporated a discussion of the image into their analysis of other concerns or themes. As mentioned earlier (Chapter Three, p. 107.) Martha Winburn England's view of Dickinson's bee image as representing a challenge to the restrictive moralism of Watts's 'busy bee' is instructive.[9] However, as Thomas Johnson observes in *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (1955) the image also becomes a trope of ecstasy, arguing that the 'sweetness of honey which the bee gains by ravaging a flower' is '[...] a trope which she repeatedly employs in her poems'.[10] The bee image serves as a metaphor for giving shape or pattern to one's connection to the world and therefore radically redefining what is considered as spirituality and worship. For example, in her discussion on the nature of temporality in Dickinson's poetry, Sharon Cameron (1979) notes the unexpected shift in the description of the bee from 'Buccaneers of Buzz' to the assertion of 'Fuzz ordained – not Fuzz contingent,' in poem Fr 1426, arguing that it:

> [...] rescues the bee from the triviality to which 'buccaneers of Buzz' had almost certainly doomed it. This is not such so much metaphor as it is metaphysics when, from another world, the bee is invested with priest-like powers.[11]

Cameron's view is that the poem's ability to rupture temporality allows for such a shift to occur; and yet the conception of religious hierarchical structures, rather than temporality, seems to be the most prominent dislocation here. If the bee's 'investment' of powers is not viewed as a progression from 'doomed triviality' to being 'ordained,' but the two descriptions are allowed to co-exist, then it is not time which is ruptured or struggled for in this poem, but rather a representation of an alternative to hierarchical conceptions of religion and spirituality at play in the image of the bee which this poem typifies. Albert Gelpi's *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the*

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[9] See Martha Winburn England and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers*, pp. 122-123.

[10] T. H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955) pp. 229-30. With reference to poem Fr 1628: 'The sweetness of honey which the bee gains by ravaging a flower ...– a trope which she repeatedly employs in her poems – is also entombed in a cell whose form and shape bear noticeable likeness to a small coffin.'

[11] Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) p. 9.

Poet (1966) includes the chapter 'The Flower, the Bee, and the Spider: The Aesthetics of Consciousness,' in which he analyses Dickinson's use of the bee image in relation to her perception of the self as poet.[12] He connects the theme of drunkenness in Dickinson's poem 'I taste a liquor never brewed' (Fr 207) with Emerson's notion of the poet as 'inebriated by nectar[...]which is the ravishment of the intellect.'[13] Quoting Dickinson's poem, which includes the lines 'Inebriate of Air – am I -/And Debauchee of Dew', Gelpi supposes:

> It was reeling triumph to be a secret drinker while in the name of orthodox religion her father laboured tirelessly for the Temperance League. He could close the bars of Amherst, but not the 'inns of Molten Blue' where she drank with saints and was served by angels.
> (Gelpi, p. 134.)

Gelpi does not discuss the poem in terms of the obvious bee imagery it contains, and is content to connect Dickinson's description of 'debauchery' with Emerson's assault on the intellect to convey the idea that the poets shared a similar intellectual intoxication. However, Emerson's metaphor is concerned with the persona of the poet, whereas it is the exuberant liberty of Dickinson's intoxicated bee, 'reeling' from flower to flower which provides the poem's focus, not a reflection on the role of the poet, nor the 'ravishment' of the intellect, as Gelpi would have it. He then goes on to discuss the bee and flower imagery in Dickinson's work as representing two aspects of the poet self, and offers masculine and feminine stereotypes associated with ideas of gender as explanation of the positioning of the image in her poems. There is, however, no doubt an emphasis on the divisions between masculinity and femininity in Dickinson's use of the flower/bee imagery, and Gelpi acknowledges her fluidity between the two positions:

> Emily Dickinson could think of herself as the flower or the bee, as the poet possessed or the poet possessing. Since she was no stickler for logic or rigid theory, the point is not that these concepts of the poet existed for her as distinct abstract categories but, on the contrary, that in living poetically she knew both experiences and

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[12] Apart from this short chapter which looks at the bee as well as other images, there have been no studies which focus exclusively on bee imagery, nor on the way ED uses the image in different ways from one poem to the next.

[13] Albert Gelpi, *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) pp. 133-134 Gelpi cites Emerson's 'The Poet' in *Essays: Second Series*.

> appropriated both roles.
>
> (Gelpi, p. 139.)

Although Dickinson's occupation of both genders at various points in her poems can be seen in her use of the bee image, the main focus in this chapter will be on how this fluidity relates to the representation of patriarchal religion in contrast to the representations to an alternative spirituality or mystical discourse. Gelpi does not associate Dickinson's use of the bee image with religion, except to note Dickinson's inscription of lines from notable preacher Jonathan Edwards ('All Liars shall have their part' and 'Let him athirst come') alongside her poem which she entitled 'The Bumble-bee's Religion,' highlighting her view of the contradictory nature of religious dogma, both rebuking the bee's entrance into the flower whilst also providing an invitation to those who are thirsty. (Gelpi, pp. 139-140.) Normally, Dickinson refrained from giving her poems titles and so it is significant that one is provided here as it connects her use of the image of the bee unambiguously with orthodox religion.

The notable American preacher and important religious figure, Jonathan Edwards, provides an American example of the expression and cultivation of emblems, or 'moral images' in devotional works, which Dickinson's bee image undoubtedly invokes. The 'field or garden of God,' with particular emphasis on the flower, is a favourite image employed by Edwards in his *Personal Narrative* (1743):

> such a little white Flower, as we see in the Spring of the Year; low and humble on the Ground, opening its Bosom, to receive the pleasant Beams of the Sun's Glory; rejoicing as it were, in a calm Rapture; diffusing around a sweet Fragrancy; standing peacefully and lovingly, in the midst of other Flowers round about; all in like Manner opening their Bosoms, to drink in the Light of the Sun.[14]

The bee in Dickinson's poems provide a counter not only to the stereotypes on gender to which the supplicatory and responsive nature of Edwards' flower image (human) and the penetrative action of the sun beams (God) in *Personal Narratives* correlates, but also the notion of God as being distinctly separate from humans which the hierarchical metaphor also describes. However, the bee emblem in Dickinson's poetry

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[14] Daniel B. Shea, 'The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative,' in *The American Puritan Imagination: Essays in Revaluation*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch, pp. 159-172. (p. 169.) Shea cites Jonathan Edwards' *Personal Narrative*, pp. 29-30, from Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Boston, 1765)

does not only explode the hierarchical structures of organised religion; it also resists, by the fact of the metaphor of the bee's relation to the hive, the descriptions of God as espoused in the poetical works of Dickinson's notable male contemporaries such as Emerson and Whitman. Gelpi maintains that by comparison, the crafted emblems such as the bee, the flower and the spider in Dickinson's poetry do not align her with any kind of 'mysticism:'

> For all her experience of the blaze of noon and the lightning-flash, for all her knowledge of the flower's ecstasy and the bee's power, she had to reject the kind of 'mysticism' which in Emerson became mistiness and in Whitman amorphousness. She wrote neither as a visionary nor as a genius but as a craftsman making order out of the fragments of mutability.
>
> (Gelpi, p. 152.)[15]

Such an association of mysticism with 'mistiness' serves to undermine the radical aspect of Dickinson's mode of non-saying, and simultaneously denies the possibility for shape and pattern within such a mode. Dickinson's mysticism and her 'craftsman[ship]' go hand in hand because to engage with order, the form of the hymn and the structures implied in bee imagery and her repeated (albeit differentiated) use of it, is to highlight both absence and relation – two aspects of spirituality which are continually reassessed in her poetry.

The prolific nature of the bee image in Dickinson's poems means that focus in this and the following chapter will be centred necessarily around two main ideas which are broadly associated with her critique of orthodox religion. The first is the dialectic between the individual and community, an important aspect of traditional orthodox religions when is conveyed metaphorically in terms of the bee's relation to the hive or wider community. The second is the connection/division between ideas of industry and revery, which connote respectively ideas of production and ecstasy. To explore these ideas Dickinson uses firstly, caricature, where the bee represents the Puritan and the Protestant work ethic, and secondly, emphasis on the bee's presence in the poetical scene, usually with an excessive, disruptive and often sexualised body. The different ways in which the bee image is used can be seen as being 'emblematic' with their performative nature taking on a liturgical quality within Dickinson's poetic

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[15] Gelpi cites Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: 1963) pp. 250-252, for similar invocations of the bee, flower and spider in the poetry of Keats.

and spiritual architecture. Martha Winburn England identifies 'systems of images' in Dickinson's poems, and likens these to those found in Shakespeare's plays:

> In the plays, systems of images form almost a separate plot element. In her collected poems, similar systems of images give an effect of drama. [...] They enter into conflicts. They mirror one another, change sides in an argument, combine and re-combine as in multiple valences, entering into combination with conflicting ideas, themes and emotions.
>
> (Winburn England, p. 117.)

The emblematic but repositioning shape of Dickinson's bee imagery enters directly into the conflicts created by the orthodox religious culture she had grown up within, and her own spiritual experiences as she felt them. Whilst Dickinson's relation to the bee imagery she employs is shifting, the bee's relation to the hive unchanging. In this way, the bee presents Dickinson with a paradigm for her own predicament; the effect of creating poetically a metaphor for the divine which is both emblematic *and* multivalent, both changing *and* unchanging. Bee imagery serves Dickinson as a way to articulate the reconciliation of impossibilities and therefore also, to trace the trajectory of the divine.

Transcendentalism and Unitarianism

In keeping with her time, and the proliferation of different religious groups which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century period in New England in particular, the various challenges to ideas of individuality and community and religious orthodoxy delineated by the bee image in Dickinson's poems can be seen as reflecting and articulating the climate of challenge to the myth of American Protestant unity.[16] Transcendentalism and Unitarianism undoubtedly influenced Dickinson. Both were popular in literary circles and espoused in the works she read by Ralph Waldo Emerson[17] and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and although the extent of such

[16] For detailed information on religious groups in New England, see Catherine A. Brekus, 'Interpreting American Religion,' in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century America* ed. by William L. Barney, pp. 317-333.

[17] Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) See 'The Over-Soul' where Emerson states 'that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other.' Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (1841) (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1904) pp. 197-221. (p. 198.) Also Emerson's poem 'The Humble-bee' in which he sees perfect design in the bee's industry:

influence is debatable, the fact that such 'unevangelical' thinking permeated Dickinson's literary and social sphere must be acknowledged at this point.[18] Thomas Wentworth Higginson was a Unitarian,[19] writer and critic who became an important mentor figure for Dickinson. Both Emerson and Higginson produced works on nature and the 'revery' which might be achieved by engagement with it. Dickinson was undoubtedly familiar with Emerson's essay on 'Nature,' in which Emerson argues that the natural world provides the human observer with ways to transcend mortal reality, thus articulating the important leap from rational Unitarianism to Transcendentalism.[20]

As discussed in the previous chapter, Eliza Lee Follen's hymns and songs for children were widespread and her connection with Unitarianism was perhaps a contributing factor in her popularity. New England Unitarianism encouraged congregational hymn-singing and English hymnographers such as the theologically liberal Dissenters such as Philip Doddridge, Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1826) and Isaac Watts were also popular. Significantly, a type of reticence which leant itself to cryptic phraseology was also encouraged, as Daniel Walker Howe explains, citing Henry Ware Jnr.:

> [...] New England Liberals had been disposed to disguise their theological opinions in cryptic phrases to avoid weakening the Standing Order. [...] 'Never allow yourselves to be carried away by the whim that frankness and honesty require you to proclaim your modern flights into the clouds – to tell of your visions or to declare

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Yellow-breeched philosopher!
Seeing only what is fair,
Sipping only what is sweet,
Thou dost mock fate and care,
Leave the chaff and take the wheat. (*American Poetry: The Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by John Hollander (New York: Library of America, 1996) (p. 109.)

[18] Martha Winburn England dismisses claims of Dickinson's Unitarian or Transcendental tendencies, arguing that 'There are only such elements of mysticism and transcendentalism as are common to all orthodox Hebrew and Christian thinking,' and sees Dickinson primarily as displaying a Puritan's attitude toward the Establishment.' See Martha Winburn England, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers*, p. 119.

[19] See Richard B. Sewall *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, vol 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) For Higginson's progression from Harvard Divinity student to 'radical Unitarian Minister.' (p. 540.)

[20] David M. Robinson, 'Emerson and Religion,' in Joel Myerson, ed., *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 151-177. (p. 158.) Robinson cites Emerson's *Nature* to illustrate his commitment to idealism: 'Idealism sees the world in God,' 'It beholds the whole circle of persons and things, of actions and events, of country and religion, not as painfully accumulated, atom after atom, act after act, in an aged creeping Past, but as one vast picture, which God paints on the instant eternity, for the contemplation of the soul.' (*Nature* 1:36)

> every opinion of your own. The physician does not tell the patient all he knows about his disease, for it might be the death of him.'[21]

In contrast to the Puritan habit of diary keeping and outward show of divine knowledge of divine communion, 'frankness' and 'honesty' are observed in Unitarianism in the above passage as being an indulgence of 'whims.' Reticence is prescribed by Ware as a caution to protect the hierarchical relation between a preacher and his congregation. The emphasis placed upon reticence in Unitarianism might have provided inspiration for the poetic voice in Dickinson's poems which struggles to articulate 'truth.' Dickinson's continued friendship with Higginson, and her readings of his magazine, presented ample opportunity for Dickinson to register Unitarian thinking and absorb the modes of its relatively small number of preachers.

Keen to stand at a critical distance from those who proclaimed to know God intimately, who also might have an investment in maintaining the hierarchical status quo that orthodox religion offered, Dickinson's poetic persona achieves ironic distance at times by mimicking the cryptic reticence favoured by Unitarian ministers. Found equally in her poems is the tendency to both 'Tell all the Truth but tell it slant,'(Fr 1263) that is, to avoid explicitness, but also, to give the impression of 'telling' all of the time, seen for example in poems such as 'I'll tell you how the sun rose' (Fr 204), only to debunk the idea of poetic vision as soon as the act of describing is announced, with modifiers such as 'there seemed' when describing the scene before her, and the speaker's need to reassure herself of the validity of her ability to perceive accurately; 'Then I said softly to myself –/ 'That must have been the sun!'' This mode of coyness, often found in Dickinson's poems, indicates a knowing playfulness at the fear or inevitability of being 'found out.'

However, in contrast to the view of Dickinson as being essentially a poet of reticence and introspection, whose poetry is marked by its 'virtual exclusion of the contemporary and social' and is ultimately contextless,[22] Dickinson's poetics (exemplified here in her use of the bee image) delineate the individual's place within

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[21] Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy 1805-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) pp. 170-171. Cites Howard Ware Jnr., 'Notes,' p. 59. (from *Works,* 1830)

[22] See for example, Cora Kaplan, 'The Indefinite Disclosed: Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson' in Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986) pp. 95-115. (p. 98.) And Lynn Shakinovsky, 'No Frame of Reference: The Absence of Context in Emily Dickinson's Poetry', in *Emily Dickinson: Critical Assessments Vol IV* ed. by Graham Clarke (Mountfield: Helm Information Ltd., 2002) pp. 703-716.

a community and society, and directly address the poet's position as producing 'praise.'[23] The notion of 'revery' incorporates the bee to challenge religious authority and patriarchal control in the depiction of sexuality and bodily excessiveness. In this way Dickinson uses it to articulate rebellion via sexuality. There are of course moments when Dickinson's bee is simply that: an insect she chooses to use as a metaphor for transcendence, physical pleasure or interconnectivity. However, the fact that the image has such strong resonance both in literary history and also the puritan work ethic and notion of leading a 'useful' life conveyed in many of Isaac Watts's hymns, means that it becomes, overall, more than a metaphor for these things; it becomes a trope within her own poetic 'liturgy' and is therefore also inextricably bound to her own search for, and expression of, belief.

Dickinson's Bee Imagery and Traditional Emblems

The various ways in which the bee is presented resists, partly, the impulse to see it as a definitive, one-dimensional emblem or motif. Frequently, Dickinson's metaphors deny and undermine language's power to define; something that has made her work so receptive to post-modern accounts and readings.[24] However, because of its repeated use within her body of work, and the numerous occasions when it does seem to carry a uniform quality across the corpus from one poem to another, the bee in Dickinson's work can be seen as having a tropic quality within her own poetic liturgy. This repeated presence reveals an effort to construct an alternative to the dogma of orthodox religion. Lease concedes that Dickinson's metaphors were 'rooted in ideas that she took seriously – that we can and should take seriously'[25] but the extent to which they were 'rooted' or connected explicitly to ideas or even political persuasions is debatable. If we are to assume that Dickinson's imagery serves as material to

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[23] 'Praise' can be used to connote Dickinson's idea of poetry as prayer, or prayer as poetry, as seen in the pun she makes on 'prairie' in Fr 1779: 'To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee'. As discussed in the following chapter, pp. 19-21.

[24] For example of such criticism on the relation between Dickinson's 'indefinite' self and postmodernist literary theory, see both Gudrun Grabher, 'Dickinson's Lyrical Self' and David Porter, 'Searching For Dickinson's Themes' in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 224-239 and pp. 183-196.

[25] *RMB*, p. 62. Lease argues that ED's metaphors shouldn't be taken literally and that her central emphasis was secular and aesthetic, and cites Charles R. Anderson, *Stairway of Surprise* (p. 46); 'that figurative expressions should not be taken literally is an unexceptional position – but I would urge that Dickinson's life and art were inextricably linked to her lifelong struggle for religious belief.' (p. 144.)

construct a poetic world, one in which she participated whilst writing poetry, then the bee image seems a particularly poignant point to start.

The symbol in Western Christian traditions of worship has been noted as possessing potency and importance. M. Bradford Bedingfield's (2002) comments on the place of the symbol in Anglo-Saxon Christianity are relevant here:

> The relationship between the symbol and what it symbolises is real enough to belie the modern predisposition that ritualistic expression, relying as it does on symbols, is somehow unrealistic. [...] art can imbue a church with divine power, providing 'a way of entering the next world.'[26]

Reading Dickinson's poems in such a way goes against one's natural impulses, and does seem to be implausible or 'unrealistic' in a similar way to that suggested above. However, given that Dickinson's mode of expression is often elliptical and evasive, the recurrence of images and the personifications she frequently employs become all the more striking when compared with the conventions of religious liturgy and religious art. In particular, the subtle shift to the mimetic in Anglo-Saxon dramatic liturgy that Bradford Bedingfield identifies – that is, the shift from the ritual to representational – is useful when thinking about Dickinson's use of imagery because her use of the bee seems to fall somewhere between these two categories. (Bedingfield, p. 228.) In a similar way to the symbols used in Christian liturgy, Dickinson's images often hint at analogous events, states of being or processes and are characteristic of meaning beyond the image itself.[27]

Some discussion of this trait in Dickinson's writing can be found with reference to her other images, such as flowers. In her discussion of Dickinson's use of the gentian flower, Elizabeth Petrino (2005) argues that Dickinson would have rejected the emblematic quality of the depiction of the gentian in contemporary male writers such as William Cullen Bryant and John Greenleaf Whittier.[28] Citing a list of Dickinson's botanical reading, produced largely by her education at Mount Holyoke, Petrino argues that such reading, together with her devotion to a herbarium, illustrates

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[26] M. Bradford Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002) pp. 5-6 Bradford Bedingfield cites Barbara Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography* (Cambridge, 1990) p. 16.

[27] For explanation of liturgical symbols see Gerhard Podhradsky, ed., *New Dictionary of the Liturgy* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967) pp. 190-191.

[28] Elizabeth Petrino, 'Late Bloomer: The Gentian as Sign or Symbol in the Work of Dickinson and Her Contemporaries,' *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 14: 1 (2004) 104-125

how she 'veered away from the age's religiocentrism, with its attendant attitudes toward gender,' but also notes how such education encouraged the scrutiny of the physical world which would prepare young women to be capable of abstract thought. (Petrino, p. 105.) Similar ideas inform Dickinson's use of the bee image. Just as she clearly revised the gender associations with flowers in contemporary literature, so she systematically revised the 'religiocentrism' inherent in other emblematic depictions of nature. The image of the bee in Dickinson is ironically emblematic but also emblematic within her own poetics of the struggle to convey the essential paradox that such religiocentrism could not reconcile: the desire for community and interconnectedness with the need for freedom and liberty in poetic language.

Petrino concurs with Domhnall Mitchell's view on Dickinson's use of flowers as being that which locates her to middle class culture:

> She ironically deploys flowers, insects, and other natural creatures to express her wish that she could control life as she would hope to plant and tend a garden - another aspect of her middle-class sensibility.
>
> (Petrino, p. 110.)

The notion that Dickinson deployed images of the natural world, including bees, to 'express her wish that she could control life as she would hope to plant and tend a garden' is questionable at best when considering the various ways in which the image of the bee is 'deployed.' Although Dickinson was in no doubt middle-class, a desire to exert control over life cannot be taken as an indication of this fact, nor can it be identified in her portrayal of bees, as often they invoke the abnegation of such control. However, the various ways in which bee imagery is conveyed in the body of Dickinson's work effectively assists readings of her critique of orthodox, organised religion because of the affinity the bee images have within the poems with Puritanism, hymn-singing and the debates surrounding an individual's position within a spiritual community.

Judith Farr has argued recently in *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (2004) that Dickinson's use of flowers (both as literary tropes and also actual flowers, as she highlights Dickinson's interest in gardening) supplied her with a method of organising her poetics and even her literary and social self. Furthermore, she argues that

Dickinson's 'use' of flowers is what aligns her most decisively with the literary tradition:

> Mid-Victorians liked to pun on the aesthetic associations between 'posies' and 'poesie.' Her flowers were Emily Dickinson's other 'poems,' which the conservatory could safely enshrine in an age when what Hawthorne contemptuously called women 'scribblers' were not always received in society.[29]

Gardening no doubt played an important part in Dickinson's contact with nature and therefore also provided a 'respectable' occupation and source of inspiration for her poems. Farr argues that Dickinson's flowers 'live in her poems and letters as one of her primary subjects, chief sources of themes and imagery, and foremost means of exploring her vision of reality.'(Farr, p. 12.) However, the bee image is equally well established in literary (and also religious) history.

Unlike the flower, the bee image provides a disruption, and a counter, to the flower's genderised, genteel-feminine associations, carrying equally the phallic and masculine association as well as the feminine solitary-worker,[30] and matriarchal 'Queen Bee' connotations. The image of the bee serves to express equally masculine and feminine 'traits,' and at times these stereotypes are manipulated in the poems to express but also undermine and dissolve easy gender distinctions. It is perhaps because of this fluidity that the bee is capable of reason and sound judgement, as well as 'delirium.' In the poem 'There is a flower that bees prefer,' for example, the bee is introduced as displaying a measured, rational response (as opposed to 'desire') with regard to the choice of flower, which in this instance is a clover:

> There is a flower that Bees prefer –
> And Butterflies - desire -
> To gain the Purple Democrat
> The Humming Bird – aspire – (Fr 642)

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[29] Judith Farr, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) p. 4. Farr quotes from Domhnall Mitchell's *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000) pp. 112-177; Dickinson's 'floral preferences.. [were] saturated with the language and supposition of class distinctions.'

[30] The 1828 entry for 'bee' in *Webster's* dictionary does not provide the sex of worker bees, therefore we cannot be certain that Dickinson knew that they are all female. Despite this, however, bee imagery certainly provided Dickinson with an opportunity to utilise both the phallic, masculine association of the bee's action of gathering pollen from a flower as well as the popular association of the Queen Bee with exclusive, matriarchal power.

The poem, which eulogises the clover as the perfect feminine specimen delays the usual climax of ironic wit present in other poems which are concerned with flowers as a metaphor epitomising negative stereotypes of femininity. Instead, the poem gives way to genuine affection for the clover's lowly position and endurance, invoking simultaneously both Christ's example of suffering and Mary's innocence and patience in bearing her 'privilege:'

> She doth not wait for June –
> Before the World be Green –
> Her sturdy little Countenance
> Against the Wind - be seen –
>
> Contending with the Grass –
> Near Kinsman to Herself –
> For Privilege of Sod and Sun –
> Sweet Litigants for Life –

The bee's response to the clover is a measure of the poem's distance from a parody of the flower's innate qualities of constancy and altruism:

> Her Public - be the Noon –
> Her Providence – the Sun –
> Her Progress – by the Bee – proclaimed –
> In sovereign - Swerveless Tune –
>
> The Bravest - of the Host –
> Surrendering – the last –
> Nor even of Defeat – aware –
> When cancelled by the Frost –

Usually easily distracted, deference is given in this poem to the bee's estimation ('swerveless tune') of the clover's progress, here perhaps symbolising spiritual as well as physical growth. The bee in this poem is not the rebellious, pleasure-seeking wanderer, but is comparatively 'mature' and capable of sound judgement, and serves as an indication to the reader the level of esteem imparted to the clover's 'Christian' qualities.

In the epilogue to her book, Farr makes a rather brief connection between poem Fr610 'From Cocoon forth a Butterfly,' with its references to the 'steady tide' which 'extinguishes,' and the frequent reminders of darkness to be found in eighteenth-century hymns, and cites Watts's 'O God, our help in ages past' as an

example. (Farr, p. 281.) It is no coincidence that such a poem, in which the bee image is particularly striking because of its markedly less prominent position within the poem, should be noted for its resonance with Watts. Often in poems where the bee is present, the Wattsian association of the bee with the conflict between idleness and industry, and how that relates to spirituality, or rectitude, is also there. Dickinson's use of the bee can be seen as much more than a desire to align herself with nature, moreover, it directly confronts 'nature' as a concept which problematises gender construction. In contrast to the flower as a relatively *static* metaphor, the bee, which invokes what Farr terms 'the conflict between the need for labour and the quest for pleasure' (Farr, p. 281.) is rather, an *ecstatic* metaphor, which conveys at different turns, fluidity, multiplicity, liberty, community and regeneration: qualities which are strongly associated with spirituality in her poems which appear as disruptive to the representation of orthodox religion.

The tendency to align rebellious, rowdy qualities with the bee can be seen in a letter of April 1856, to John L. Graves, where she describes the bumblebee as a 'Cockney' in 'jaunty clothes', and makes the distinction between this type of bee and the 'manly, earnest' bees of summer:

> And here are Robins – just got home – and giddy Crows – and Jays – and will you trust me – as I live, here's a *bumblebee* – not such as summer brings – John – earnest, manly bees, but a kind of Cockney, dressed in jaunty clothes. Much that is gay – have I to show, if you were with me, John, upon this April grass.
>
> (L:II, p. 327.)

The 'jaunty cockney' bumblebee represents an elusive character whose changeability resists the definitions of gender, a trait echoed in the fluid nature of bee imagery which is here the jauntiness of the bumblebee rather than the industry of the honey bee. Contemporary literary treatments of the bee image as worker or 'jaunty' entrepreneur are found in both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Dickens. As Bee Wilson observes,[31] *Bleak House* contains a section in which Dickens uses the metaphor of the male (non-industrious) drone in order to convey the deceptive nature of Mr. Skimpole's character, whose ability to scrounge money out of others whilst receiving little in the way of retribution conveys the opposite of the more widely held

[31] Bee Wilson, *The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us* (London: John Murray, 2004) pp. 31-32.

association of the worker bee with worthwhile industry. In Chapter Eight of *Bleak House*, entitled 'Covering a Multitude of Sins,' Dickens describes Mr. Skimpole's rumination on the productive life of bees, and the significant differences between worker bees and drones:

> He didn't at all see why the busy Bee should be proposed as a model to him; he supposed the Bee liked to make honey, or he wouldn't do it – nobody asked him. It was not necessary for the Bee to make such a merit of his tastes. [...] He must say he thought a Drone the embodiment of a pleasanter and wiser idea. The Drone said, unaffectedly, '[...] I must take the liberty of looking about me, and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him.' This appeared to Mr Skimpole to be the Drone philosophy – always supposing the Drone to be willing to be on good terms with the Bee: which, so far as he knew, the easy fellow always was, if the consequential creature would only let him, and not be so conceited about his honey![32]

The above excerpt displays not only the prevalence of the notion of the 'busy bee,' and the extent to which it had become idiomatic in popular literature during the nineteenth century, but also the distinction between industrious bees and non-industrious drones which Dickinson, having read *Bleak House*, must have been aware of when choosing how to represent the insect in her poems. The idea of the morally dubious character or the association of the bee's ecstatic nature with criminality is invoked in many of her representations of bees, as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, her use of the image also includes criticism of society's expectations and how one must be seen as being productive or face moral reprehension as she questions the notion of productivity, as well as the portrayal of joy, exuberance and ecstasy as being counter to orthodox religion's emphasis on being industrious.

The notion of disorder that the bee sometimes conveys in Dickinson's poems might also represent the female as disorder, something prevalent in Puritan New England. Susan Juster's book, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* includes a chapter on the 'Feminisation of Sin 1780-1830,' in which she outlines the ways in which women were 'othered' in a community of religious believers through their association with disorder. She writes:

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[32] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853) (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 116.

> [...]disorderly qualities were seen not only to be manifest in individual women members, but to constitute the very core of the feminine character [...] 'feminine' qualities in general were redefined as disorderly even when exhibited by men.[33]

Women were seen as being the epitome of disorder, 'seducing souls and bodies away from the truth.' (Juster, pp. 148-149.) Dickinson's depiction of the bee often revels in disorder, presenting it as an anarchic mode of rebellion against that which oppresses and defines the woman as the enemy of truth.

The image of the bee and its life pattern has always served as a rich metaphor for writers and an opportunity for making connections between it and human political action (or inaction). As Bee Wilson explains:

> Bee politics has taken almost as many forms as human politics, shifting with the changing values of different places and times. The hive has been, in turn, monarchical, oligarchical, aristocratic, constitutional, imperial, republican, absolute, moderate, communist, anarchist and even fascist. As so often in politics, we see whatever it is we want to see.
>
> (Wilson, p. 110.)

Dickinson's use of the bee shifts also, and is at times the worker honey bee, compatible with utopian socialist thinking; at other times the solitary bumblebee indicative of the excessive fuzz and buzz of society but also of her own experiences as a poet. The bee image as a metaphor for leading a useful life and also being under the rule of a Queen Bee is especially apt for Dickinson's era – in terms of both its Puritan and colonial heritage. However it is the fluidity and variety of positions available to the bee which makes it an attractive image to Dickinson and why it conveys, ultimately, her own poetic identity.

'Out of the strong came forth Sweetness': Biblical and Literary Bees

In a literary sense, Dickinson's bee image is neither Classical nor Romantic; however, the range of her reading would have encompassed the following in which the bee is an important image: Virgil's *Georgics*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the devotional poetry of

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[33] Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994) pp. 148-149.

George Herbert, Isaac Watts, and William Blake's poetry.[34] She may also have been familiar with Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) which has influenced many writings on the life of bees because of the emphasis which Mandeville places upon the morally dubious nature of bees, where the 'paradise' or 'public benefit' of the hive is not constructed by the virtue of the working bees, but rather by the 'private vice' of individuals. As Wilson observes:

> None of the workers in Mandeville's hive was honest. This was a workforce of 'Sharpers, Parasites, Pimps, Players, Pick-pockets, Coiners, Quacks, Sooth-Sayers.' [...] Even though 'every part' of Mandeville's hive was 'full of vice,' the whole mass was 'a Paradise.'
>
> (Wilson, p. 127.)

Dickinson's 'Skimpolean' bees invoke the moral dubiousness which Mandeville associates with the individuality of bees, and assert a poetic 'Paradise' which is similarly, hubristically, amoral. Her 'fraudulent' bees are incorporated within, and are not incompatible with, the pattern for ecstasy within her poems. However, this serves to highlight the moral judgement attached to such ecstatic behaviour as opposed to the behaviour itself.

Before engaging in a brief outline of canonical writers' use of the bee image, attention must first be turned to the Bible, one of Dickinson's most favoured sources of inspiration. Sources for the use of the bee to convey resurrection, or a bridge between life and death can be seen in many texts. As Bee Wilson observes, the practice of 'bugonia,' the belief that dead oxen 'produce' bees and honey is alluded to in much classical literature to convey the miracle of death producing life and the biblical version is an allegory of God's power and resurrection through death. However, the actual practice of producing honey in this way was described in ancient Greek and Roman farming advice.[35] The quotation 'Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came forth sweetness' is from Judges 14:14 where Samson gathers

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[34] *RMB*, p. 35. In the chapter 'Sacred Texts Transformed' Lease considers Dickinson's reading list: Shakespeare, King James Version of the Bible, Isaac Watts, Thomas a Kempis, Sir Thomas Browne, George Herbert and Henry Vaughan, noting; ' Shakespeare, the King James Bible, Watts and some notable seventeenth-century writers of devotional prose and poetry served as catalysts to release Dickinson's distinctive voice and vision – a voice and vision that transformed these sacred texts to serve her own religious quest and dedicated artistry.' (p. 35.) To this list, perhaps omitted because of its ubiquitous presence and influence in much of the literature she read, *Paradise Lost* should be added.

[35] Bee Wilson, p. 74. Wilson cites *Geoponica*, the ancient Greek and Roman anthology of farming advice.

honey made by the swarm of bees seemingly born out of the decaying carcass of the young lion he had killed through the Holy Spirit's power.[36] The exuberant nature of Dickinson's bees connotes a similar spiritual strength, derived from access to its own sweetness or its ability to produce sweetness.

Dickinson's schooling was predominantly classical, and the Roman poet Virgil (70-19BC) would have been familiar to her. Virgil's pastoral poem the *The Georgics* was, up until the Renaissance, one of the main sources for writing about bees. (Wilson, p. 24.) Virgil's main source for information on bees was books five and six of Aristotle's *Historia Animalium.*[37] It is likely that the *The Georgics*, probably Dryden's translation, widely available in the nineteenth century, may have provided a source for Dickinson's bees. The depiction in the *The Georgics* is interesting to read alongside the poems of Dickinson's which contain bees because Virgil's poem veils what is an extensive consideration of a human's place in society and the relationship to her/his environment – a similar consideration in Dickinson's poetry. In this, it is also a eulogy to the Roman people, and Dickinson's bees perhaps represent the warrior-like search for cohesion within her own 'Ecstatic nation' (Fr 1381.). Mynors notes Virgil's use of Aristotle's terms of 'nare' and 'trahi' in book four of *The Georgics* which conveys the 'trailing motion of a swarm which, though composed of thousands of individuals, moveth altogether, if it move at all.'[38] It is no surprise that the image of the bee colony which is made up of many individuals and moves as one unified colony should become a metaphor for the ideal of solidarity or community, religious or otherwise. Virgil's description of the re-emergence of the bees at the end of book four is such that it effectively bridges the living and the under worlds, as the bees issue forth from death, their flight upwards from the decaying carcasses of bulls indicating and delineating a path towards heaven, that is, a new nation, and 'golden age':

> Nine mornings thence, with sacrifice and prayers,
> The powers atoned, he to the grove repairs.

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[36] *The Holy Bible in the King James Version* (New Jersey: Thomas Nelson, 1972) Judges 14. 14, p. 312.

[37] R. A. B. Mynors, ed., *Virgil: Georgics*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 266. Mynors notes in the commentary to lines 58-60 of book four that Virgil uses Aristotle's phrase 'ad sidera' which means 'soaring flight' to connote the bees' 'new found liberty.' Mynors comments on the swarming action of the bees – 'the first or 'prime' swarm when the hive is overfull with spring brood and the old queen issues forth with many of her people to establish a new colony.'

[38] Ibid, p. 266. Mynors notes in the commentary to lines 58-60 of book four.

> Behold a prodigy! For from within
> The broken bowels and the bloated skin,
> A buzzing noise of bees his ears alarms:
> Straight issue through the sides assembling swarms
> (*The Georgics*, Book IV, p. 212.)[39]

Depicting the practice of bugonia, this final passage from *The Georgics* reiterates the bee's origin which is death and also simultaneously their miraculous, collective power; the 'broken bowels' and their 'straight issue through the sides' describes their physical force. Thus the bee imagery here provides a connection between death and life, where a vital life force is literally born out of the death and decay of a previously existing but now extinguished life. Significantly, at the end of Dryden's text, Caesar's use of 'arts' in exacting his authority is invoked:

> With conquering arts asserts his country's cause,
> With arts of peace the willing people draws;
> On the glad earth the golden age renews.
> (*The Georgics*, Book IV, p. 212.)

Dickinson's use of poetic artistry similarly envisions a new kind of heaven. Virgil's use of bee imagery is instructive to reading Dickinson's bees as (in Dryden's translation) they symbolise a reconfigured hope and spirituality borne from an old world (in Dickinson's case an old faith) where 'slow-creeping evil eats his way' (*The Georgics*, Book III, p. 186.), and the projection of a renewed 'age' and subsequently renewed heaven.

However, other biblical instances of bees (all Old Testament) are connected with vengeance, wrath and danger and foreshadow the apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelations.[40] Although Dickinson's bees do not display these qualities, the typological significance of bee imagery is undoubtedly at work in her poems. The swarming action of the bees and the state of God's vengeance being enacted foreshadows the apocalyptical visions in the Book of Revelations, which Dickinson cited as a main source of inspiration.[41] The rebelliousness and disruption which the bees in Dickinson's poems display enact the apocalyptic vision, delineating a trajectory towards a new heaven. Thus the description of the bee in poem Fr 979,

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[39] *The Works of Virgil*, vol. 3, trans. by John Dryden (Chiswick: C. Wittingham, 1822.)
[40] See for example Deuteronomy 1.44, Psalm 118.12 and Isaiah 7.18.
[41] See SL, p. 172. April 25, 1862, to T.W. Higginson.

which derives inspiration from the gemstone imagery in Revelations, includes an armoured puritan in battle, a 'defender of the faith'.[42]

Milton's use of bee imagery also invokes the typological connection with bees and the apocalyptic visions in the Book of Revelations through its emphasis on the bees' ability to rebel and disrupt. The life-force of the bee in Dickinson's poems often takes on a rebellious, excessively exuberant aspect, and a significant previous example of such association of bees with the qualities of rebelliousness and defiance can be found in *Paradise Lost*, Book One, where Milton describes the throng of Satan's angels waiting to enter his court of Pandaemonium:

> Thick swarmed both on the ground and in the air,
> Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
> In spring time when the sun with Taurus rides,
> Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
> In clusters, they among fresh dews and flow'rs
> Fly to and fro or on the smoothed plank,
> The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
> New rubbed with balm, expatiate and confer
> Their state affairs
>
> (*PL*, Book I, 767-775.)[43]

Milton draws on Virgil's notion of bees as city builders (writing of how Satan was sent 'With his industrious crew to build in Hell.' (*PL*, Book I, 751) and as models of social order in *The Georgics* (Book IV).[44] The angels are gathered, in parliamentary fashion, to 'expatiate and confer/Their State affairs,' thus also depicting commonwealth ideals in keeping with Milton's politics.[45] The solitary bee is tiny but the collective, 'swarming' force of a colony ('crowd'), compounded by their ability to produce painful stings, produces a threatening image on a much larger scale. The gathering of Satan's angels and the 'hiss' of their 'rustling wings' firmly connects the

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[42] A name applied to Oliver Cromwell during the Puritan revolution.

[43] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Gordon Teskey (London: Norton and Company, 2005) p. 25. All citations from this edition and abbreviated to '*PL*'.

[44] Also a further allusion to Book One of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the Carthaginians are compared to bees in spring, 'So in the youth of summer throughout the flowering land/The bees pursue their labours under the sun.' (430-431) Thus diminishing them to insects, an effect which is also evident in *Georgics*. See Jasper Griffin, ed., *Virgil: The Aeneid* trans. by C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 19. (lines 430-437).

[45] John Milton actively promoted commonwealth ideas in 'The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth' published in 1660, shortly before the Restoration of Charles II in the same year. *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, although we are told he had begun to compose it in 1658. For further information, see F. T. Prince, ed., *Milton: Paradise Lost, Books I and II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) pp. 204-205.

industrious bee with satanic force, the 'hiss' invoking perfectly at once the rapid movement of a bee colony as well as the snake/form of Satan in *Genesis* which is exemplified further with their ability to 'charm' the peasant in their 'mirth and dance' with 'jocund Music.' Milton's depiction of the bee in this context is perhaps useful when reading Dickinson's use of the image as it conflates the relation of power to size and also carries the association of bees with the 'satanic' rebellion that became a part of the Romantic sensibility.[46]

Conversely, Alexander Pope's *Epistle to a Lady: Of the Characters of Women* and *Essay on Man*, focuses on the bee's instinct to extract 'healing dew' (honey) from poisonous flowers with precision:

> In the nice bee, what sense so subtly true
> from pois'nous herbs extracts the healing dew?[47]

Here emphasis is placed not upon satanic or rebellious qualities, as Milton associates with bees, but upon their implicit ability to divine goodness from what is inherently bad.

Dickinson's use of the bee trope in her letters conveys her own pointed engagement with its particular associations, but most specifically with gender. Gilbert and Gubar discuss what they observe as being a 'master/slave' relationship which resonates throughout a lot of Dickinson's poems and link it to Blake's 'Nobodaddy' - the notion of a domineering patriarchal figure coupled with a desire to be 'nobody,' an abnegation of a public self.[48] One of the examples they cite to demonstrate this point comes from Dickinson's letters, and is also an example of her use of the bee metaphor in her social interactions with others, namely the unnamed masculine addressee, who has been identified by Thomas Johnson and others as Charles

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[46] See Byron's poem *Cain* for Romantic treatment of Satan as rebellious fallen angel but anarchic, intellectual force.

[47] 'Essay on Man' lines 219-220 in John Butt, ed, *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (London: Methuen, 1968) p. 512. Habegger notes ED read this text at Mount Holyoke, see *MWL*, p. 192. Also 'Epistle to a Lady: Of the Characters of Women' in Robin Sowerby, ed., *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Routledge, 1988) p.158. Insects fly and buzz about Sappho, connoting dirt and profanity:

> Or Sappho at her toilet's greasy task,
> With Sappho fragrant at an evening mask:
> So morning insects, that in muck begun,
> Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting sun. (lines 25-28)

[48] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979) rev. edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p. 605.

Wadsworth. In this letter dated around 1862, which is also grouped by Johnson into what he calls the series of 'master' letters, Dickinson employs the metaphor of the flower ('Daisy') and the Bee in order to characterise a particularly painful personal relationship. The letter displays alternative word choices which have been bracketed, and crossings out, which indicates that it may have been an earlier draft of one which may or may not have been finally sent. She writes:

> Oh, did I offend it – [Didn't it want me to tell it the truth] Daisy – Daisy – offend it – who bends her smaller life to his (it's) meeker (lower) every day – who only asks – a task – [who] something to do for love of it – some little way she cannot guess to make that master glad – [...] Wonder stings me more than the Bee – who did never sting me – but made gay music with his might wherever I [may] [should] did go – Wonder wastes my pound, you said I had no size to spare.
>
> (L:II, p. 391.)

Gilbert and Gubar call this letter an example of Dickinson's awareness of 'romantic coercion'(Gilbert and Gubar, p. 605.) and use it to exemplify their ideas about Dickinson's knowledge and use of the Sun as a powerful symbol of the patriarchal other, the master to whom she must, at some point bend, inevitably, flower-like. Her use of the bee metaphor is left uncommented on by Gilbert and Gubar which seems odd as it is central to Dickinson's use of the master/slave metaphor which they identify, and is central to the example they give in this letter. This particular letter is an important example of Dickinson's use of the bee metaphor as it displays her knowledge of the image of the bee and its association with painful, romantic love, as also depicted in the figure of Cupid in poem Fr 1351.[49]

The association of the bee with romantic love has its roots in Classical Greek and Latin literature, and Andreas Alciatus's sixteenth-century *Latin Emblems* (published in the seventeenth century) includes the 'Honey Thief' story in which the bee represents the pain of romantic love. When Cupid is stung by a bee, he cries to his mother Venus, who laughs and says to him, 'You too, my son, imitate this creature, for though small, you also inflict so many hurtful wounds.'[50] Although there is no conclusive evidence to confirm it, the nineteenth-century revival of interest in the

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[49] Poem Fr 1351 alludes to the bee's 'cupidity,' in reference to his ability to pollinate flowers, serving in this instance as a sexual metaphor.

[50] Peter M. Daly, and others, eds., *Andreas Alciatus: (1) The Latin Emblems Indexes and Lists* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) Reprint of the Padua 1621 edition. Emblem #113.

emblem tradition is something which Dickinson might well have been aware of and influenced by, when revisiting the image of the bee in a continuous way throughout her poetic life. Daly (1985) provides information on the revival of interest in the emblematic tradition during the Victorian period and cites the Holbein Society's publication of Henry Green's translation of Alciatus's emblems, published in London and New York in 1871 and 1872 with further reprints as being representative of such a renewed interest. Furthermore, Ruth Miller's (1968) work forges comparisons between the organisation of Dickinson's fascicles and Francis Quarles *Emblems, Divine and Moral*, demonstrating a discernable narrative structure in Dickinson's poetry from 'acceptance through suffering and rejection to resolution.'[51] Although such a narrative is problematic in that it imposes a temporal and linear structure upon the poems, the fact that such a connection with Quarles can be made serves to bring out the emblematic quality of Dickinson's writing.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, Dickinson refers explicitly to the 'sacred emblems' of the 'sacrament of summer days' in poem Fr 122, which has as its central concern the deceptive quality of nature's ability to present an autumn day with blue sky that gives it the appearance of summer. Significantly, it is the bee, Dickinson's own version of a 'sacred' emblem, which is immune from this deception, the 'fraud that cannot cheat the Bee.' The place of emblems in religion is also brought to the fore in Edward Hitchcock's *Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons* (1850), which Dickinson would certainly have read or been aware of. It includes a chapter entitled 'The Resurrection of Spring' which contains an illustration entitled 'Emblems of the Resurrection' that depicts emblems such as the cocoon and the butterfly.[52] In order to convey how such literature might have informed Dickinson's use of insects in poetry, Richard Sewall includes an excerpt from poem Fr 162:

> The dreamy Butterflies bestir!
> Lethargic pools resume the whirr
> Of last year's sundered tune!
> From some old Fortress on the sun
> Baronial Bees – march – one by one –

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[51] Marietta Messmer, 'Dickinson's Critical Reception,' in Gudrun Grabher, and others, eds., *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 299-322. (p. 318.) Messmer discusses Ruth Miller's *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1968)

[52] Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* vol 2, illustration between pp. 502-503.

In murmuring platoon!

This, one of her earlier poems, indicates her use of the bee to depict a particular rank in the ceremonial rite of spring that is likened here to the tuneful marching of an army. As Chapter One noted, such simple tunes were often used in battle and form part of America's revolutionary history of the colony gaining independence, and the child gaining freedom from the parent, which no doubt permeated Dickinson's cultural background. As Kramnick observes, when the British were defeated in 1781, Cornwallis ordered his troops to sing the following:

> If buttercups buzz
> After the bee;
> If boats were on land,
> Churches on sea;
> If ponies rode men,
> And grass ate the cow;
> If cats could be chased
> Into holes by the mouse;
> If mammas sold their babies
> To gypsies for half a crown;
> If summer were spring
> And the other way round
> Then all the world would be upside down.[53]

According to Kramnick, this rhyme indicates a 'violation of all that seemed natural.' (Kramnick, p. 24.) Dickinson's use of the term 'baronial bee' might be seen as an indication of the paternalistic, puritan heritage of England's rule, but her desire to retain a child-like quality in her poems can also be seen as a desire to forge new configurations of spirituality beyond God the Father, and independence from paternalistic notions of God or spirit. In this sense she can seen as playing with the guise of the infidel, and the rebellious child and pitting it directly against the legacy of her paternalistic puritan heritage. Therefore in this instance the bee can be said to be emblematic, in so much as it draws upon and reflects particular aspects of her religious, political and literary culture.

As they appear to be influences upon Dickinson's 'emblematic' way of incorporating the bee in her poetics, Alciatus's book of emblems might also be

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[53] Isaac Kramnick, ed., *Thomas Paine: Common Sense* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) p. 24. Kramnick notes that an account of this incident is given in Samuel Elliot Morrison's *Oxford History of the American People* (New York: 1965) p. 265.

something which connects Isaac Watts and William Blake and provides a strong link to the emblematic tradition. Titles for Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* seem to echo some of the poetic emblems in Alciatus and comparisons were drawn between Blake and Watts by contemporary writers. Shrimpton (1976) cites B.H. Malkin's introductory letter to his *A Father's Memoirs of His Child* (London, 1806) which included a range of Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and a contrast is set up between Blake's poetic style and Isaac Watts's hymns.[54]

We know that Dickinson read and was probably influenced by the work of the metaphysical poet, George Herbert (1593-1633).[55] The image of the garden as a metaphor for the Church, which inevitably includes the images of nature and particularly the flower, can be seen repeatedly in Herbert's poems and hymns.[56] In the poem 'Providence,' which there is no evidence for Dickinson having read, but nonetheless proves as an illuminating intertext for her poems, Herbert's Bee is emblematic of the harmony and order he perceives through faith in God's design, and appears amidst a long list of 'creatures' which exist harmoniously, side by side, in nature:

> Bees work for man; and yet they never bruise
> Their master's flower, but leave it, having done,
> As fair as ever, and as fit to use;
> So both the flower doth stay, and honey run.
> (*The Temple:* 'Providence')[57]

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[54] N. Shrimpton, 'Hell's Hymnbook: Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and their Models' pp. 19-35 in B. G. Beatty, and R. T. Davies, eds., *Literature of the Romantic Period 1750-1850* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1976) p. 20. Shrimpton traces children's hymns for influences on Blake's poems, citing Watts's *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the use of Children* (1715). Bruce Woodcock notes in *The Selected Poems of William Blake* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000) that lines in Blake's poem 'The Divine Image'; 'And all must love the human form/In heathen, turk or jew' answer Watts's 'Praise for the Gospel'; 'Lord, I ascribe it to thy grace,/And not to chance, as others do,/That I was born of Christian race,/And not a Heathen or a Jew' in *Divine Songs attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715) ed. by J. H. P. Pafford, Oxford University Press, 1971. (p. 157.)

[55] *RMB*, p. 63. and p. 144. Lease cites Jack L Capps, *Reading* (pp. 68-69) as a reference and identifies particular poems, such as 'The Church Porch, and 'Virtue,' which he notes were in the Dickinson family library copy of *The Sacred Poets of England and America* ed. Rufus.W. Griswold (New York: D.Appleton & Company, 1850) and also that 'Mattens,'- was available to Emily not only in the *Springfield Republican's* publication of it (28 Oct, 1876), but also in the family's copy of Chambers' *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*.

[56] Herbert's influence extends beyond the bee; the final three stanzas of 'The Flower' are echoed in ED's letter (L:II, p. 391.) quoted above.

[57] John Tobin, ed., *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 110.

Here the bee does not affect the environment it is in, other than to produce honey, and so as a metaphor for the spiritual human, the 'bee' replicates an uncomplicated relationship with God that is spiritually productive. However, Dickinson's use of the bee as spiritual actor enacts the design implied in Herbert's use of the image, whilst also conveying ecstatic movement within and beyond the confined space of the garden or church. The productive aspect of the speaker's relationship with God implied in Herbert's use of the bee has strong associations with the production of ecstasy in Dickinson's poetry, in the revery which is derived through bodily pleasure as equally as spiritual connection. Perhaps the most striking allusion to the life of bees in connection with spirituality to be found in Herbert is in 'The Holy Scriptures (1),' where the restorative sustenance that the Bible provides the speaker with is likened to a bee's experience of honey:

> O Book! Infinite sweetness! Let my heart
> Suck ev'ry letter, and honey gain,
> Precious for any grief in any part;
> To clear the breast, to mollify all pain.
> Thou art all health, health thriving till it make
> A full eternity: thou art a mass
> Of strange delights, where we may wish and take.[58]

Not only does the speaker feast on each letter of the Bible as a bee would each flower, but the productive store of the holy book, the 'mass of strange delights,' which provides the speaker with unlimited access to spiritual sustenance is evocative of the beehive, a similar 'mass' with its many strange parts. Herbert's view of holy scripture as restorative can be likened to the effects of poetry in Dickinson, where the bees' access to revery connotes and allows the achievement of an ideal space.

Contemporary uses of the bee image can be gleaned from articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*, a magazine which Dickinson certainly read.[59] A poem entitled 'Telling the Bees' which appears in the April 1858 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, comes with a footnote explaining a New England custom of covering over the bee hive in mourning:

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[58] Ibid, p. 52.
[59] *RMB*, p. 59. Lease cites Higginson's involvement with the magazine and notes the influence that his article, 'Letter to a Young Contributor' had on Dickinson.

> On the death of a member of the family, the bees were at once informed of the event, and their hives dressed in mourning. The ceremonial was supposed to be necessary to prevent the swarms from leaving their hives and seeking a new home.[60]

Although the custom of 'Telling the Bees' of the death of a family member was perhaps in Dickinson's lifetime a somewhat out-moded custom left over from previous New England generations, it does illustrate the extent to which a belief in a particular quality of consciousness and perception had been invested in the bee. The desire to see the bee as that which seeks a thriving community, and to be an affirmation of life and activity, is attached to this particular meaning of the bee's anticipated flight away from death, and a need to separate itself from the inactivity that death brings. Another article from the *Atlantic Monthly* that concerns itself with the notion of 'Individuality' furthers the idea of the bee as social creatures as being emblematic of community and city building:

> Bees and ants are, to say the least, quite as witty as beetles, proverbially blind; yet they build insect cities, and are invincibly social and city-loving as Socrates himself.[61]

Both of these articles serve to demonstrate that bees were certainly part of the literary consciousness and would also be a familiar talking point at the time that Dickinson was writing poems that included the bee in its different modes.

Advances in science and interest in natural history in mid nineteenth century America no doubt play a part in Dickinson's fashioning of the bee in many of her poems. The work of Sir John Lubbock (Lord Avebury) was possibly known to Dickinson, as his study *Ants, Bees and Wasps: A Record of Observations on the Habits of the Social Hymenoptera* was published in New York in 1882, and his illustrated *On the Origin and Metamorphoses of Insects* was published earlier, in 1874. The 1828 edition of *Webster's* dictionary includes an entry for 'bee' that describes the three classes of bees as; female queen bees, male drone bees and the 'neuters or working bees.'[62] Although this entry is evidence of the fact that the sex of

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[60] Anon., 'Telling the Bees,' *Atlantic Monthly* 1: 6 (1858) 722-724 (p. 722.)
[61] Anon., 'Individuality' *Atlantic Monthly* 9: 54 (1862) 424-430 (p. 428.)
[62] *Webster's* dictionary, 1828 edition. http://65.66.134.201/cgi-bin/webster/webster.exe?firstp=17671 managed by Christian Technologies, Inc. 2002. (date accessed 5/06/07) The popularity of *Webster's* with American women writers in the mid-nineteenth-century is evidenced by Phoebe Cary's mention of

drone bees was known, it is unlikely that Dickinson would have known the female sex of worker bees. The 'neutrality' of gender which is ascribed to the worker bee at this point might account for Dickinson's use of it as an image which frequently disrupts gender stereotypes. One other notable influence on Dickinson's interest in natural history is that of Edward Hitchcock, the Reverend Professor and President of Amherst College, whom Richard Sewall identifies in his biography of Dickinson (1974) as a:

> [...] man of God and man of Science, who inspired a whole generation with a love of nature that combined a sense of its sublimity with an accurate knowledge of its parts and processes, as far as the natural sciences of the day knew them.[63]

The work and views of both Lubbock and Hitchcock no doubt informed Dickinson's analysis of the connection between the natural world and God's design in her incorporation of the life and habits of bees in her poetry, drawing on both biological/scientific and religious concerns. In her poems the bee is emblematic of being both 'part' *and* 'process,' that is paradoxically, an individual, ecstatic part of the productive, communal process.

Summary: Dickinson's Bee Imagery as an Alternative to Liturgical Symbolism?

The series of changes to the liturgy that took place during the eighteenth century, such the increased active participation of the laity (Podhradsky, p. 13.) together with the minimising of formal rituals, are reflected in Watts's Dissenting hymns.[64] As discussed in Chapter Three, the use of simplified language and the widening participation of the congregation that Watts's hymns enabled served a communal response to scripture that deviated significantly from earlier liturgical practices. If Dickinson's treatment of poetic imagery takes on such a liturgical aspect, what are the kinds of rituals they are reflecting or enacting? Dickinson's bees are often celebratory, disruptive and even anarchic, a somewhat surprising hallmark for poems which are frequently concerned with the weight of time, immortality and death. Richard B.

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it in the scathing poem 'Advice Gratis to Certain Women,' in *American Poetry: The Nineteenth century*, ed. by John Hollander (New York: The Library of America, 1996) p. 525.

[63] Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, vol 2, pp. 342-343.

[64] Book Three of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* is significantly titled 'Prepared for the Lord's Supper' rather than referring to the Eucharist. *PH*, p. 287.

Sewall argues in *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (1976) that in many of her poems, Dickinson is concerned with 'the ends of things,' and in this way she displays, what one reviewer of her *Letters* estimated, a 'primitive vision.' Sewall considers the review:

> Primitive, one infers, in the sense of seeing things as if they had just been created, but sophisticated enough to know that all things pass, and possessing the "acute natural sensibility" (again the review) to detect the pathos, or terror, or beauty of the full human cycle.[65]

Although many of her poems which include various motifs such as flowers and the sun do indeed explore the idea of conclusions and endings, the image of the bee is arguably Dickinson's most ebullient, conveying life and hope. Moreover, its connection with the regenerative energy of the hive places the bee in opposition to the preoccupation with 'endings' and the turning away from the world ('not on life but on the non-life she saw about her') Sewall identifies in Dickinson's poems. (Sewall, p. 719.) Her ability to write poems on the other side of an apparently firmly shut door was not a refusal of a 'non-life,' but a direct confrontation with it. Dickinson's poems do not voice a rejection of modernity per se, but a desire for confirmation of what she knew, experientially, of life. This can be seen in a late poem such as Fr1581, where she looks back upon the certainties of religious conviction, only to find a present absence in comparison:

> 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 Behaviour small –
> Better an ignis fatuus
> Than no illume at all – (Fr 1581)

The solidity and definiteness of 'God's Right Hand' which is capitalised in the first stanza indicates a place of certainty which she straightforwardly rejects in other poems, where belief is reduced to a mere abstraction, a 'spangled journey' to 'the

[65] Ibid., p. 719. Sewall quotes from the *Times Literary Supplement* (London) May 30, 1958, p. 296.

peak of some perceiveless thing'(THJ 1627). Her interest in the bee image highlights a preoccupation with the *idea* of being a part of an inherent design, whether it be an 'ignis fatuus' or not. Design is integral to the bee image, as it always carries the association of the hive and the design of the bee's work or production.

Dickinson utilises the bee trope to offer a critique of Puritanism and the religious dogma which her age both moved away from and was ultimately still attracted by, but also incorporates herself and her spiritual quest in writing around the image of the bee. Carrying with it a sense of agency and distinctiveness within each poem, Dickinson incorporates a sense of autonomy that can be aligned to the poet herself. In this way the bee image articulates the tensions Dickinson felt between her own sense of spirituality as against that of her New England Puritan heritage. So on the one hand the bee signals a cacophonous difference, or disruption of the familiar and conventional within her poems and at the same time delineates a pattern of interconnectivity and liberty to which the poems aspire. In a similar way, the use of the trope highlights a tension between the desire to be a female poet, which for her involved being solitary, and the desire to forge in writing a sense of being merely one element of a wider community. This was perhaps a community which did not necessarily require her physical presence, but was one not only composed of other women poets, but also those engaged in spiritual worship. As further analysis of bee imagery in the following chapter will demonstrate, in the imaginative work of the poem, Dickinson conjures a congregation of her own and participates in a form of worship that becomes materialised and enacted within the poem itself, thus forging and defining a heterologous space which successfully negotiates the 'I-Thou' model of address in hymn culture.

Chapter Six

Connecting Industry and Revery in Dickinson's Use of Bee Imagery

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-40) argued that labour was presented to the American people as the 'necessary, natural and honest condition of human existence.'[1] The connection between industry and religion, that is, seeing industry as a form of virtue and religious conviction, was deeply rooted in the American psyche from the Puritan Pilgrim Fathers' emphasis on leading an industrious life to the increasingly 'industrial' and profitable middle America of the nineteenth century. As Bee Wilson observes, the image of the bee was taken up and used as a motif for the American worker in the new republic, and the need to 'sanctify the virtue of labour through bees'[2] was increased with America's fast-moving industrialization. Such a view of industry or the 'religion of work' served to obfuscate the fact that this ethic inevitably benefited those in power over marginalized others and also neglected to pay attention to the idea of pleasure. Dickinson's bee poems offer parodies of the Puritan/Protestant work ethic which connects industry with Christian morality and virtue,[3] but she also uses the image to convey poetic vocation as a form of industry which acquires spiritual significance within her poems (the poet 'gathers' as the bee, as full an experience of life as possible and 'stores' it within the poem). She subverts and re-imagines the Protestant work ethic usually explicitly available to the hymnist, by stressing the connection between industry and 'revery.'

The bees in Dickinson's poems are described as anarchically enjoying their mode of production, representing the ultimate transgressive act which renders their position within a hierarchical social structure dangerously ungovernable. This singular transgression of connecting revery and industry, the forbidden ideal, is described hyperbolically by Dickinson, in terms of many different forbidden acts and transgressions, from debauched drunkenness and annoying intrusion, to sexual promiscuity and seduction. The fluidity of gender which bee imagery lends serves to emphasise such transgressions, further perplexing any commitment to defining categories and oppositions as displayed in orthodox religion and Puritanism particularly.

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* ed. Alan Ryan (London: Everyman, 1994) Vol 2, p.152. This quotation from Tocqueville is cited in Bee Wilson, *The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us* (London: John Murray, 2004) p. 34.

[2] Bee Wilson, *The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us,* p. 35.

[3] For discussion of the connective elements of ascetic Protestantism and the structure of capitalism, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) (London: Routledge, 2004) pp. 102-125.

Furthermore, playing upon the culturally received connections between the bee and the figure of the Puritan as we have seen in the previous chapter, Dickinson emphasises the spiritual dimension of such 'transgressive' behaviour. If the Puritan-bee's 'drunken' pleasure is perceived as a kind of seduction, then the significance of the performing sexual body to spiritual experience in Dickinson's poems is made exaggeratedly apparent. The connection between the body and mystical experience will be discussed here in relation to specific poems where the bee/body is made radically and effectively present. Moreover, oppositional thought, which the 'I-Thou' model of relation to the divine in traditional hymns epitomises, collapses in Dickinson's connection of industry and revery, and a redefinition of space is produced.

References to the role of the poet and poetry found in Dickinson's bee imagery reflect the connections between industry and revery, and community and the individual, which had been made separate by a patriarchally driven religious culture and an increasingly industrialised society. For example:

> Fame is a bee.
> It has a song-
> It has a sting-
> Ah, too, it has a wing. (Fr 1788)

The connections between revery ('wing') and industry (here the combined effect of 'song' and 'sting') which are made explicit in this poem serve to convey the both transporting effect of poetry and also the dualistic aspects of 'fame'. The connection between the experience of an ideal of a communal 'revery' and the practice of a morally defensible life which Dickinson's poems make explicit in the use of bee imagery, which describes exactly that, was necessarily obfuscated, for the effective production of a new England, and a profitable America.[4] Revery in Dickinson's bee imagery is a necessity

[4] Such obfuscation is seen in de Tocqueville's description of how poetic inspiration in a democracy turns *naturally* to an 'ideal' or an all-encompassing, expansive vision of divine design which connects individuals in their daily experience: '[m]en are disposed to conceive a much more vast conception of divinity itself, and God's intervention in human affairs appears in new and brighter light. Seeing the human race as one great whole, they easily conceive that all destinies are regulated by the same design and are led to recognize in the actions of each individual a trace of the universal and consistent plan by which God guides mankind.' Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835-40) ed. by J. P. Mayer (London: Fontana Press, 1994) p. 486. Dickinson's concern with connecting revery and industry serves as a critique of the desire for a socially cohesive 'ideal' in which all individuals were clearly not given equal status.

and not simply equated with ecstasy, or the pleasure of an individual, nor is it simply the self-reflective mode of the Romantic poet, as Roger Lundin argues.[5] Lundin describes's Dickinson's use of 'revery' as correlative to the Romantic ideal, and describes poetry as being for her a 'surrogate for traditional religion' which would lead her 'away from marriage and church into solitude.'(Lundin, pp. 60-62.) While revery in Dickinson's poems is a spiritual and mystical state it is not just a 'surrogate' for traditional religion; rather, the persistent connection of revery with the life and action of bees connects the ideal of revery with design and pattern. Dickinson's revery in many ways reconsiders and redefines traditional religion, and persistently presents revery as a state in relation to others as opposed to being a form of isolation.

Moreover, the implicit connection between industry and revery in her bee imagery fully confronts the cultural anxieties about idleness that were implicit in mid-nineteenth-century debates in the work ethic in relation to the woman question.[6] Thus Dickinson challenges the hierarchical ordering and patriarchal versions of the divine within religious culture through her use of bees, which serve to interrogate and destabilise the cultural (and social, sexual) divisions between industry and pleasure and between individuality and community. This challenge can be located within hymn culture and the divisions potentially proliferated or destabilised in hymns, through Dickinsons' use of bee imagery which carries a constant allusion to the culturally idiomatic 'busy bee' of Watts's verse, and also to the 'father' of hymnody.[7]

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[5] Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1998) pp. 56-62. Lundin cites 'Ilk Marvel's' popular *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850) as evidence of the growing approval of 'reveries' as being a suitable mode of inner reflection for young people during the mid-nineteenth century.

[6] Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974) pp. 182-209. In his chapter on feminist versions of the work ethic, Rodgers describes the critique of 'idle womanhood' in feminist works, such as *My Wife and I* (1871) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. In the novel, Stowe criticises the conventions that forced middle-class women into marriages which fostered and perpetuated idleness and purposelessness in otherwise capable women of 'faculty'.

[7] Phrase used by David G. Fountain in *Isaac Watts Remembered*, p. 102.

Industry and the 'divine perdition' of Idleness

> And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;
> That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and ye may have lack of nothing.
>
> (I Thessalonians 4.11-12)

Whilst Dickinson's rejection of affiliation with religious orthodoxy is clear, the Protestant work ethic which pervaded nineteenth-century didactic literature proved a useful paradigm for the poet struggling to articulate and simultaneously perform her own sense of vocation and belief through poetry. Frequently incorporated in her uses of bee imagery are parodies of the Puritan/Protestant work ethic that is epitomised in Watts's instructive poem for children 'Against Idleness,' which champions the 'busy bee.' The second poem in Franklin's reading edition, this verse introduces a direct parody of Watts:

> Sic transit Gloria mundi,
> "How doth the busy bee,"
> Dum vivimus vivamus,
> I stay mine enemy! (Fr 2)

The Latin phraseology of the Roman Catholic Church ('So the glory of this world passes away') is challenged by its parallel, and decidedly defiant response ('Let us live while we live') and is also undercut by the then idiomatic line from Watts's famous rhyme for children, which Lewis Carroll famously found occasion to parody.[8] Watts employs the cultural association of bees with industry to depict a memorable model of virtue for children

[8] Lewis Carroll's parody of Watts; 'How doth the Crocodile,' positions a predatory crocodile in the place of the 'busy bee,' to comic effect:

> How doth the little crocodile
> Improve his shining tail,
> And pour the waters of the Nile
> On every golden scale!

The parody appears in chapter two of *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* (1865). Martin Gardner provides the full text of the Watts poem in his edition *The Annotated Alice* (London: Penguin, 1965, revised edition 1970) pp. 38-39. Alice's inability to recite the rhyme correctly indicates the change in her which has taken place, thus exemplifying the large extent of children's familiarity with Watts's verse in the nineteenth century.

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

and to clarify the opportunity for satanic influence over 'idle hands':

In works of labour or of skill,
I would be busy too;
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do. (*PW*, pp. 340-341.)

Watts stresses the industry of the bee, in keeping with his emphasis on leading a useful Christian life, just as the speaker in Herbert's 'Employment (1)' questions his own life's work against the exemplary design of employment and usefulness depicted in the habits and work of bees: 'All things are busy; only I/Neither bring honey with the bees,/Nor flowers to make that,/nor the husbandry/To water these.'[9] The bee is ceaseless in its task of 'gathering' honey from 'every opening flower,' and seems to fit perfectly as an instruction to children to work hard. In emphasising the industriousness of the bees, Watts ignores, or at least obfuscates, the aspect of pleasure implied with the bee's nectar gathering which is exploited to its full in particular instances by Dickinson. Although further discoveries about the sex and different functions of bees were being made in the nineteenth century, which might account for Dickinson's association of the bee with pleasure, as found also in both Emerson's 'Humble-bee' who 'leave[s] the chaff and take[s] the wheat,'[10] and Mr Skimpole's 'drone philosophy' in *Bleak House*[11] which emphasises the drone's pleasure-seeking as opposed to the industry of the worker bee, Watts's emphasis on industry has less to do with inferior knowledge on the life of bees, than it has with his support and emphasis of the Protestant work ethic, which connects

[9] John Tobin, ed., *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 51.
[10] Emerson's 'The Humble-bee' in which he sees perfect design in the bee's industry which necessarily incorporates pleasure:

Yellow-breeched philosopher!
Seeing only what is fair,
Sipping only what is sweet,
Thou dost mock fate and care,
Leave the chaff and take the wheat. *American Poetry: The Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by John Hollander (New York: Library of America, 1996) (p. 109.)

[11] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853) (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 116.

productivity with morality and was particularly attractive to American pioneer sensibilities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By including Watts's line amongst the antiphonary phrases, the second of which is decidedly secular, Dickinson's poem questions the cognitive connections between traditions and the premises upon which such instructive literature are based.

Although Dickinson's poem does not follow the formal question and answer of versicle and response, the poem echoes it and presents a clear parody. The antiphonary style which Dickinson's poem mimics is similar to poems by Herbert which convey a reciprocal interaction and repetition between a group chorus and individuals made up of both angels and men.[12] However, unlike Herbert's antiphonary poems, the responses in the initial stanza of this poem do not provide agreement or confirmation, but rather represent an inherent conflict in religious doctrine. This poem thus exemplifies the central concerns of this chapter: the realm of the body and material world, and experience as Dickinson felt it, versus the idea of a 'higher' and morally correct way of life, the benefit of which is not felt until this world 'passes away,' as typified in Watts's verse. Both the ideology of the Church and the fact of living one's life 'while we live' are opened to scrutiny in Dickinson's use of the bee trope. Although she states gleefully in this poem 'I stay mine enemy,' and that can be read as a statement of clear defiance against constraints on the enjoyment of existence as a valuable store of experience not to be missed or misused, Dickinson is quick to convey the notion of one's self being an enemy just as much as the imposing voice of constraint she characterises so well, with full quotation marks, here.[13] Dickinson thus acknowledges that to challenge orthodoxy is to take the difficult path involving being seen by many as an enemy to the self. Her voice in comparison to Watts is deadpan, the exclamation indicating the poet's desire for surer ground. Surer ground for Dickinson comes from mediating such resonant voices as that of Watts, and working out where the paths of faith and life meet in accordance with her own experience of it – as delineated by the arc of the bee's flight in her poems - which is both 'ordained' through the fact of its design *and* steeped in embodied revery, in

[12] John Tobin, ed., *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*. See poems 'Antiphon (1)' and 'Antiphon (2),' pp. 47 and 85.

[13] Franklin uses the last fair copy of the poem and does not put quotation marks around the Latin phrases as T. H. Johnson does. This suggests further that Dickinson uses Watts in a specifically dialogic way.

'ostentation' (Fr 1426). It is an image which permeates a significant part of the corpus of her work, and directly confronts the Wattsian industrious bee. Moreover, the fact that Dickinson chooses to manipulate the antiphonary responses used in liturgy to a mockingly dramatic and comic effect in this poem illustrates a concern with the nature of liturgy and the effects reached when substituting or replacing traditional religious imagery with one that is self-conceived and also self-acting.

Dickinson returns to the culturally paradigmatic connection between industry and morality epitomised by Watts's verse,[14] much later on in her life in 1881. In a letter to her nephew Gilbert Dickinson the poet encloses a poem entitled 'The Bumble Bee's Religion', again inviting an inversion of the bee trope's resonance, where idleness is reconfigured as wisdom and virtue. Such idleness, or 'divine perdition' is for Dickinson as assertion of spiritual growth as it connotes a move away from the organising structures of religion:

> The Bumble-Bee's Religion -
> His little Hearse like Figure
> Unto itself a Dirge
> To a delusive Lilac
> The vanity divulge
> Of Industry and Morals
> And every righteous thing
> For the divine Perdition
> Of Idleness and Spring -
>
> (Fr 1547. In letter to Gilbert Dickinson,
> 1881, L:II, p. 701.)

The bee in this poem is a caricature of the Puritan going about his business of 'Industry and Morals'. An association of flowers with femininity and of bees with masculinity also operates to separate the active, masculine 'Bumble Bee' from the comparatively passive, 'delusive' feminine Lilac. The slow deadening of life ('Hearse' and 'Dirge') which such an adherence to a design for life imposes is presented as a show for the static, 'delusive Lilac' to observe. 'Delusive' and 'divine Perdition' invoke the Lilac's deviation and

[14] The extent to which the industry/idleness diptych which 'How doth the busy bee' epitomises was widely recognised can be seen in ED's reference to Watts in a letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland, 1878; 'I am sorry your Doctor is not well. I fear he has "improved" too many "shining hours." Give my love to him, and tell him the "Bee" is a reckless Guide.' (L: II, p. 542.)

separation from conventional access to Christian grace or salvation through business and movement, while, the lesson the Lilac observes in the bee's sombre movements is one of vanity. The flower exists in a comparative state of damnation because of its being a flower, unable to move, whereas the bee's 'design' allows for movement and production.

However, the configuration of industry as morality becomes vanity only where choice and capacity are not considered. A doctrine that deems the bee's innate movement (which is also its mode of industry) as a form of morality is not only absurd but vain also in its implicit exclusion of those (like the lilac) who cannot move, or whose 'design' does not include movement. Unable to accommodate difference, the 'Bumble Bee's Religion' (one of the very few titles Dickinson gave to a poem), that is, the Protestant moralising of work, is a form of enslavement. Therefore, the Lilac's exclusion, the position of 'divine perdition' in this poem, is one of resistance and is constructed as being preferable to the culturally ordained 'Religion' or pattern of the bee's industry. Moreover, the state of grace and ecstatic pleasure that 'divine perdition' of the Lilac connotes is an alternative mode of relation with the world – 'Idleness and Spring' are necessarily made concomitant by renouncing the structures of religion. 'Spring' is already in motion, the immanent, explosive force which can not stop itself. It is the 'Bumble Bee's Religion', that is the Puritan's moralising rather than the actions of bees, which defines 'idleness,' but Dickinson's deconstruction of the industry/idleness diptych in this poem renders it not only a redundant exercise, but a vain one too.

Dickinson critiques the restrictive doctrines of orthodox religion further in 'The pedigree of honey does not concern the bee' which invokes the Calvinist notion of election:

> The pedigree of Honey
> Does not concern the Bee,
> Nor lineage of Ecstasy
> Delay the Butterfly
> On spangled journeys to the peak
> Of some perceiveless thing –
> The right of way to Tripoli
> A more essential thing. (THJ 1627, version 1)[15]

[15] Johnson includes both versions of this poem, Franklin includes only the second, last version (Fr 1650)

The pedigree of Honey
Does not concern the Bee –
A Clover, any time, to him,
Is Aristocracy - (THJ 1627, version 2)

Both versions of this poem denounce notions of election and predestination: familiar concepts to be found in revivalist New England, while the second version explodes hierarchical distinctions and temporal limitations as the simple 'clover' gains aristocratic status at 'any time.' In the first version, the pilgrimage to the apex of 'some perceiveless thing' is quite simply rejected in favour of the 'right of way to Tripoli', which suggests instead, a natural gravitation towards a place (significantly 'Tripoli' also suggests a pun on Trinity.) This is emphasised in the second version, where 'pedigree' is again spurned for the knowledge gained from the bee's everyday experience of clovers. Ecstasy here is accessed at an every day level; it is not static or residing in the sky, but is ecstatic, like the bee, moving constantly from flower to flower. Time pushes us on involuntarily, lending us no space for abstractions of deferred pleasure - and Dickinson's bee is most human in this respect, with the insistence that it has upon variation, upon multiplicity and upon instant gratification as opposed to delayed pleasures. In this way, the bee's undeferred, readily available pleasure invokes a paradoxical transcendence that is dependent upon (inter) action and the dissolution of the hierarchical structures defined by orthodox religion. Paradoxically, by critiquing the Christian notion of riches in heaven, the poem reasserts the example of Christ's humanity in the Gospels.

Dickinson draws upon stereotypical Puritan characteristics with which her culture would be familiar, such as abstemiousness and a cultivation of morality that showed itself in usefulness. Particular attention is placed upon the masculine, ministerial figure who has achieved a vision of God which seems to be absolute.[16] However, in using the bee and its attraction to flowers, she also makes full use of Puritan aesthetics which liked to emphasise the attraction of opposites, (light and darkness, good and evil) in order to highlight the absolutes that they perceived to be necessary for faith. The poem below (Fr 979) exploits the clear distinction Watts makes between 'idleness' and 'labour,' and

[16] Dickinson's relationship with Rev. Charles Wadsworth might have provided impetus for such a focus. See Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, vol 2, for speculative discussion on Dickinson's relationships with Rev. Charles Wadsworth and Samuel Bowles and the 'master letters'. (pp. 512-531.)

further highlights the connection between the two modes which the bee's life implies, describing the bee's movements as a pattern for a critique of the Puritan's notion of 'industry.' Here the description of the bee is comically evocative of the Puritan, prepared and ready to defend faith in battle:

> His feet are shod with Gauze –
> His Helmet, is of Gold,
> His Breast, a Single Onyx
> With Chrysophras, inlaid.
>
> His Labor is a Chant –
> His Idleness – a Tune –
> Oh, for a Bee's experience
> Of Clovers, and of Noon! (Fr 979)

On one hand the image is a parody of the Puritan and a version of the biblical metaphor of the breastplate as righteousness and the helmet as salvation which extends from the Old Testament in Isaiah (59. 17) to the New Testament in Thessalonians; 'But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation' (I. 5-8). The 'chant' of the regularised trimeter is swift and compact, conveying an overall sense of symmetry and craftsmanship. On the other hand, the poem holds up for scrutiny the effectiveness of the poet's own vocation as a form of such industry. The two stanzas differ in that the first is an attempt on the poet's part to render the bee image through self-consciously poetic language into a set of lapidarian, gem-like, and therefore also static metaphors. She uses 'gold', 'onyx' and 'chrysophras' (Johnson's edition uses 'chrysophrase') to describe the bee's armour-like body parts. The word 'chrysoprase' has particular resonance for the Puritan as the English pronunciation of 'chrys' carries a verbal echo of Christ (from Greek 'khrusos' for gold)[17], being evocative in the poem of Christ and also the Holy Spirit as the Puritan's breastplate and protection. Onyx and chrysoprase work well to describe the bee's body, onyx being a precious stone with black and white bands not unlike the bee's body, and chrysoprase being gold with a green sheen. Both gold and chrysoprase are amongst many of the precious stones used in the Bible, for example in Exodus 35. 9, but most notably in the

[17] *OED*, vol III, entry for 'crysoprase'.

Book of Revelations where they are used to describe the foundations of the walls of heaven (especially Rev 21: 18-21), the passage or 'gem chapter' which Dickinson undoubtedly used to inspire her descriptions of nature in poetry.[18] She associates the colours green and gold with immortality in an earlier letter to Mrs. Bowles where she thanks her for a gift, and remarks, 'Why did you bind it in green and gold? The *immortal* colours. I take it for an emblem.' (L:II, p. 358. December 26, 1859.)

The activity of the bee in the poem's second stanza and its casual triumph of experiencing life ('clovers' and 'noon') throws the poet's self-consciously stylised language of the first stanza into focus. Dickinson points towards the excessiveness of her own desire to be equally industrious, and wants to align herself with the 'idleness' of the bee and his 'tune,' but her poetic vision is secondary to the bee's effortless 'experience' of the fullness of life which here is illustrated by the polaric opposites indicated by 'clovers' (feminine space of morning, shadows) and 'noon' (illumination, sight, masculinity). The poet's vocation or 'labour' struggles to capture the experience that the bee's movements delineate. The bee in this poem represents an ideal, where pleasure and worldly experience are implicit in the 'design' of the bee's life. Much to the speaker's envy ('Oh, for a Bee's experience') both modes of 'labour' and 'idleness' are as equally productive, producing 'chant' and 'tune' respectively. The speaker-poet considers a replication of the pattern of the bee's life in verse, creating her own poem ('tune') and conferring upon it the status of labour. In this poem Dickinson considers the ideal of design in the organised community of bees in which pleasure and labour are connected harmoniously.

The caricatures of the Puritan which are especially evident in some of her shorter, less lyrical poems, also attempt to highlight the contradictions in organised religion:

> Partake as doth the Bee,
> Abstemiously.
> The Rose is an Estate –
> In Sicily. (Fr 806)

[18] See SL, p. 242. To Mrs. S. Bowles, 1878. ED refers to her discussion with Samuel Bowles of the 'gem chapter', which Johnson supposes is Rev. 21. This is undoubtedly the description in Rev 21:20: 'The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.'

This poem is almost axiomatic in that it declares the kind of behaviour necessary to obtain the prize of divinity on offer, where the rose is named as a papal-like 'estate' in 'Sicily.' Abstemiousness is connected with the Puritan's simple way of living, where the 'Rose' is paradoxically deemed as the forbidden, Catholic road to indulgences that must be avoided. The word 'abstemious' itself describes avoidance of and restraint from that which can be linked to the Catholic ritual of the Eucharist, being derived from the Latin 'abs,' for 'from' and 'temetum,' for 'strong wine.' 'Rose' and 'Estate,' which symbolise Christ and Heaven respectively, convey a luxuriousness which is held in tension and opposition with the paradoxical instructions of the initial stanza. The bee's very existence is to indulge, to 'partake' of the Rose in order to produce nectar for the collective community, conveying also the notion that human access to the divine must also be necessarily unrestricted if it is to be shared and put into practice. However, the Puritan's example/instruction of abstemiousness is held in conflict with this, as the bee cannot, by its design, be abstemious. Therefore, the poem questions and challenges the connections made between the rituals and instructions of religious orthodoxy and God's design for humanity. If the bee's design means that its productivity and industry is based upon its access to the 'rose' of sweet nectar, then it follows that God's design for humans must necessarily imply a similar access to ecstasy and revery. In many of Dickinson's poems, the bee both symbolises and displays traditionally non-Puritanical qualities, but here, significantly, they are connected with the Puritan way of life, with comical and destabilising effects. In nature's example, industry and revery are necessarily concomitant.

In the poem below, Dickinson positions her reflections on the role of the poet within the discourse of the Protestant work ethic (indicated by the use of both 'work' and 'idleness'). She offers a detailed, painterly description of the movements of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon which delineates a scene that is laden with existential drama. Dickinson positions herself as the artist, who is at pains to 'trace' the design, the continuity or meaning in the 'scene', and therefore also in life which ends in death:

From Cocoon forth a Butterfly
As Lady from her Door
Emerged – a Summer Afternoon –
Repairing Everywhere –

Without Design – that I could trace
Except to stray abroad
On Miscellaneous Enterprise
The Clovers – understood -

Her pretty Parasol be seen
Contracting in a Field
Where Men made Hay –
Then struggling hard
With an opposing Cloud –

Where Parties – Phantom as Herself –
To Nowhere – seemed to go
In purposeless Circumference –
As 'twere a Tropic Show –

And notwithstanding Bee – that worked –
And Flower – that zealous blew –
This Audience of Idleness
Disdained them, from the Sky –

Till Sundown crept – a steady Tide –
And Men that made the Hay –
And Afternoon – and Butterfly –
Extinguished – in the Sea - (Fr 610)

The poem is striking because the butterfly, along with the design or pattern that the butterfly usually represents, that is, God's promise of resurrection, and metamorphosis from human existence into a heavenly one, is 'extinguished' at the end of the poem, along with the 'Men' and the 'Afternoon' in the final stanza. The poem's seemingly more minor characters, both 'Bee' and 'Flower' are, by comparison, stripped of any romantic/artistic livery, and are described simply as the bee 'that worked - ' and the flower which 'zealous blew - '. They are ascribed a tenacity which places them in sharp contrast to the 'Audience of Idleness' which 'Distained them, from the Sky.' The activity of the scene, together with the fact of being below the 'sky' or eye of Heaven is

something which links each life form in the poem, but particularly the bee and the 'Men who made Hay' in their shared capacity for 'work.' Although nineteenth-century uses of the terms 'labour' and 'work' might have had different associations where the former is manual and the latter cerebral and/or spiritual, the implicit connection Dickinson makes between the forms of activity ('trace', 'made' and 'blew') throughout the poem suggests a disregard for such distinctions. Her placement of 'notwithstanding' in relation to the bee in this poem is arresting; the tetrameter stretches the word out in order to make it seem adjectival, rather than the qualifier for the poem's final dramatic closure. Initially, Dickinson makes the bee's presence in the poem appear to be less significant than it is, whilst it actually serves to highlight the problematic division in the poem between those who perform an interconnected function and those who appear to be isolated, as the butterfly, in 'purposeless [c]ircumference'. The 'struggle' that the speaker observes appears to be subsumed into a larger, discernable 'design' which is provided by the work involved in daily toil. The bees gathering honey, like the men gathering hay, can be seen as being part of the same process of life which is illuminated briefly, and then pulled back into the inevitable darkness. Dickinson chooses to illuminate the commonality of all life in this poem that stands apart from the darkness, to provide an alternative idea of design and pattern, and goes some way to negate its power to 'extinguish'.

Again, the Puritan abhorrence of 'idleness', as depicted in Watts's 'Against Idleness and Mischief', is reversed in this poem. The sky's comparative vacancy is placed in contrast against the industry and spirit of the bee who simply 'worked'. Implicit in Dickinson's idea of industry is the ability to err, to 'stray abroad/on Miscellaneous Enterprise.' Here, 'work'[ing] and 'enterprise' both point towards Dickinson's notion of her own enterprise as a poet, which is distinct from the decidedly feminine ('Lady'), chaotic, substanceless ('Phantom as Herself') meandering that the butterfly conveys, despite the appearance of design, or promise of fulfilment that its patterned wings symbolize. In this way, the poem also echoes the critique of idle womanhood in contemporary novels.)[19]

[19] Such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *My Wife and I* (1871). As previously cited in Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850-1920*, pp. 182-209.

Whilst Dickinson's poetic persona challenges and confronts the notion of idle womanhood, the poem conveys, equally, a conflicting attitude towards poetic subjectivity. Dickinson places herself as the poet-onlooker in this poem, but is keen also to play down her part as the scene is revealed casually, with a colloquialism ('her pretty parasol be seen') that has a distancing effect and minimizes poetic agency. She describes her role as being that in which she is able to 'trace' the scene, when what she actually provides is an intense scrutiny of the way in which the 'Sky' controls the movements of the various forms of life and activity below. In this way, she displays a sight that at first declares non-specificity, whilst also conveying a sight of both depth and clarity. The anxieties about poetry evident in this conflicting attitude also echoes anxieties about belief itself. The 'Audience of Idleness' possesses in the poem the weight of God's omniscient judgement, but it also indicates the speaker herself, who, searching for 'Design' before her, finds only a 'Tropic Show', or accepted ways of thinking about nature. The images of the summer day that the poet-onlooker wants to invest with the resonant meaning of 'tropes', by 'tracing' symbols of either resurrection or hope, are emptied of their significance and become merely affectation or 'show'. The symbol of achieved potential which is the emergent butterfly, daubed with the evidence of the design implicit in the cocoon, is usurped in this poem by the bee who, simply by 'working', escapes the disdain from above. Ultimately, it is the butterfly who fails, unable, like the bee, to repair or accommodate for the lack of design apparent in the scene on offer. The poet's own admission of 'trace'[ing] design within the scene outshines the butterfly's journey for design by observing, casually, the design implied in the bee's 'work' and the flower's 'zealous'[ness]. The subjective 'I' in this poem is placed at a remove from the stereotypes on gender that butterfly and bee both connote. Dickinson's persona reaches out in this poem for a sense of purpose and scrutinizes religious certainty; in absence of the latter, she is able only to reveal or expose her own 'work', as conveyed by the industrious role of the worker that the bee in this poem represents.

Thus Dickinson's treatment of the industry/idleness diptych fluctuates between a parody and subversion of the Puritan and his ethics, and becomes also a direct confrontation with ideas of both omnipotent design and the poet's subjective desire to impose design, in which she encounters difficulty and struggle. Whilst the fascination

with design remains with Dickinson, the impulse to explode the industry/idleness diptych, and to deconstruct the hierarchies implicit in nineteenth-century assumptions about gender and spirituality that it inevitably includes, is always strong.

The tension between industry and idleness in 'from Cocoon forth a Butterfly' reflects the cultural association between industry and morality as set out in the popular playwright George Baker's *The Revolt of the Bees* (1826). Its distinction between the idle butterfly and the worker bee is remarkably similar to that depicted in Dickinson's poem. As Wilson observes, Baker's play depicts butterflies which encourage the worker bees to 'sport and flutter in the breeze,' and to lead a 'free and roving life' and to an ultimate rebellion.[20] The didactic tale finds resolution in the Queen Bee's message that the butterflies' 'roving' lasts only a day and conformity and working hard will win in the end:

> Their life they picture as so bright and gay
> Is short and vapid, lasts but for a day.
> While we by labour energy and worth
> Long live and prosper; o'er all the earth. [21]

The motifs of butterfly and bee in Baker's play present a contemporary example of how such associations were culturally resonant and became effectively popularised. However, Dickinson's use of the butterfly and bee in 'From Cocoon forth a butterfly' indicates an uncertainty about, and struggle for, an answer as to which will prosper, and whether poetry, as a version of such industry, can offer a form of redemption.

Benjamin Lease has noted that Dickinson's use of the bee trope is something which 'fuses death with deathlessness.'(*RMB*, p. xviii.) The bee, a reminder of spring and of regeneration which we would also associate with the resurrection of Christ, also becomes emblematic of hope because of its ability to defy gravity, with its outsized and awkward body. The 'sublime' sobriety of the Puritan life is made ridiculous when it is compared with the bee's sheer exuberance, whose excessive physical presence in

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[20] George M. Baker, *The Revolt of the Bees: An Allegory* (1826) (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872) p. 83. Cited in Bee Wilson, *The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us*, pp. 35-36. Wilson observes that Baker's play is in many ways a response to Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714).
[21] Ibid, pp. 35-36.

Dickinson's poems pushes the boundaries of opposition which govern societal definitions of morality, uselfulness, gender, and also representations of the divine.

'Lost in Balms': Idleness, Subversive Sexuality and Revery

The connection between industry and revery in Dickinson's bee imagery is exemplificative of (and also dependent upon) the connection she explicitly makes between physical and spiritual experience. The 'jaunty' entrepreneur bumblebee Dickinson described and separated from the 'manly, earnest' worker bees in the letter to Graves (L:II, p. 327.) cited in the previous chapter[22] is perhaps the best representation of this configuration of her excessive bees. The emphasis on the bee's physical presence in this group of poems is evocative of the emotionality in Puritan preaching as depicted in the figure of the 'rowdy' bobolink in poem Fr1620 who (in the earlier version which appears in Johnson) 'swung upon the Decalogue/ And shouted let us pray - ' (THJ 1591). It also accentuates the gravity assigned to experiential, bodily versions of the divine or 'revery' depicted in the poems. Critics have discussed Dickinson's tendency to portray the excessive body as providing evidence of her resistance to the mind/body dualism and hierarchical construction of spirit over body which religious doctrine asserts and makes distinct, and of her assertion that, instead, the body and mind/spirit 'draw upon each other for definition,' as Eberwein (1998) observes:

> Robert McClure Smith and Cristanne Miller maintain that Dickinson resists nineteenth-century gender ideology by making her body pervasively present in her works. Smith argues that, despite the Christian doctrine that the spirit should transcend the inferior body, Dickinson insists that the body and mind/spirit draw upon one another for definition [...] Miller interprets Dickinson's excessive bodies as arising from a tension between her typical experience of self and the culture that defines her 'deviant' experiences of self as monstrous. [...] Her society might have sought to repress women's bodies, but the

[22] ED's reference to worker bees as 'manly, earnest' bees is interesting as all worker bees are in fact female; the male drones being the non-industrious type.

> pleasures and complex difficulties of living in a nineteenth-century woman's body live as well in Dickinsons's poetry.'[23]

Similarly pervasive as the human body parts in Dickinson's poetry, the image of the bee also serves to fuse the spirit/body dichotomy and emphasise the connection between bodily, physical experience and spiritual immanence. The excessive bodily 'fuzz' and 'buzz' of the bees, along with their interruptive noises, not only convey dangerous sexuality, but crucially, confuse and disrupt the categories of gender perpetuated by cultural nineteenth century stereotypes. The '*bumblebee*', as Dickinson describes it, displays an 'indefinite', fluid identity that has been adopted through dressing up in 'jaunty clothes'. It is perhaps because of this, and because of the 'implausbility' of the bumblebee's ability to take flight that the image is invoked in Dickinson's depictions of sexuality. Transcendence for the (particularly female) sexualised body is similarly implausible in orthodox religion, and the association of the bee with subversive sexuality continues the theme of criminality established in other poems concerning the bee's liberty.

In these poems Dickinson retains the notion of the Puritan way of life and the surety of faith in the structure and design inherent in the bee's life – going to and from the hive in order to collect honey for the collective good – but her description of the bee's movements is decidedly unrestrained. The bee is defiantly errant and has the freedom of choice which flower to visit, how long to stay, and is at points in her poems 'drunken,'(Fr 207) 'debauched,'(Fr 140) or 'lost in balms'(Fr 205). In other words, the bee possesses the freedom that connects it with human free will, despite working within the overall design of its purpose, and relation to the hive. In many ways, this serves as a parallel to the free will given to humans by God, whilst existing within God's design for human life. However, rather than stressing a deferral of pleasure as the manifestation of such design, Dickinson emphasises unrestricted physical experience as the basis for spiritual transcendence (immanence).

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[23] Jane Donahue Eberwein, *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998) pp. 25-26.

This idea can be seen in an earlier poem, where the bee's liberty is described in terms of its ability to 'ride indefinite,' where all possibilities are harnessed in the bee's ecstatic reluctance to settle. The disregard for boundaries and acceptable modes of behaviour which the bee displays is conveyed in terms of criminality, and is mapped onto the speaker's fantasy of freedom:

> Could I but ride indefinite
> As doth the Meadow Bee
> And visit only where I liked
> And No one visit me
>
> And flirt all Day with Buttercups
> And marry whom I may
> Dwell a little everywhere
> Or better, run away.
>
> With no Police to follow
> Or chase Him if He do
> Till He should jump Peninsulas
> To get away from me –
>
> I said "But just to be a Bee"
> Upon a Raft of Air
> And row in Nowhere all Day long
> And anchor "off the Bar"
>
> What Liberty! So Captives deem
> Who tight in Dungeons are. (Fr 1056)

Dickinson conveys with dramatic, comical effect, the ways in which such a desire to transcend societal pressures could be regarded as criminal behaviour. The speaker's fantasy of deviance from traditionally prescribed roles for the female is depicted here as criminality, which the speaker thoroughly embraces – 'indefinite' being simply another mode of 'revery.' The desire to 'flirt all Day with Buttercups' suggests a sexual identity which is not impinged by externally imposed parameters of time or taste and is not necessarily only a lingering precursor to a conventional 'marriage.' If marriage is on the agenda then the speaker wishes the freedom to marry 'whom I may.' The desire to present an alternative to the constraints of gender is clear in this poem and yet the

alternative is presented in meagre terms; 'indefinite,' 'a little everywhere,' 'run away,' 'just to be a Bee,' and to 'row in Nowhere.' The alternative here is presented in terms of a desired absence, of being simply where 'No one' is. However, the poem's leap to the unexpected hyperbole of criminality 'With no Police to follow' in the third stanza, describes the gap between the Captive's expectation of liberty and the sheer force of resistance it is met with. The shifting use of the bee image can be traced from a claim for liberty to articulating anarchic rebellion. The weight of restriction can be measured in this poem against the fact that such small wants are equated with rebellion.

As with many of the poems, this is described with a distance of irony. However, the fact remains that as the sense of a lack of social, sexual, political and spiritual freedom increases, the bees in Dickinson's poems become gradually more disruptive, interrupting the clarity required for an axiomatic faith. In this way, her use of the bee can be seen as being paradoxically axiomatic, carrying with it an implicit design. 'Indefinite' in this poem can be likened to the idea of 'revery,' as the indefiniteness of the bee's movements is also implicit in its design to pollinate flowers, moving industriously, but also pleasurably, from one to the next. So, the mode in which orthodox religion is challenged in Dickinson's poems is not always just a resistance of definition per se, but is rather, an insistence to constantly define what spirituality is not. In attending to that which 'organised' spirituality and religious traditions do not allow and by highlighting the 'absence of what they designate'[24] through a series of disruptions, Dickinson's poems reassert the qualities and behaviour she associates with her own experience of spirituality.

Another striking poem where Dickinson's bee disrupts the 'atmosphere' and signals an alternative to the 'clarity' of heaven often expressed in Watts's hymns is in poem Fr 622:

> To interrupt His Yellow Plan
> The Sun does not allow
> Caprices of the Atmosphere –
> And even when the Snow
>
> Heaves balls of Specks, like Vicious Boy
> Directly in His Eye –
> Does not so much as turn His Head

[24] Michel de Certeau, 'Mystic Speech' in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. by Graham Ward, p. 205.

Busy with Majesty –

'Tis His to stimulate the Earth –
And magnetize the Sea –
And bind Astronomy, in place,
Yet any passing by

Would deem Ourselves – the busier
As the Minutest Bee
That rides – emits a Thunder –
A bomb – to justify - (Fr 622)

Here, the Sun, the 'Eye' of heaven is aloof, and 'busy' with being at the pinnacle of moral superiority. However, Dickinson playfully suggests on the one hand that such business is a false enterprise, as the bee seems far more engaged in activity, given the impact its noise has on the atmosphere of the sky. She implies that the space of the sky (heaven) is by comparison rather uneventful and insipid, but equally, that it is vanity which makes us forget that our actions are indeed futile in comparison to God's 'Plan' which is of a far higher order. The bee, along with the weather, offers an interruption to the beam of the Sun's light and is therefore as 'capricious' as the 'Vicious Boy.' Significantly, it is the Eye that is attacked again, the bee wrangling to obstruct the claim of spiritual vision and clarity as emphasised in Watts's hymns.[25] The bee's presence in the poem is explosive, 'thundering' along the lines as it does, to assert itself, and is in direct contrast with George Herbert's depiction of bees that 'work for man' yet 'never bruise their master's flower'.[26]

By alluding to criminality in her depiction of bees, as in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*[27], Dickinson also considers how the ideal of community and of a multiple and open relationality which the bee represents in many other poems can of course be merely appropriated and exploited for personal or political gain. Although in poem Fr 1078 the 'suit' of the bee refers immediately to his position in courtship as a suitor (as one described in Fr 134 'Did the Harebell loose her girdle / to the lover bee') and conveys the

[25] See Chapter Three, pp. 114-119 for discussion of vision in Watts's 'When I survey the Wondrous Cross'.
[26] As cited in previous chapter, George Herbert, 'Providence' (lines 65-68), from *The Temple*, in John Tobin, ed., *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 110.
[27] As cited in the previous chapter, as Wilson notes, Mandeville's cautionary tale includes bee 'workers' who are in fact 'Sharpers, Parasites, Pimps, Players, Pick-pockets, Coiners, Quacks, Sooth-Sayers.' See Bee Wilson, *The Hive:The Story of the Honeybee and Us*, p. 35-36.

treacherously fickle lover who declares 'troth' and flies off, 'suit' also carries an allusion to a communal identity, something that is cultivated and worn for individual benefit. Written in the same year as poem Fr 979 quoted above (1865), and using a similar formula of describing the bee's features, there is a connection to be drawn between the two poems. The earlier poem describes the bee's features as a Puritan defender of the faith; the later poem reconsiders the connection between those Puritan values and theology with the support political activities. It is no surprise that towards the end of the Civil War, Dickinson would consider the connection between religious ideals and political gain, when so many hymns were used to support social cohesion during war time.[28] Her use of 'terms' such as 'traitor', 'troth', 'propoundeth' and 'divorce' each echo the rhetoric of the law and are emphasised by the poem's 4/3 hymnic common metre:

> Of Silken Speech and Specious Shoe
> A Traitor is the Bee
> His service to the newest Grace
> Present continually
>
> His Suit a chance
> His Troth a Term
> Protracted as the Breeze
> Continual Ban propoundeth He
> Continual Divorce. (Fr 1078)

In this instance, the freedom and expansiveness of 'breeze' available to the bee is described as being a tool of verbal obfuscation for the 'traitor'/lover, whose promises and loyalties are 'protracted as the Breeze'. The bee is personified, and is described as displaying a permanently fickle attitude towards not only his lover but by extension religion also, 'continually' swearing allegiance to the 'newest Grace'. Moreover, far from invoking the ideal multiple relationality and community, the bee represents exclusion and separation ('Continual Ban' and 'Continual Divorce'). However, Dickinson's estimation of the disingenuous ('specious') member of a community, in turn, mimics the suspicion

[28] For discussion on Dickinson's use of military and theological tropes during the Civil War years, see Shira Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) (pp. 32-63). Also reference for the distribution of one million hymnals and books of psalms during the war in 1864. (p. 57)

and disdain for 'inauthentic' or cultivated religiosity prevalent in her own community.[29] The collective identity ('suit') of the bee in this poem is acquired only by 'chance' as opposed to a pre-ordained identity such as that of the Calvinist notion of the chosen, 'elected' minority. Evangelical revivals created divisions as much as they aimed to convert and promote cohesion and community. Dickinson's use of bee imagery in this poem conveys a struggle with the ideal of relationality that the bee represents but also the manifestation of such an identity in organised religion, and the hierarchical barriers that such claims to spiritual authenticity generate. Ultimately, the 'Continual Ban,' and 'Continual Divorce' can be read, not as a statement of the benefits of separation per se (or from the ideal of a multiple and open relationality which the bee in other poems represents) but of the necessary separation from organised religion which proliferates such divisions. Moreover, the poem also underscores the differences between the state of multiple and open relationality as traced and enacted in Dickinson's poetics, and the definitive versions of God in orthodox religion and the problematic hierarchies such versions project.

The connection between physical pleasure and spiritual transcendence, and the association of it with transgression in Dickinson's bee imagery, is noted by Judith Farr (2004), who argues that Dickinson frequently employs the bee as a rape metaphor, where flowers are ravished and the bee is unruly, drunken, taking his nectars in.[30] There are a number of closely related poems in which the bee image can be associated with sexuality and exuberance, of which Fr 205, Fr 134 and Fr 207 are examples. As we have seen, the excessively fuzzy body of the bumblebee and its interruptive noises and movements can be seen as articulating sexual desire in the connection they illustrate between physical pleasure and ecstatic transcendence. This configuration of the bee trope allows Dickinson to highlight the sterility and comparative silence of 'official' religious and literary culture. John B. Pickard observes the 'erotic expectations' in poems where Dickinson is 'employing the bee-flower image to convey physical desire' and gives examples of the

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[29] See *MWL*, p. 143. Habegger notes the division in Amherst between a 'cultivated Episcopalian' (member of Anglican Community in America governed by Bishops) and the egalitarian, Evangelical 'orthodox scheme of things' which the educational texts Dickinson would have used at Amherst Academy reflected, such as Watts's *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741).

[30] Judith Farr, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) pp. 184-185.

poems 'Come slowly-Eden!'(Fr 205) and 'A Bee his burnished Carriage,'(Fr 1351), describing them as her 'most sentimental and derivative love poems.'[31] However, the resistance of gender that the bee allows, provides a wider interpretation which takes the poetic imagery beyond such aesthetics of heterosexual procreation. The range of fluctuation with regard to gender which is available within bee imagery means that it is at different times, and even all at once, the 'manly, earnest bee,' the solitary Queen bee, the chaste, asexual bee and the delirious rapist.[32] In poem Fr 1351 for example, the 'erotic expectation' of the courtship between a 'male' bee and 'female' rose is subverted as the rose receives the bee, not with rapture, but with a decidedly measured, anti-climactic 'frank tranquility:'

> A bee his burnished Carriage
> Drove boldly to a Rose –
> Combinedly alighting –
> Himself – his Carriage was.
>
> The Rose received his Visit
> With frank tranquility,
> Withholding not a Crescent
> To his cupidity.
>
> Their Moment consummated
> Remained for him – to flee –
> Remained for her, of Rapture
> But the Humility. (Fr 1351)

Rather than appearing as a rapist, the stereotypical power relation between genders is reversed. The bee's anticipation and exuberance is quashed somewhat by the automated response of the rose. Although part of the bee's repeated pattern and industry, his 'boldness' is paradoxically indicative of an action that has been performed on numerous previous occasions, and conveys endlessly renewable vitality. The notion of romantic courtship is parodied by the capitalisation of 'Moment' for dramatic effect, compared

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[31] John B. Pickard, *Emily Dickinson: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967) p. 87.

[32] Philomela's brother Butes was a famous bee-keeper. The image is thus connected with rape, as she was infamously raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus. See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (1948) 4th edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) p. 427.

with the lower case use for the rose's 'rapture' and 'humility'. If sexual intercourse is not a pleasurable exchange in this poem then the metaphor for the procreative, generative imagery is also undermined. The bee's vitality is present before the 'Moment,' and is seemingly not increased after the encounter, where his action is simply to 'flee;' thus furthering the idea that the bee is itself an instant of self-generative ecstasy.

The 'fainting' bee in poem Fr 205 is an example of experiential, physical ecstasy and it conveys fleeting, but also considered, abandon. The speaker's appeal is that paradise should be reached 'slowly.' Although the bee is 'ecstatic' in the sense that it roves from flower to flower, collecting nectars and thus being 'late' getting to the next one, it is the moment of recognition, when the transcendent moment is both anticipated and registered which is emphasised in this poem. Ecstasy should be experienced 'slowly,' as the bee who considers his rosary-like 'nectars' before giving himself up to being 'lost in balms.' Moreover, the experience of life should be savoured before reaching an Edenic unknown:

> Come slowly – Eden!
> Lips unused to Thee –
> Bashful – sip thy Jessamines –
> As the fainting Bee –
>
> Reaching late his flower,
> Round her chamber hums –
> Counts his nectars –
> Enters – and is lost in Balms. (Fr 205)

The metaphor of the bee entering the flower extends beyond generative imagery to a congregation member entering a place of worship and considering the moment of spiritual transcendence. The 'nectars' are considered, computed even, and this moment of consideration is emphasised by the poem's initial directive of 'slowly' and the following exclamation mark. Unheeding of both time and production, the bee is detained ('reaching late his flower') by the multiple opportunities for pleasure. In spiritual and physical ecstasy, the bee explodes the idleness/industry paradigm by being both lingering and on course, both aimless and in pursuit. In this way, Dickinson also deconstructs the

teleological premises of the Puritan's spiritual journey, where pleasures are postponed for the afterlife.

In the poem below, the bee's exuberance is exaggerated even further, to the level of heresy and apostacy:

His oriental heresies
Exhilirate the Bee,
And filling all the Earth and Air
With gay apostasy

Fatigued at last, a Clover plain
Allures his jaded Eye
That lowly Breast where Butterflies
Have felt it meet to die – (Fr 1562)

'Oriental heresies' might mean exotic flowers from the East or simply the bee's line of motion, his orientation, with the various flowers pulling him this way and that, controlling his path. The poem conveys the multiplicity available to the bee and it is overtly sexualised. However, the bee is eventually allured by the plainness of clover much in the way that the puritan's disapproval of catholic luxury is oriented towards plain living.

Ecstatic pleasure is explicitly connected with notions of idleness in poems where Dickinson parodies the rhetoric of temperance literature. Drunkenness (a variant of 'idleness') is often connected with the bee to symbolize ecstatic pleasure or revery. For example, in poem Fr1630, as in 'The Pedigree of Honey/Does not concern the Bee' (Fr 1650), the bee is upheld as knowing the right way to 'delight' and 'joy,' and the idea of excess is championed over abstemiousness:

A Drunkard cannot meet a Cork
Without a Revery –
[...]
The moderate drinker of Delight
Does not deserve the spring –
Of juleps, part are in the Jug
And more are in the Joy –

Your connois[a]eur in Liquors consults the Bumble Bee –
(Fr 1630)

Both poems (Fr 1650 and Fr 1630) are placed alongside each other in Johnson's collection (THJ) and the dominant ideas of physical pleasure and spiritual ecstasy evident in both are clearly linked, as are other poems in which the bee represents this anti-temperance mode. (For example, poems Fr 207 and Fr 244 are closely related in their representation of the bee as 'Debauchee of Dew' and 'revel[ling]', 'First - at the Vat - and latest at the Vine -', and are both dated 1861.) The bee's innate connection with nature and the dictates of 'Spring' in this poem serves to link physical pleasure with spiritual ecstasy. 'Joy' is a necessary element of 'Juleps'; materiality is abstracted and then reshaped into something definite and tangible. The speaker's knowledge of such joy is referred to the bee, which is a model for consultation. However, unlike Emerson's elevated 'yellow-breeched philosopher', Dickinson's bee is the '[d]runkard,' instinctive and anarchic. Moderation is frowned upon here as being non-conducive to 'revery'. This expression, which Dickinson uses to convey a state of 'joy' connected with spirituality in this poem, is also inextricably connected with poetry and writing, and the mystical immanence it enabled her to express. Therefore, Dickinson's excessive and rebellious bees represent not only the physical transgression and blurring of the hierarchical, social and sexual boundaries which are represented in hymn culture through the 'I-Thou' model of relation to the divine, but also, subsequently, they delineate a space in which spiritual immanence might be experienced.

Shaping Spaces: Revery in Relation

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few. (Fr 1779)

The connection between industry and revery, and between physical and spiritual experience in Dickinson's bee poems generates a space in which 'excessive' bodies can

perform and access 'revery'. Revery is therefore always experienced through relation. The emphasis on the bee's connection to the hive is associated with the ideal space in which 'revery' can occur, the ideal state which many of the bee poems illustrate a desire for. This element of the bee image is something which correlates with the systematic resistance to orthodox religion in Dickinson's poems and projects meaning which is not compatible with postmodernist readings of Dickinson's evasive quality. The association of the bee with the idea of community, relation and faith, is important as it replaces and reconfigures elements of orthodox religion within her own poetics. Analysing the image of the bee in terms of community and relation radically repositions Dickinson's poetics within theological debates on spirituality and gender, carrying as it does, correlative connections between the shape of community and the shape of God in contemporary feminist theology.[33] Further, it aligns the shaping spaces which Dickinson's poetics create with the alternative values of 'multiplicity of perspectives and a community of voices [...] over unitary or monologic identity, [...] narratives of persistence rather than conversion or transformation' which Scheinberg suggests are necessary to counter the androcentric 'generic patterns' in Victorian poetic theory.[34]

In this late poem (above) 'reverie', a term usually connected with dreaming or imagination, is pointedly reconfigured ('revery') by Dickinson as a trope for mystical immanence, as well as for writing, in its relation with the bee.[35] It displays what is almost an emblematic formula for the spiritual dimension that is circumnavigated in her bee imagery poems. With its economical display of language, it dissects and lays bare the mechanism of 'revery', and effectively encapsulates the interconnection between writing and spirituality that her bee imagery implies. Here 'revery' is exposed as being the creative force that exists in relation, as an interconnected element of a trinity.

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[33] As discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 64-68.) in relation to new metaphors for the divine in feminist theology.

[34] As cited in Introduction. Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture*, p. 236.

[35] Other definitions of 'reverie[y]' work together in ED's use of it: 1. a. A state of joy or delight. b. Wantonness, wildness. 4. c. An instrumental composition suggestive of a dreamy or musing state. See *OED*, vol. XIII. The popular novel *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850) by Donald Grant Mitchell (a.k.a. Ik Marvel), which she and her brother admired, perhaps also influenced her use of the term. For discussion of Dickinson's responses to the novel, see Lisa Spiro, 'Reading with a tender Rapture: 'Reveries of a Bachelor' and the Rhetoric of Detached Intimacy', *Book History* 6 (2003) 57-93 (83).

The poem utilizes procreative imagery – one of each (clover and bee) - to multiply and produce 'revery'. But the analogy also stretches to a minister and a congregation, that is, the bee who provides the vehicle for worship, and the clover, the receptacle who receives the divinely inspired words. However, her assertion at the end of the poem, which also reads axiomatically, is to use imagination ('revery') if 'bees are few,' thus rendering a reading of the metaphor of heterosexual procreation insufficient, also exploding the active/passive oppositions in favour of an in-between mode of connectivity. Here, she urges for a worship that does not rely upon clergy (or the necessary attraction of opposites), but is freely available to those who employ their own active engagement as the vehicle for spiritual ecstasy. The association of 'revery' with singing and hymn-like verse is important, as this denotes a comparatively sacred space which transcends the boundaries between the divine and the speaker (here also between gender) that are laid out in conventional hymns. Here, the 'I-Thou' model of relation dissolves as each element of the trinity collapses into each other endlessly. The absence of capitalisation so favoured by Dickinson in other poems is notable, upsetting the reader's impulse to distinguish nouns from verbs and vice versa. 'Revery' is a noun which describes an act which connotes dream-like passivity and yet it is described in the poem as a vital, active ingredient for the production of a 'prairie.' The components of 'prairie' are explosive with meaning; Dickinson parodies 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost' whilst conferring such creative power upon nature and human imagination, using examples from nature and the romantic notion of 'revery' for poetic inspiration. 'Prairie' itself invokes the pun on the word prayer, but it also connotes an expansive, ideal space, the logical resultant form created by connecting the three elements described. Thus, the connection between 'revery' and an ecstatic state can be drawn.

The production of this space in the poem is connected with the vocation of the poet, as poetry is also the method of praise here, indicated by Dickinson's pun on 'prairie' and 'prayer.' The Blakean location of 'Heaven in a Wild Flower'[36] does not depend upon the communication of it from the bee, that is, the mechanism of divine inspiration from preacher to congregation, but can be accessed directly through imagination. Imagination here is assessed in terms of re-evaluating what spiritual ecstasy

[36] 'Auguries of Innocence,' in *William Blake: Selected Poems* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994) p. 72.

means, and the method of achieving it in relation to traditional forms of worship. The poem places emphasis upon the act of praise, that is, the song or revery of the subject herself: 'Revery alone will do', but even this is not satisfactory ('will do') in isolation.

Crucially, this poem challenges the reader's urge to separate the elements that combine to make a 'prairie', that is, a prayer or ideal space in which the divine is experienced. The poem offers in a prescriptive manner the fact that to engage with spiritual worship, one must be able to rest with opposition ('bee' and 'clover', male/female, God/human), and allow a third element of (imagination, mystery or 'revery') to occur. The poem is problematic because satisfactory substitutions cannot be made adequately, nor can one permutation of the triune connection (of 'clover', 'bee', or 'revery') be rationalized as being preferable to the other. In such a triune pattern, which invokes the Trinity (seen elsewhere, for example in Fr 1788 and Fr 610), received notions of religious faith and morality are forever fused together against the flux of human experience that pulls ideology into a space which signifies its contradictions, incompletenesses and absences. This is Dickinson at her perplexing best, teasing the reader with the formulated phrases of religious orthodoxy versus the potentially liberating space of poetry. The triune relation in this poem is indicative of the intimate connection between poetry, subjectivity and spirituality, and the generation of space at work in Dickinson's bee imagery.

In describing 'revery' in this way, Dickinson explodes the need for boundaries between gender, extracting the spiritual dimension of the Trinity as the genderless element that is the mode of prayer for Dickinson, the process which is *both* the source of, *and* route towards, the divine. There is a gesture towards a rejection of the heterosexual model for procreation and access to the divine which 'clover' and 'bee' invokes, and yet 'revery' cannot be isolated or fully chosen by the speaker. The endless interplay between the three elements at work in this poem constructs divine immanence which is both within the 'prairie' and within the process of the poem itself, conveying what feminist theologians such as Mary Daly have termed 'God the Verb.'[37] In this way, Dickinson's

[37] As discussed in the Introduction, see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, p. xvii.

poetics of revery reconfigure an ideal space of relation and community in hymn culture without reinscribing an oppositional 'I-Thou' model of relation to the divine.

'Fuzz Ordained': Bees and Poetic Baptism

The notion of 'revery' in Dickinson's bee poems articulates a third space, of possibilities and relation, in which oppositional thinking is at once both suspended and collapsed. The production of this space is connected with her own industry as a poet. For Dickinson, to be useful is to gather and capture experience of life as she felt it, rendered 'amber-like' in the poem, like the bee who travels from flower to flower, gathering honey. It is also to reach out to others with her 'revery,' a real and/or anticipated community, and in doing so to actively participate in Watts's notion of a useful life. 'I dwell in possibility' is a good example of where images we would associate with the bee's life are used without explicit reference to the bee itself. Notions of 'gathering' and having innumerable and multiple 'chambers' which we would associate with the bee are utilised by Dickinson in this poem to convey the work or 'occupation' of a poet.

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer house than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior - for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of Eye –
And for an Everlasting Roof –
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation - This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands –
To gather Paradise - (Fr 466)

Significantly, such an occupation is valued in terms of its many opportunities for openness and expansiveness. The work of the poet is to represent imaginative spaces and

openings ('more numerous of windows/Superior - for Doors - ') which can accommodate multiple and different 'visitors' and visions of 'Paradise'.

The ideal space of interconnectedness which the speaker in Dickinson's poems wishes to achieve is often conveyed in a poem by associating the bee with the idea of riding, thus describing the enjoyment and ease implied by a bee's access to revery. The freedom of the bee's flight indicates the speakers' desire to acquire a similarly available access to revery and not only delineates a trajectory for the speaker to follow but also represents the vehicle or transport to ecstasy for the speaker to take. Significantly, in this poem, revery is equated with being able to make a sound that is a form of praise, an alternative hymn, indicated here by the bee's 'hum:'

> Because the Bee may blameless hum
> For Thee a Bee I do become
> List even unto me.
>
> Because the Flowers unafraid
> May lift a look on thine, a Maid
> Alway a Flower would be.
>
> Nor Robins, Robins need not hide
> When Thou upon their Crypts intrude
> So Wings bestow on Me
> Or Petals, or a Dower of Buzz
> That Bee to ride, or Flower of Furze
> I that way worship Thee. (Fr 909)

The bee's humming and buzzing, which is indicative of singing (a variant perhaps on Blake's 'singing' bees)[38] is described as a form of worship in the final line of the poem, thus connecting the poem with hymn singing and congregational worship. The hymnic common metre is broken, only further highlighting the speaker's distance from traditional or acceptable ('blameless') devotional poetry or conventional hymns. The mode of the poem is coy, and the noises of the bee are 'blameless' because they are non-linguistic, and therefore also potentially non-threatening within the context of nineteenth-century religious traditions which either silence and subordinate women or offer specifically defined and limiting roles, such as the domestic 'angel at the hearth'. Combining the

[38] 'The Argument,' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p. 28. As discussed in the previous chapter.

diminutive/coy mode with boldly assertive directions, 'List even unto me,' the qualifier of 'even' denoting the 'lowest place' of subordination is modified by the initial, insistent directive of 'List.' The poem surveys the various strereotypical roles or guises on offer for women and it is the bee which is most acceptable here, ironically, because of its ability to 'hum,' but also perhaps because of the association with the Puritan notion of industry which Dickinson utilises in other bee poems. The parameters of 'acceptable' female relation to the divine is parodied in the 'Dower of Buzz' and 'flower of Furze.' The former invokes a widower, a legally connected person to the essence of spirituality ('Buzz') and therefore a 'legitimate' speaker, and the latter describes the small yellow flowers of a spikey gorse, again reiterating a relatively diminished, humble position, as it would not be esteemed highly for its aesthetic value.[39] Furze is resilient and known for withstanding an inhospitable environment, a quality which is both inevitably required of the pious woman but is simultaneously unrecognised as strength or independence in patriarchal religious culture, a double standard which Dickinson's poem highlights.

Gilbert and Gubar have discussed Dickinson's tendency to create acceptable covers or masks through which to speak in a 'ventriloquist' fashion, in such a way that highlights the woman poet's problematic relation to language and the dubious legacy of Romanticism's gendering of nature, and describe the various, 'child masks;' 'a tiny person, a wren, a daisy, a mouse, a child, a modest little creature easily mastered by circumference and circumstance.'[40] The insect is a guise Dickinson favours as it accommodates her tendency to portray the self as diminutive, coy and unobtrusive. However, the bee image, which might also be placed in this 'child mask' category cannot be regarded as being like the other guises as it is neither 'modest,' nor 'mastered by circumference and circumstance.' The Classical association of bees with poets[41] means that Dickinson's bees are more significantly aligned with the poet-speaker in her poems than other insects. The position the bee's transport allows the speaker to potentially achieve in this poem is one that makes the bee (and therefore also the speaker) bold,

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[39] Tennyson uses 'furze' to connote a calm place of morning and dew in *In Memoriam* (1850). See Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam* , XI, lines 5-6: ' Calm and deep peace on this high wold,/ And on these dews that drench the furze'. Dickinson parodies the association of these qualities with femininity in letters to Susan Gilbert. (See L: I, p. 210. Letter dated June 1852.)

[40] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 581-591. They describe Dickinson's technique of disguise or dramatisation of a 'supposed' self. (p. 587.)

[41] As established in the previous chapter.

hubristic and heretical. In this poem, the speaker dares, ironically, to 'intrude' both within the scene of nature's perfection and also the position of a worshipping objective onlooker. The 'crypts' invoke here the hierarchical structure of the church, being placed both below the choir ('robins') and providing a link or passage to connect the martyrs grave beneath the high altar.

And yet, 'intrude' is assigned to 'Thou,' the God-like figure being addressed in this form of poetic praise/worship, therefore describing the speaker's desire to be in the same position as the transcendent God figure. In order to be at least at equal height with 'Thou' in the poem, the speaker wishes to achieve transcendence by 'riding' a 'bee' and singing like one. Although this poem critiques acceptable forms of worship which the distance of the speaker from the bee's path describes, it also articulates an alternative mode of worship where the bee's noises are instructive because of their non-linguistic quality, existing in a self-cultivated state of 'buzz' which is akin to the ideal space of revery. Revery would be achievable in this poem if transcendence is 'bestowed' upon the speaker, as 'wings' invokes. And yet the bold desire to be on equal terms with God is described in terms of the poetic flight the image of the bee allows the speaker, therefore enacting and creating an alternative mode of worship and a self-bestowed/created mode of spiritual transcendence. The final statement confirms this; 'That way I worship thee.' Worship has been asserted within the poem and redefined as the expression of the speaker's ability to access transcendence through following the example of the bee in nature, which is both outside of linguistic/patriarchally defined expectations of worship and praise and within it. The bee is therefore an example of both non-threatening articulated subjectivity and also powerfully subversive subjectivity precisely because of this position. The traditional 'I-Thou' model of relation to the divine in hymns is destabilised and renegotiated in this poem as the nature and whereabouts of 'Thou' and 'Thee' is essentially non-consequential to this act of asserting subjectivity.

Dickinson's use of the industry/idleness diptych in Protestant doctrine highlights an anxiety about poetic vision (as evident in the speaker's desire to 'blameless hum' in the poem above, or the attempt to 'trace' 'design' in Fr 610 above) as much as a scepticism about religious doctrine, then it also, equally, provides an unexpected trajectory, a design of sorts, for reaching towards and reconfiguring belief through

writing. The ecstatic bodily excess that the bee often conveys in her poems also delineates a strong subjectivity which negotiates the confines of gender, and which feminist literary theory has connected with the 'horizon' of spirituality.[42] The reconfiguration of gender stereotypes and the connection Dickinson makes between this refusal to settle and spirituality goes some way to negotiate a powerful alternative to the religious revivals that inspired her to grow 'careless'[43] and rebel. Moreover, the bees in Dickinson's corpus signal a 'becoming space' and can be seen as an alternative liturgy which, as we have seen in Chapters Three and Four, takes its mode of dissent from the examples she found in contemporary hymn culture. In this space of becoming, signalled by the bee (historically associated with the poet figure), Dickinson baptises her self into her own poetic identity.

In *Aurora Leigh* (1856), a text which Dickinson almost certainly read,[44] Elizabeth Barrett-Browning describes the awakening of the biographical speaker's senses and renewed perception, which runs parallel to her development and awareness as a writer, as a baptism of 'seeing' which takes place within an enclosed garden setting. The scene invokes both the 'garden' of traditional male devotional poetics,[45] where communication with the divine is apprehended, and also the enclosed nature of woman's position as a caged bird within a privet-hedge/nest:

> I had a little chamber in the house,
> As green as any privet-hedge a bird
> Might choose to build in
> [....]
> You could not push your head out and escape
> A dash of dawn-dew from the honeysuckle,
> But so you were baptized into the grace
> And privilege of seeing... (*Aurora Leigh*, I, p. 382.)[46]

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[42] Luce Irigaray's notion of horizon, as discussed in Chapter Two.
[43] Letter in which ED declares her 'careless' position, as cited in Introduction, p. 18. (3 April, 1850, to Jane Humphrey, L: I, p. 94.)
[44] Dickinson cites 'Mrs Browning' as among her favourite writers in letters to T. W. Higginson (25 April, 1862 and November 1871) see SL, p. 172 and p. 214. For information on Dickinson's reading, including Barrett Browning, see *R MB*, p. 35.
[45] See discussion of George Herbert in previous chapter.
[46] Elizabeth Barrett-Browing, *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Henry Frowde, 1904) p. 382. Aurora Leigh, Book One.

Furthermore, the catalyst to such 'seeing' is described as an interruption which is precipitated by the humming of bees in the lime trees which awakens the speaker from her sleep:

> First, the lime
> (I had enough there, of the lime, be sure, -
> My morning-dream was often hummed away
> By the bees in it)

And again, the life of bees is referred to when describing the speaker-poet's self-'crowning' or self-baptism of her poetic vocation directly. She prefaces the self-baptising fantasy monologue with a comparison of the bee's self-affirmative humming with her own 'murmuring':

> Meanwhile I murmured on
> As honeyed bees keep humming to themselves,
> 'The worthiest poets have remained uncrowned
> Till death has bleached their foreheads to the bone;
> And so with me it must be unless I prove
> Unworthy of the grand adversity,
> And certainly I would not fail so much.
> What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day
> In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,
> Before my brows be numbed as Dante's own
> To all the tender prickling of such leaves?
> Such leaves! What leaves?' (*Aurora Leigh*, II, p. 393.)

Such self-baptising is evident in Dickinson's poems and the bee is connected directly to this act, with the emphasis on producing a self-affirmative song and 'humming.' Paul Ricoeur's assertion that 'the symbol gives rise to thought'[47] describes the powerful reversal of the process where thought becomes language, where the symbol itself elicits thought and therefore also language. Dickinson's use of bee imagery presents an alternative liturgy because its repeated presence suggests structure, both communion and participation, whilst being itself an image of ecstatic erring which resists structure. The imagery exploits the reader's prior knowledge of bees and also literary and cultural usage

[47] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1967) pp. 347-357, cited in Elizabeth Johnson *She Who Is*, p. 6.

of bee imagery in order to produce a dialogic interplay between 'known' meanings of community and industry, and traditional paths to the divine, and the new 'ecstatic' ones being produced both within the poem and within the reading process.

The image of the bee has a history of being connected with the rite of baptism in Christian liturgy. Although the practice was not retained after the sixth century, the concluding rituals involved the baptised person being given milk and honey to take, as a symbol of their entrance into the promised land.[48] The bee is also associated with rebirth, renewal and spring, and this is reflected in the Carmelite liturgy for Easter.[49] The transformational quality of the bee imagery in Dickinson's poems invokes a similar association of rebirth and renewal and suggests notions of self-baptising. Dickinson's tendency to wear only garments of white from middle age onwards conveys perhaps a dramatic outward show of this baptism, as white garments are also associated with baptism in the Christian tradition (Podhradsky, p. 36.). By using the bee, Dickinson creates an ecstatic metaphor that effectively redefines the self as poet as well as experience of the divine. We have seen the desire to self-baptise elsewhere in Dickinson, in poems such as Fr 194 ('Title divine, is mine.'), Fr 411 ('Mine – by the Right of the White Election!'), and Fr353 ('I'm Ceded – I've stopped being Theirs'), where she states 'But this time – Adequate – Erect/With Will to choose, or to reject/And I choose, just a Crown - '. Here she invokes the rhetoric of Calvinist election in order to both reject the mode of hierarchy which spurns her self-defined position as heretical, and also to confer status upon this position, which is itself depends upon the collapse of such hierarchical definitions of self and God.

Defiant self-definition is conveyed in poems which also allude to the act of writing. They also invoke the bee to signal an alternative liturgy in which defiant, noisy subjectivity triumphs over the stasis of doctrine. Dickinson tackles religion's failure to represent and accommodate the freedom and chaos of nature and humanity explicitly in 'Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,' where the bee in this earlier version of the poem 'babbles' into a 'stolid ear:'

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[48] Gerhard Podhradsky, ed. *New Dictionary of the Liturgy* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967) p. 36. Isaiah 7.18 includes the Assyrian bee as an image of God's power and forgiveness; those who learn not to choose evil are provided with honey to eat.

[49] Archdale A. King, *Liturgies of the Religious Orders* (London: Longmans, 1955) King describes the 'Eulogy of the Bee' in Carmelite ritual which is performed on Holy Saturday, during Easter. (p. 267.)

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

Light laughs the breeze
In her Castle above them –
Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence –
Ah, what sagacity perished here! (THJ 216, 1859 version)

The deafness of the dead many, the unseeing, unhearing congregation, signals a triumph of nature and life over death. The poem asserts that the ear should be attuned to the sounds of life – which the laughing breeze and the babbling bee represents here. The 'noise' of life is in full resonance, brought into sharp contrast against the deathly silence of the poem's first stanza. Dickinson takes the Wattsian notion of the afterlife and heaven as the palatial 'courts above'[50] and turns death into the abstraction, life being the 'Castle' here, the place to reside in the present life of activity and noise. Dickinson berates the death of 'sagacity' in the Puritan meditation on death, and denial of life, as depicted in the poem's first stanza. The bee in this poem is aligned with 'sagacity'[51] – that is foresight, wisdom and even reward - as although it 'babbles,' this connotes the way in which the message of life cannot seep through to those who, in Dickinson's view, remain 'dead to the world,' as it were, and ignorant of life and the elements, of sensory experience. The metaphor of the tomb extends not only to the 'members' of the Church, but to the very foundations of the Church itself – cold, lifeless and devoid of light in its 'alabaster' and 'stone' construction: signalling the extent of her criticism of the Church as an institution.

[50] For example in 'Come, let us lift our joyful eyes/ Up to the courts above', *HSS*, II, 108:480.
[51] Dryden uses 'sagacious' to describe Virgil's use of bees in Book IV of *The Georgics*: 'last, he singles out the bee, which may be reckoned the most sagacious of them, for his subject.' *The Works of Virgil*, vol. 3, trans. by John Dryden (Chiswick: C. Wittingham, 1822.)

In the second, revised version of this poem (a revision prompted by Susan Gilbert's criticism of the poem)[52] she makes draws her criticisms of orthodox religion together and relates them explicitly to writing as her vocation:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –
Untouched by Morning –
And untouched by noon –
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection –
Rafter of Satin and Roof of Stone -

Grand go the Years,
In the Crescent above them –
Worlds scoop their Arcs –
And Firmaments – row –
Diadems – drop –
And Doges – surrender –
Soundless as Dots,
On a Disc of Snow. (Fr 124, later version)

In this version it is significant that the freedom of the first version's second stanza (indicated by the bee's presence) is absent, and has been replaced with time's delineation 'Grand go the years' and 'Firmaments - row - ' which the freedom that writing offers her ('Soundless as dots – on a disk of Snow') serves to conquer. Therefore the bee, and the freedom and triumph over death which it represents in the first version, is explicitly interchangeable with, and connected directly to, the act of writing in the later version.

The idea of bees occupying an ideal space is returned to and developed in poem Fr 1426 where the state of 'Buzz' is connected with the sustenance provided by the variant 'Fuzz ordained.' The idea of riding is connected with the bee once again (see Fr 1056 above), who is in this poem described as a 'Buccaneer', wearing 'Gilt Surcingles':

Bees are Black, with Gilt Surcingles –
Buccaneers of Buzz.
Ride abroad in ostentation
And subsist on Fuzz.

Fuzz ordained – not Fuzz contingent –

[52] See SL, pp. 161-162 for ED's letters to Susan (1861) which included the poem and then its later alteration, and also for Susan's response to the second version of the poem.

Marrows of the Hill.
Jugs – a Universe's fracture
Could not jar or spill. (Fr 1426)

Perhaps the most striking example of Dickinson's use of the bee to describe spirituality, this bee appears at first to be a parody of the Puritan, where the ineffable spiritual agency which 'Fuzz' connotes in the first stanza simultaneously undermines the notion of God as sustenance and spiritual strength with its flippant invocation of frothiness or excess. 'Gilt' and 'ostentation' also convey an inauthentic, almost fraudulent mode, where the (perhaps stolen) paraphernalia of the Puritan-like 'buccaneer' is boldly on display and unnecessarily opulent. The outward show of their position which is highlighted in the first stanza appears to undermine the remarkable quality of their actions of 'riding abroad' and the actions of the second stanza, that is, to preserve nectar in their mouths or 'Jugs' which will not spill and can withstand the full force of the Universe if it should 'fracture.' Such remarkable ability is both questioned by the speaker in the poem, but also presented as something rare and special, as the smallness of the bee's receptacles makes their prized nectar paradoxically unspillable, rendering their ability to pollinate and produce honey virtually infallible and therefore also part of a perfect, 'ordained,' design:

Fuzz ordained – not Fuzz contingent –
Marrows of the Hill.

The distinction between 'ordained' and 'contingent' in the initial lines of the second stanza is crucial as it separates the steadfast word of God from the idea of contingency. Contingency and faith are oppositional as the latter does not depend upon anything else for its existence, it simply is there or it is not. Equally, however, the poem allows for readings in which 'ordained' might not necessarily be correlative to negative associations of religious doctrine, but rather an alternative, positive state that is beyond the realm of religion and therefore human conceptions of 'Fuzz,' or spirituality. Moreover, 'ordained' is likely another variant of the self-baptism which poetry affords her. 'Marrows of the Hill' describes an essential quality in nature, not a man-made concept, as providing the sustenance, the 'Fuzz,' of the bee. Marrow being the essential

life force and sustenance for the body is a striking metaphor which connects the figure of the bee in this poem to the human body, and therefore also to humanity. 'Marrow' is evocative of Watts's diction and the emphasis which he places upon the humanness of the body in order to convey the speaker's wretchedness and separation from God. However, here human physicality is invoked to convey the bee's (that is, the spiritual human's) inherent connection with the essence of God, that which provides sustenance and resides in the core of all things.

Although the poem parodies the Puritan figure in a similar manner to some of the other bee poems, and in many ways the existence of such a faith is questioned and gently mocked by the comical depiction of the bee/Puritan riding the currents of ecstasy whilst wearing 'gilt surcingles,' the existence of the ideal space indicated by 'buzz' is still a real consideration. The fact that the bee is described as a Buccaneer, with its association of piratical, plundering activities, suggests the idea that such a paradisal space has been similarly plundered or hijacked by orthodox religion, which attempts to 'ordain' and therefore impose limitations upon the spiritual ecstasy which 'Buzz' and 'Fuzz' convey in this poem. This being so, the ideal space where revery can occur still exists within the poem, within the speaker's gaze, as the example from nature ('Marrow of the Hill') conveys.

The pointed repetition of 'Fuzz' in this poem (the repetition of words being itself a rare occurrence for Dickinson) accentuates, as in many other of Dickinson's bee poems, the excessiveness of the bee's body, and suggests that it is perhaps a bumblebee. Again, it is an example of impossibility made possible and actual, where the sheer volume of the bee's body in comparison with its wing power renders it miraculous in scientific terms. A connection between the implausibility of the bee and the implausibility of Christian salvation and immortality is implied. Dickinson exploits this remarkable fact by alluding to the bee's precarious position in the air with its need for surcingles, which aid balance, as it rides upon the currents of the air, plundering 'Buzz.' The fact that the bee image in this poem allows the reader to observe both a critique of religious faith, with its apparent implausibility (as indicated by the bee's implausibly excessive body) and also what is essentially a reassertion of faith in an ideal space of revery, indicated by 'Buzz,' suggests further that in connecting industry and revery, the bee image serves (like Virgil's bees) as

a bridge between faith and doubt and between life and death. It connotes an ideal space where both, impossibly, could exist, escaping the 'contingency' of human thinking on spirituality and also on the potential of women poets. The fact that the bees in Dickinson's poems are often described as 'riding' the air is suggestive of angels on horseback, riding the unseen, spiritual currents, delineating the arc of such an ideal space of possibilities. Significantly, the bees are themselves, their own method of 'transport,' and transcendence, where 'surcingles,' 'wings' or 'carriages' are also their bodies. In this way the bee is an automaton and an example of the self-'ordained', and also of the self-defined woman poet, giving expression to this self.

Despite this autonomy, the mode of relation and destabilised oppositions which this self-baptism draws from in her poems works against reinscribing self-centredness and interiority. However, Benjamin Lease uses Thomas à Kempis and Sir Thomas Browne, both read by Dickinson, to support the emphasis of interiority he places upon her mode of spirituality:

> A heavily marked chapter in Dickinson's copy of the *Imitation* is titled 'Of the Love of Solitude and Silence' – and one of its sentences must have spoken with special force to the poet: 'The greatest Saints avoided the society of men, when they could conveniently, and did rather choose to live to God, in secret'. Sir Thomas Browne, whose collected works were a part of the Dickinson family library, conveyed a similar view in his *Christian Morals*: *He who must needs have company, must needs have sometimes bad company. Be able to be alone. Lose not the advantage of solitude, and the society of thyself; nor be only content, but delight to be alone and single with Omnipresency.* Even before she initiated her correspondence with Higginson, Emily Dickinson was engaged in a life that reflected Browne's vision of simultaneous solitude and deep involvement.
>
> (*RMB*, p. 58.)[53]

There is a difference between Dickinson's rejection of orthodox rules of salvation, and the damnation associated with traditional forms of religion, particularly Puritan and even revivalist, evangelical Christianity with which she would be familiar. Her inclination to

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[53] Lease cites Thomas à Kempis *The Imitation of Christ* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, [n.d.] (pp. 69-70.) and Sir Thomas Browne *Religio Medici* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862) 'Christian Morals'. (Part 3, Section 9, p. 246.)

not assent to the majority or accepted patterns implicit in such orthodox religions must not be mistaken for privileging interiority and isolation over a desire to connect with the world and partake in a 'communion'. Lease himself notes the connection between the bee (an image of relation) and spiritual vision in Dickinson, when he cites 'These are the days when Birds come Back' (Fr 122) as evidence of her direct engagement with Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation*, reading it as an extrapolation of the emphasis on childhood in Kempis:

> The *Imitation* dwells on the central importance of the Lord's Supper – and the need for simplicity and purity in everyday life ('By two wings, a man is lifted up from things earthly, namely, by Simplicity and Purity.') [...] In the dying season, there is for the child – and for the child in spirit – the possibility and promise of eternal life. The lesson of the undeceived bee is that the season is indeed dying; the bee is not cheated in *this* false season. But they who become as little children partake in a celebration of cyclical death and life, of life in death – and are not cheated in any season.
>
> (*RMB*, pp. 54-55.)[54]

Lease observes the apparent special immunity to 'fraud' that Dickinson imparts to the figure of the bee in this poem, and highlights the emphasis she places upon being 'as little children.' However, the bee's immunity to the 'fraud' of appearances in this poem does not 'induce' the poet speaker's child-like belief in, and acceptance of, Christian redemption and immortality through Christ ('Almost'), but rather invokes a communion with nature and its cyclical, immortal seasons, in which all things are inextricably related:

> These are the days when Birds come back –
> A very few – a bird or two –
> To take a backward look.
>
> These are the days when skies resume
> The old – old sophistries of June –
> A blue and gold mistake.
>
> Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee –
> Almost thy plausibility

[54] Quotation from Thomas à Kempis, p. 114 and p. 211.

Induces my belief.

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear –
And softly thro' the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf.

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

Thy sacred emblems to partake –
Thy consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine! (Fr 122)

The bee in this poem is the objectified, observed participant in the 'summer communion,' but acting as it does as an intermediary between the scene on display and the speaker in the poem, it becomes itself a 'sacred emblem' within Dickinson's poetic liturgy. The bee, dependent upon the nectar of blooming flowers, cannot be cheated by the appearance of a summer day because the absence of flowers for it provides proof of the seasonal change to autumn. Its relation to the hive and the industry *and* revery it must continue dictates the objective 'truth' of the season for it. It is the bee who communicates the gap between faith and doubt and the collapsing division between the 'I' ('my') of the speaker and the inherent divinity 'Thou' ('Thy') of the scene. If, then, we trust the bee, whose proof against fraud has been proved by its innate relation to the world, then so, perhaps, we must trust in that pattern of relation but also, and just as importantly, in the individual vision of the poet who sees the truth of the sacrament of 'Communion' laid out in the 'haze' of late summer days. And so in this way, the bee provides the evidential, relational truth of the existence of a design in which industry and revery are *always* connected, the circumference of which, for Dickinson, is traced through her own poetic work.

Summary

This (and the previous chapter) have shown that Dickinson's bee poems, with their erratic flight, create a new notion of space and rely on a constant exchange between 'I-Thou'

which defies and collapses models of hierarchy. She exploits and ruptures the culturally idiomatic connection between industry and morals (as epitomised by Watts's 'busy bee') to connect industry and revery in her bee imagery. Thus, giving voice to the erring other who dares to 'ride indefinite' and willingly get 'lost in balms', and who demonstrates the 'impossible' flight which is at once non-linear, erratic and ecstatic. This mode of being allows 'revery' to come to the fore, which is also an 'impossible' state, a state of possibilities, in which oppositional thought can not rest and in which social hierarchies can not be reproduced. This particular use of bee imagery explodes divisions and delineates an ideal space in which the shapes, and shaping, of spirituality are articulated.

Dickinson's use of the bee image thus both critiques and utilises familiar modes of religious ideology and also offers one way of perceiving the shape or design of her industry and license as a poet, and ultimately, her own connection with belief and 'illume' or 'revery'. In this way, Dickinson's use of the bee image can be seen as being emblematic of an ideal space and thus performing an alternative symbolism for spirituality within her poetics. Ultimately it is the transportive power of poetry that offers Dickinson a mode of revery which is both an ecstatic experience and also a form of industry. Her version of industry delineates a spiritual life by constantly redefining and simultaneously destabilising the force of oppositions which stifle it. In using bee imagery to parody or subvert Puritan values Dickinson creates a new aesthetic response to religious orthodoxy and in doing so articulates an alternative mode of belief.

Conclusion

'Why Floods be served to Us – in Bowls – /I speculate no more-'

One blessing had I than the rest
So larger to my Eyes
That I stopped gauging – satisfied –
For this enchanted size-

I knew no more of Want – or Cold –
Phantasms both become
For this new Value in the Soul –
Supremest Earthly Sum - (Fr 767)

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that Emily Dickinson's engagement with hymns goes beyond metrical subversion of Isaac Watts's hymn patterns, broadening out to a wider engagement with hymn culture as a whole, in which the hierarchical 'I-Thou' model of relation to the divine in hymns is renegotiated and an alternative version of spirituality, a 'new Value in the Soul', is asserted. It has illustrated that engagement by reading Watts primarily as a model for dissent, by identifying a tradition of contemporary women hymnists and by going further to analyse and develop theories of hymnic space, an important way in which to trace the representation of spirituality in Dickinson's poetry against 'tradition' and experience. Thus this thesis has demonstrated that Dickinson's relation to hymnody can provide one way of examining the representation of apparently contradictory, fluid and multiple spirituality in her poetry. Hymn culture provides a 'bowl' into which Dickinson's expansive spiritual vision can be poured, where her series of challenges to, and creative reconstructions of, the divine can be measured against both the oppositional 'I-Thou' model of address and notion of cohesive 'community' which are associated with hymns. Thus, the representation of spirituality in Dickinson's poetry can be traced through an engagement with hymn culture, from the influence of Watts and the example of Dissent and autonomy that his hymns demonstrate, and through the challenges to teleological representations of the divine found in the work of contemporary women hymnists, to the knowledge of the self and assertion of subjectivity which are performed through metaphors of relation in Dickinson's poetics.

Analysing Dickinson's use of the hymn in terms of a heterologous space in which to articulate an individual's relation to community provides a paradigm for the version of the female divine which is described in twentieth and twenty-first century feminist theology and feminist literary theory, particularly that of Daphne Hampson and Luce Irigaray. It has shown that although the echoes of hymns in Dickinson's

work serves to highlight her dislocation from the religious communities and the particular versions of social cohesion and of the divine which she found to be antagonistic to her own experience of self and spirituality, her interaction with hymn culture is not based exclusively upon recalcitrance. Moreover, this thesis has demonstrated that the poetics of relation which Dickinson's writing constructs belies a commitment to the ideas of community and relation which the hymn form encodes. These aspects of hymn culture are reworked and transformed in Dickinson's poetics and evade oppositional models that do not accommodate her own experience. In this way they have affinity with the alternative models for the divine considered in current feminist theology. By arguing that Dickinson's engagement with hymn culture goes beyond formal concerns of metre, the thesis seeks to move Dickinson studies forward, beyond a simple perception of her interaction with hymnody as being limited to the disruption of regularised metre and subversion of biblical tropes in the hymns of Isaac Watts. Rather, it shows that Dickinson's hymns can be seen as positive responses to and expansions of the tropes of dissent, flight and spiritual community instigated by Watts and developed by other women hymnists.

This work has also provided a context for Dickinson's relation to hymnody and the use of an anti-teleological, anti-hierarchical mode of writing within the forms culturally prescribed and acceptable for women writers during the nineteenth century. It has argued that the structure, imagery and mode of Dickinson's poems serve to challenge the ontological parameters of the hymn and the traditional, hierarchical notions of the divine to be found Protestant Christianity, and in doing so, shows that Dickinson effectively reclaims the hymn to express a version of the divine which is compatible with her own, individual, experience.

Chapters Three and Four analysed the hymns of Isaac Watts, Phoebe Hinsdale Brown and Eliza Lee Follen to show that the hymn is a form of expression which inherently allows limitation to become visible. Highlighting the ways in which each hymnist engages with the expectations of a hymn and also its limitations, provides an important context for Dickinson's engagement with the hymn and hymn culture in a period when the use of patriotic hymns during war to reassert social cohesion, together with the emergent proliferation of female hymnody, made the genre a particularly potent form of expression for the poet to use.

The evidence of hymnody being used by Watts and antebellum era women hymnists as a form of Dissent and protest, as well as expression of spirituality, was

built upon in Chapters Five and Six by tracing Dickinson's use of bee imagery which carries particular resonance with both Puritanism and the Protestant work ethic and aspects related to hymns and hymn culture, such as singing (the bee's noises and interruptive presence within the poem), relationality and community. Analysis of Dickinson's use of this particular imagery illustrated how she exploits the connection with industry and morals in hymn culture to give voice to her ecstatic and erring self, and to express her own divine 'revery.' A triune pattern was traced in Dickinson's bee motif that is concerned with industry, revery and relation respectively. This combination, and particularly the notion of relation, was brought into critical focus by comparing it to the notions of community and relation in feminist theology and also with the mode of the mystical writings of Irigaray and Certeau, as examined in Chapter Two in relation to the redefinition of hymnic space.

The final Chapter demonstrated that by engaging with hymn culture and cultural associations of the bee, and primarily the idiomatic connection between industry and morality, Dickinson radically transforms the image into a trope of multiple, diverse relationality which also becomes an image associated with poetry and the poet. By highlighting the connections between labour and pleasure in nature and by connecting this with her own industry as a poet, Dickinson's bee imagery delimits a heterologous space, where individuality is given freedom and movement within a structure. This is also, by implication, a reworking of hymn culture as it repositions the 'I' in hymn address into a diverse relationality, thus escaping the linear, teleological relation to the divine which is exclusionary. Both centripetal and centrifugal forces come together in Dickinson's bee imagery, signalling again a reconfiguration of the outwards but also centralising movement of address in hymns. Dickinson holds the inwards/outwards movement in tension, the 'centre' of God is not pursued, but is replaced instead with the mystical and Dissenting mode of tracing the margins, Dickinson's 'Business' of 'Circumference'. (SL, p. 176.) In this way, the reconfiguration of the 'I-Thou' model in Dickinson's poetry which this thesis has demonstrated, displays qualities which are comparable with the 'alternative values' of 'multiplicity' and 'community' which Scheinberg suggests are necessary to counter the androcentric 'generic patterns' in Victorian poetic theory.[1] Dickinson's bee

[1] As cited in Introduction, p. 5., and Chapter Six, p. 238. Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture*, p. 236.

imagery, like Virgil's, bridges the gap between death and life, between old traditions and new hopes.

Ultimately, the thesis has shown that the hymn is a form of expression which makes its limitations visible; and by doing so is able to take spiritual discourse some way beyond those limitations, leaving space for an openness which cannot be 'contained.' Dickinson's illuminations of the genre's limitations is something which makes the hymn form endlessly rejuvenating and self-regenerative within her poetics. Rather than reading Dickinson's poetry as the meditations of a spiritual isolate, her mystical 'alternative hymns' convey the expression of a radically engaged mind, pushing the boundaries of a traditional and patriarchally defined form to create anew a mode of expression for the divinity in human and temporal relation.

'instead of getting to Heaven, at last - '

Dickinson's poetics work against the linearity and fixity associated with the depiction of the speaker's relation to the divine to be found in traditional hymns. Whilst the common hymnic metre of many of Dickinson's poems suggests that such linearity and fixity is available, the speaker's vision is deferring, open, and chooses to engage with something much more explosive. By choosing transgression of traditional hymnody's boundaries as the basis of her poetic style, Dickinson provides an open space for herself and for her version of the divine to become animated through a method that is both a response *and* a non-saying. Moreover, like the mystic, Dickinson's hymnic space remains new, and as such is a space for the reader to make cognitive connections that are suggested but not final. In this, Dickinson's language is placed in relation to the reader, but that relation is paradoxically (and crucially) without ties. This paradoxical sense of connection is explored by feminist theologians in relation to qualities of a female divine and the problematic negotiation of hierarchical structure in traditional religious culture.

The idea of received knowledge, or as Graham Ward writes, 'a response to the reception of what is given'[2] requires a horizon, a barometer against which to measure itself as similar or to be recognised. Watts's hymns convey the points at which his 'describable' knowledge of God seems to fail him, which are articulated in terms of

[2] Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) p. 185.

sight/blindness or closeness/distance in many instances. Dickinson's poems, on the other hand, describe a journey of relation with the unsayable, whilst also challenging the view of traditional hymnody as representing and enacting social cohesion. In this way, they work against the 'act of naming' in traditional hymnody whilst both deconstructing and renegotiating the premises of community and interconnectedness proliferated by hymn culture. Traditional hymns are sites in which the speaker's relation to God, and the naming of the divine which they (re-)produce can be articulated. Dickinson's poems allow space for experience which is both unexpected and unbounded, as the initial and penultimate stanzas from poem Fr 483 exemplify:

> Most she touched me by her muteness –
> Most she won me by the way
> She presented her small figure –
> Plea itself – for Charity –
>
> [...]
>
> I supposed - when sudden
> Such a Praise began
> 'Twas as Space sat singing
> To herself - and men - (Fr 483)

In generating this space Dickinson allows for the possibilities of self and spirituality which can be experienced through writing, and depicts the surprise event of bursting out of 'muteness', which in this poem is anticipated by the poet-onlooker, or paternal 'Benefactor'. The occupation of multiple positions in Dickinson's poems, as the speaker's role of onlooker and the implied connection between the bird singer and the poet herself in this poem demonstrates, serves to highlight but also blur distinctions between 'I' and 'Thou' and thus collapse the model of relation in traditional hymn address.[3] This thesis has demonstrated that this relation is something which permeates Dickinson's work and signals her engagement with hymn culture.

'Heterologous space' has been used to describe the forms of relation to hymn culture and also to the divine which Dickinson's poems display. Certeau's notion of mystical writings as delineating absences and ruptures, whilst also operating within a heterologous space of relation to the historicity of discourses which produced them, has been used effectively to show not only how Dickinson's relation to hymn culture

[3] Poem Fr 483 discussed in the Introduction, p. 14.

delineates absences in traditional hymnody's 'I-Thou' model of address, but that the 'open' shape of her poetics is connected with this relation to hymn culture, resulting in a redefinion of the divine within hymnic space. Dickinson's hymnic spaces open out the 'I-Thou' model to incorporate a multiple relationality in which the linear relation between 'I' and 'Thou' is replaced with multiplicity and mobility with regard to the divine. Through this, Dickinson's 'alternative hymns' also create an alternative space in which the divine and self can be endlessly re-imagined and reborn. Therefore, the contradiction and fluidity which characterises Dickinson's work does not delimit absence per se, but instead, a space in which possibilities can inhabit.

In forging a poetics in which difference is incorporated, and in which an alternative to the 'I-Thou' model of relation in hymns is persistently considered, Dickinson articulates both a 'female divine' and 'mystical discourse' in which the premises and assumptions of traditional religious culture are invoked to make them 'say the absence' of 'what they designate.'[4] It is the moments at which traditional religious culture fails the woman writer who searches for a way to express the divine which she experiences that furnish Dickinson with the architecture of her poetics. Through dissent, doubt and discontent, Dickinson spins a poetics of an alternative faith; an optimism for, and faith in, ideas of relation and community which are reconfigured to connote immanent experience:

> God preaches, a noted Clergyman –
> And the sermon is never long,
> So instead of getting to Heaven, at last –
> I'm going, all along. (Fr 236)

Dickinson claims in this poem to have direct access to God as she defines him, a definition which is itself hinged upon understatement and irony because of her rejection of God as 'Father'. (25 April, 1862, SL, p. 173.) Here she parodies but also dismisses the need for formalised worship and the 'noted clergym[e]n' of her social milieu. She rejects formalised religious experience and does not address a 'Thou' to answer the 'I' in her poem, as would be the case in traditional hymnody. However, she does not dispense with the claim to spiritual experience but charts an alternative way, in which relation to the divine is reached immediately through the self, paradoxically, without the interposing hierarchy which 'noted clergyman' invokes and

[4] Michel de Certeau, 'Mystic Speech' in *The Certeau Reader* ed. by Graham Ward, p. 205.

without the 'interposing days' found in Watts (*HSS*, II, 145:502-503). Relation to the divine is not defined through a telos ('Heaven, at last - ') but in relation to the present, with its chaotic multiplicity ('*all* along'). This, the poem's final line ('I'm going, all along') voices ironic surprise at the autonomy of her journey, however, it also encapsulates the mode of Dickinson's relation to the divine which is within both self and world, both immediate and all encompassing. This mobile and fluid relationality is inscribed and enacted poetically by Dickinson, thus reconstructing the symbolic values of the hymn whilst negotiating hierarchical models of address. Dickinson's words form themselves, congregationally around the circumference of her own experience; the communion with nature and also the journey of her own life. They do not define nor are constricted by a demand for a telos, but instead simply express Heaven through and within present experience. Therefore, Dickinson's experimentation and engagement with the tradition of hymn culture does not merely offer a parody of the modes of expression and metrics of the popular hymnody of her day; it actively shapes a new kind of theology.

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