
Sexual Personae

Art and Decadence from
Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson

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halfway between Romanticism and the social novel, his artistic goal. So we wait—and wait and wait. Nothing ever happens in James, because he and we are hostages caught in a crossfire.

James's repressions and evasions are many, varied, and exhausting. Why more people are not seen rushing shrieking from libraries, shredded James novels in their hands, I cannot say. I used to wonder whether enthusiasm for him was based on identification, since his passive, tentative heroes resemble many academics. Perhaps what is intolerable is his enshrinement in a soporific criticism. So much must be overlooked to crown him with laurel. But if James is understood as a Late Romantic, a Decadent in my extended sense, then his sadomasochistic perversities take coherent form, integrated with his witty aestheticism and ambiguous sexual personae. His fussy late style is Decadent because it is both fastidious and excessive. George Moore called James a self-made "eunuch," implying he was a prude and sissy.⁵⁸ This is much too simple. Sex cannot be understood apart from nature. James's rhetorical impediments and frustrations arise from a suppression of the daemonic, in which sex is included but to which sex too is subject.

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Amherst's Madame de Sade

Emily Dickinson

American Romanticism, I have argued, is really Decadent Late Romanticism, the century-long evolution through which Coleridge finally triumphs over Wordsworth. Poe and Hawthorne are already registering Late Romantic perversities in the 1830s. Therefore the tardy dates of *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) show what is wrong with Mark Twain. His Wordsworthian idylls are completely out of sync with the internal development of major American literature. The two books are bourgeois fantasies about childhood and lower-class life. As in my youth, teachers continue to inflict them on students as somehow proper reading. It took me twenty years to work out a critical theory to explain why I found Twain so hateful. His dislike of the witty Jane Austen provided the key. His rejection of her Enlightenment hierarchism is partly an unconscious rejection of the innate hierarchism of Late Romanticism. Twain is trying to turn the Romantic clock back. His folksiness and pastoralism are counterfeit, as decadent as Marie Antoinette's masquerades as a shepherdess. The gloomy negativity of Twain's later life is no puzzle to me. His Wordsworthian benevolence was always false. The hierarchical Lewis Carroll is the true poet of childhood, with its mystery, cruelty, and blatant aggressions. Twain as a fabulist? Fable is marshallow myth; it is myth stripped of chthonian realities. Scratch a fabulist, and you'll find fear of woman and fear of nature. Storytelling or yarn-spinning is what men do among men. It is a ritual of avoidance, a deflection of the psychological turbulence of men's lives with women. Twain's boy-stories are songs of innocence sixty years past their time. Romanticism is in its degenerate late phase. Dark, sexual songs of experience are the authentic Late

Romantic voice. And this leads us to Emily Dickinson, the greatest of women poets.

Less melodious than Sappho, Dickinson is conceptually vaster, for she assimilates two more millennia of western experience. No major figure in literary history has been more misunderstood. Ignored by her own time, Dickinson was sentimentalized in her renaissance. After thirty years of scholarship, the modernist complexity of her high style is universally recognized. But criticism still ignores the bulk of mawkish lyrics in her collected works. There is no integration of her high and low styles. Psychoanalytic readings are slowly making their way, but the academic view of her remains too genteel. The horrifying and ruthless in her are tempered or suppressed. Emily Dickinson is the female Sade, and her poems are the prison dreams of a self-incarcerated, sadomasochistic imagist. When she is rescued from American Studies departments and juxtaposed with Dante and Baudelaire, her barbarities and diabolical acts of will become glaringly apparent. Dickinson inherits through Blake the rape cycle of the *The Faerie Queene*. Blake and Spenser are her allies in helping pagan Coleridge defeat Protestant Wordsworth.

The primary qualities of Dickinson's style are high condensation and riddling ellipsis. Protestant hymn-measure is warped and deformed by a stupefying energy. Words are rammed into lines with such force that syntax shatters and collapses into itself. The relation of form to content is aggressive and draconian. The structure cramps and pinches the words like a vise. The poems shudder with a huge tremor of contraction. Dickinson's poetry is like the shrinking room of Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, a torture chamber and arena of extremity. We are in the womb-tomb of Decadent closure.

Dickinson has two representational modes, which I call the Sadean and the Wordsworthian. The brutality of this belle of Amherst would stop a truck. She is a virtuoso of sadomasochistic surrealism: "The Brain, within its Groove / Runs evenly and true— / But let a Splinter swerve."¹ Like the Metaphysical poets, she finds metaphors among the mechanical and domestic arts—blacksmithing, carpentry, cooking, sewing. In this example, the brain, detached as Emerson's eyeball, is humming merrily along in its underground railroad of daily custom, when it is suddenly pierced by a splinter shooting off the wooden track. Analysts of emotion do not normally think of the brain as a soft mass spitted by malicious barbs. As in James, the metaphor belongs to horror films—or rotisserie cooking. It always reminds me of a breakfast-hour high-school driver-education film that made us contemplate a dead truck driver, his skull crushed against the dashboard by a load of lumber

shifting forward. The analogies in art to Dickinson's wood-speared brain are pagan or Catholic: the *Iliad's* gruesome battlefield deaths or Mantegna's St. Sebastian, transfixed by an arrow from chin to pate. In its sheer gratuitousness, the metaphor resembles the tortures of *120 Days of Sodom*, where Sade jams lethal blades, rods, and spikes into every orifice of the body.

Dickinson prefers the word "brain" to "mind": it is one of her earthy Anglo-Saxon tropes. She makes sharp Sadean comedy out of treating the brain as a thing: "The Brain is just the weight of God— / For Heft them Pound for Pound / And they will differ—if they do— / As Syllable from Sound" (632). The poet hefts the brain like a shopper picking through cabbages at the market. God has shrunk, like the embalmed head of Queequeg's totem. The poet sets him on the makeshift scales of human judgment. It's supptime: communion or cannibalism? Bereaved, Dickinson declares, "I've dropped my Brain" (1046). Thought is paralyzed, with the brain dropped like a handkerchief. But such an object will hardly float to the floor. We hear a muffled thump, like the paperboy hitting the stoop with the evening edition.

Dickinson's brain has a will of its own: "If ever the lid gets off my head / And lets the brain away / The fellow will go where he belonged / Without a hint from me" (1727). The skull seems trepanned, like a cookie jar. The brain, as masculine intellect, escapes like a canary from a cage or a firefly from a bottle. We see a Late Romantic rebellion of part against whole, the brain boldly abandoning its master, like Gogol's nose or Gautier's mummified foot. The brain can be an empty, echoing space: "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, / And Mourners to and fro / Kept treading—treading—till it seemed / That Sense was breaking through" (280). This parade of persons trampling up and down like noisy upstairs neighbors is a funeral procession of thoughts of wintry disillusion. It is also the beating of a Romantically self-oppressed heart. I suspect two influences here from Poe: the skull-like mansion/tomb of *The House of Usher* and the guiltily throbbing chamber of *The Tell-Tale Heart*.²

In "He fumbles at your Soul," probably an account of a fire-breathing sermon, the hearer's recovering brain is said "to bubble Cool" (315). So the brain has been boiling like a pot on the stove. The liquefied brain, steaming like magma in a crater, can also be the bonehead brain:

Rearrange a "Wife's" affection!
When they dislocate my Brain!
Amputate my freckled Bosom!
Make me bearded like a man!

[1737]

The brain has joints, subject to hoodlum arm-twisting. This stanza, from the marriage poems where Dickinson plays with earthly and celestial brides, is a violent fantasy of Amazonian desexing. Who are "they"? No matter what reading we choose, we are left with a spectacle of Sadean torture. The speaker is a martyred saint, St. Catherine racked by the deputies of the state.

Enough of brains. On to lungs. "A Small Leech on the Vitals— / The sliver, in the Lung— / The Bung out of an Artery— / Are scarce accounted Harms" (565). The leech is not a medical bloodsucker but a septic invader, an intestinal parasite. It is Dickinson's Sadean shorthand for a nagging anxiety, an invisible hemorrhaging wound, like a stress ulcer. Its ancestor is Prometheus' perforated liver. But the scene of suffering is domestic, not sublime. The leech is heaven's worm, cousin to Eden's serpent. The ailment of which the speaker complains, or rather declines to complain, is chronic rather than acute, a gnawing malady without High Romantic glamour.

As for the artery with its bung out, Dickinson sees the body bursting like a stoven barrel, gushing red in an apoplectic spout. The sliver in the lung is another of her bits of embedded shrapnel. It is unlikely the sliver has been inhaled—though one cannot dismiss any hallucination when reading Dickinson! Probably the sliver is a dart that has pierced the rib cage: it is one of Cupid's unlucky iron arrows, the spear in Christ's side lowered to household accident. Dickinson elsewhere says of an absent friend: "I got so I could stir the Box / In which his letters grew / Without that forcing, in my breath— / As Staples driven through" (293). Staples hammered into the thorax are her tender way of describing a catch in the breath, by which we should also understand the sliver in the lung. Returning to that stanza, we see how much irrational visual material it contains. The speaker stands with bungs out and leeches and splinters all over her body, like a human porcupine. The representational style is Asiatic. As in the platform scene of *The Scarlet Letter*, we see the Ephesian Artemis, an idol studded with grotesque sacrificial symbols.

Dickinson's sadomasochistic metaphors are usually overdetermined, in the Freudian sense; that is, they are conflation of multiple meanings. For instance, the disagreeable staple occurs elsewhere, showing its inherited associations. "They" ally once more for bouts of harassment. "They put Us far apart . . . They took away our Eyes . . . They summoned Us to die— / With sweet alacrity / We stood upon our stapled feet— / Condemned but just to see" (474). The stapled feet of the devoted couple represent their separation in space. Feet nailed to the ground, the speaker is like Odysseus bound to the mast or like a Kewpie

doll stuck to a dashboard, swaying to the motion of cathexis. The scene is Inquisitional: two prisoners are slain for their fidelity. The speaker is like Oedipus, his ankles pierced by the jealous king, or like Christ nailed up with his criminal companions. The phrase "stapled feet" is purposefully reductive in making the carpenter's son victim of a satiric carpentry. Jesus as carpenter often appears in Dickinson: he is master of "the Art of Boards," or God forces him and humanity to walk the plank.³

Dickinson strews puncture wounds liberally through her poetry. She says of one of her heroes, "Fate . . . Impaled Him on Her fiercest stakes" (1031). Fiercest may mean sharpest, but it could also mean bluntest, to maximize pain. In this savage tableau, a cruel goddess waits with a sheaf of stationary spears, nature's phallic stockade. Elsewhere Dickinson declares, "No Rack can torture me": the soul is something "You Cannot prick with saw / Nor pierce with Scimitar" (384). These negatives are a *paraleipsis*: what cannot be done to the soul *can* be done to the body. Piercing with scimitars is credible swordplay (though slashing would be truer), but what of pricking with saws? Bizarre scenarios flash before the eyes: magicians tickling ladies in half; seamstresses pricking themselves with saws rather than pins; bandits setting upon travellers with saws, pricking forearms with abandon. Again one thinks of Sade's encyclopedic *120 Days of Sodom*: by Yankee ingenuity, Dickinson is determined to add to the sum total of imaginable human tortures.

Impalement is Dickinson's metaphor for mortality: "A single Screw of Flesh / Is all that pins the Soul" (263). Incarnation is torment. The soul, like the Greek winged *psyche*, is a butterfly fixed by a pin. The cruel lepidopterist, one assumes, is God. The metaphor recalls Mary's heart lanced by the swords of her seven sorrows, or St. Teresa's heart thrilled by the angel's dart. It is a Valentine's card by Beardsley, a holiday symbolism evoked when Dickinson says of a friend, "The largest Woman's Heart / Could hold an Arrow too" (309).

Dickinson's impalements are even more atrocious: "It is simple, to ache in the Bone, or the Rind— / But Gimlets among the nerve / Mangle daintier—terribler" (244). Gimlets among the nerve are stabs or twinges of pain, a spiritual neuralgia. But the metaphor demands we see boring tools, like corkscrews, rioting through and shredding the nerve fibers. It is like a butchering surgeon's scalpel or a drunken sculptor's auger. What is a dainty mangling? This Decadent juxtaposition of beauty and horror resembles Baudelaire's "hideous delicacies." It is a subliminally sexual Spenserian effect that few English poets attempt. The "rind," opposed to bone, is human skin. Normally, only

fruit, cheese, or bacon has a rind. Dickinson's rind makes the body *peelable*. Apollo with a potato parer, she flays the Marsyas of humanity, exposing raw nerve. Man is a red-ribboned *écorché* in her laboratory.

The spectacles of affliction can be incoherent: "A Weight with Needles on the pounds— / To push, and pierce, besides— / That if the Flesh resist the Heft— / The puncture coolly tries" (264). Like tourists in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, we pause puzzled before a new instrument of torture in Dickinson's mental dungeon. A weight with needles must be depression combined with anxiety. It is grief that deadens but thoughts that arouse. The metaphor makes us see a kind of meat tenderizer or serrated millstone. Perhaps it comes from *The Pit and the Pendulum*: it combines crushing with cutting, moving walls with rocking razorblade. Or it may be a version of the medieval Iron Maiden, which drove spikes into a victim's eyes and torso. There is a shadowy sexual element in Dickinson's image, a suggestion of rape, for the weight with needles is a force that both smothers and penetrates.

If she treats the body like a pincushion, Dickinson also treats pincushions like bodies. She speaks of a grief "that nestled close / As needles ladies softly press / To Cushions Cheeks— / To keep their place" (584). Women darning or embroidering stick needles into the cushions on which they rest their hands. If their sewing is like a book being read, the needle is a bookmark. Dickinson's anthropomorphism fiendishly makes cushions fat-cheeked sentient beings, like the paunchy pudding whom Alice tries to slice. The stanza clearly shows how Dickinson's sadomasochism is a perverse self-pleasuring. She turns ladies into sadists, ruthlessly running needles into cheeks. "Softly" has a morbid Spenserian delicacy, introducing a luxurious stillness and amorousness into the sequestered scene. We peer into another rounded capsule of female solipsism, as in Blake's "Sick Rose" or Ingres's *Turkish Bath*. The needles are the thorns of a closed garden of earthly delights.

A similar poem describes the rise and fall of a painted hot-air balloon:

The Gilded Creature strains—and spins—
Trips frantic in a Tree—
Tears open her imperial Veins—
And tumbles in the Sea— [700]

By making the balloon feminine, Dickinson intensifies the masochism of its death. Its thrashings become exquisite and erotic. Beauty and pain sensually mix, as in Spenser's episode of the slashing of Amoret's white bosom. The word "gilded" gives the balloon the same aura Balzac uses in *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* to sensationalize the destruction of a

human objet d'art. The balloon "strains," "spins," "trips frantic": we are watching the hopeless flight of a victim of rape-murder. Her veins are "torn" like silk, ravaged by vandals. The veins are imperial, because she is like a Roman opening her veins in the bath of the sky-blue sea. Is Dickinson reimagining Shakespeare's Spenserian *Rape of Lucrece*? The balloon's rupture is an orgasmic sigh of surrender.

Dickinson's displaced eroticism is evident even in poems without overt sexual personae: "Force Flame / And with a Blonde push / Over your impotence / Flits Steam" (854). The images have a stunning economy and toughness. She means man is helpless before nature's laws. The locution "a Blonde push" is so remote from common English speech that it seems nonverbal, something seen or felt rather than read or heard. It has sexual implications, like Yeats's inseminating "white rush" in "Leda and the Swan." We expect a blonde push in French boudoir painting or Baroque sculpture—Bernini's Apollo chasing Daphne. The passage is structured by a hierarchical pattern of strength and weakness, attack and defeat.

Another example of Dickinson sex and violence: "She dealt her pretty words like Blades— / How glittering they shone— / And every One unbared a Nerve / Or wantoned with a Bone" (479). A daunting woman—one suspects she is young and attractive—is set before us, her mouth bristling with steel cutlery, the long teeth of a talkative Berenice. She is making those cutting remarks I find symptomatic of aggressive western speech. Both coy and cruel, this composed hermaphrodite entertains herself with a round of exploratory surgery, uncovering nerves and "wantoning" with bones—an erotic word choice. Literally, to wanton with bones is to toss them about, as if mixing a salad. So we see bones sailing through the air on gusts of chat. Are we at a social circus? Juggler, knife-thrower, and lion-tamer have gotten their acts together, in impressive triplicate.

A parallel theme from the poet's point of view: "I've got an arrow here. / Loving the hand that sent it / I the dart revere" (1729). The arrow is probably a hurtful letter that has struck home. Drawing the missile from her flesh and studying it fondly, the poet is like a martyr holding her instrument of execution, like St. Lawrence leaning on his grill. Dickinson's iconography of suffering, with its sexualized pleasure-pain, Catholicizes austere American Protestantism. Imagistically, her poetry is late-phase Renaissance. Metaphysical poetry is an anti-Puritan Baroque style, Italian in its passion and theatricality. Dickinson's lurid metaphors are surprise renovations, polychrome statues and stained-glass windows added to a white New England church.

Dickinson favors emblematic postures where she holds some weapon. Rehashing "a Withdrawn Delight / Affords a Bliss like Murder— / Omnipotent—Acute." Hence "We will not drop the Dirk / Because We love the Wound / The Dirk Commemorate" (379). The dirk must be a letter, or the memory of a letter, and the withdrawn delight its cancellation of a longed-for visit. Dagger in hand, the poet contemplates the stigmata of her private cult. To "love the Wound" in solitude is patently autoerotic. The tone is French Decadent: Baudelaire too says, "I am the wound and the knife!" And what of murder as "bliss"? Dickinson is in her Sadean phase, a blood-red moon of sexual will.

The poet's heart is vulnerable to sudden attack by projectiles other than arrows. She calls springtime birdsong both sad and sweet because it reminds us of the dead: "An ear can break a human heart / As quickly as a spear, / We wish the ear had not a heart / So dangerously near" (1764). Wham! Chop! Faster than a speeding spear, the Dickinson ear demolishes a hapless heart, which is like a piece of liver hewn by the cook's cleaver. Ear and heart, spotlit, secede from the body and turn on each other. Normally passive and receptive, the ear becomes active and aggressive. Like Samson's jawbone, Dickinson's feisty ear is among history's more exotic arms of war. One pictures battalions marching on each other, brandishing ears rather than spears.

That Dickinson does imagine the heart as an extracted organ quivering on a flat surface is proved by this stanza, which she attached to a gift of fruit:

My Heart upon a little Plate
Her Palate to delight
A Berry or a Bun, would be,
Might it an Apricot!

[1027]

Wearing her heart on her sleeve would be too conventional for our poet, who slaps it on a fruit dish and sends it down the street like a phone-order pizza. Spenser again: Dickinson is remembering Amoret's heart laid in a silver basin. Obviously, the female friend honored with the poet's crimson gift is expected to nibble on it, like a chocolate heart on Valentine's Day. More Catholic iconography: Dickinson is like St. Philip Neri holding his flaming heart in his hand or St. Lucy offering us her eyeballs on a silver platter (a real statue in my baptismal church).

Dickinson indulges her taste for saintly epiphany in clever allegories that slip by the unwary reader. For example, she disdains pearls and jewels since "the Emperor / With Rubies pelteth me" (466). This is one of her tricky bride of Christ poems: the emperor is the deity whose

motives are always suspect. The rubies pelting the speaker are not rich gifts but stones making her *bleed*. She is spotted with her own wounds, a pox or king's evil by which she is made royal. The emperor is Poe's Red Death. The jewels are drops of blood, which she elsewhere forces a friend to number like rosary beads ("But *He* must count the drops—*himself*"; 663). She is Danae whom God showers with her own blood and Mary Magdalene at whom he casts the first stone. Dickinson, *nouveau pauvre*, is an ostentatious flaunter of injuries. She says of sunset's red light, "I felt martial stirrings / Who once the Cockade wore" (152). The rosette of the Napoleonic veteran becomes a bandage with a bloodstain seeping through (cf. "The Soul has Bandaged moments"; 512). Dickinson's wounds and scars are military medals of honor, the price and prize of life experience.

Back to our catalog of Sadean abuses of the body. We saw brains and lungs undergoing rough treatment at Dickinson's hands, and this led to a list of impalements and ruptures. Eyes are next. I cited "They took away our Eyes," which means two persons have been forcibly separated and are now invisible to each other. But in Dickinson's eccentric dramaturgy, the authorities come knocking, seize the eyes, and carry them away, like a finance company repossessing a refrigerator. This is clear in a poem about the domestic aftermath of death, "When eyes . . . are wrenched / By Decalogues away" (485). Here the eyes may have put up a struggle, and death has had to yank them out like teeth. Like the dislocated brain, this may be another surreal joint, wrenched like an elbow. The haste with which the eyes are snatched recalls Perseus robbing the Graiai. The thief is God, author of the Ten Commandments, who decrees death as man's fate. As Dickinson puts it, however, the Decalogue seems greedy on its own behalf. Moses' tablets snap shut on the eyes like a mousetrap.

A frequent Dickinson formula is eyes being "put out," as in "Before I got my eye put out / I liked as well to see" (327). This may refer to her own vision problems or her self-sequestration in her second-floor bedroom. But it has an innuendo of criminal mischief, as if she has had her eye stomped out, like Gloucester in *Lear*. Possibly, she has been blinded by looking too long on the evil sun of life's mysteries. "I cannot live with You" has a witty variation of the trope: "Nor could I rise with You / Because Your Face / Would put out Jesus'" (640). Profane conquers sacred love, annulling hope of resurrection. The beloved's face is a blazing moon eclipsing the sun, putting out the holy eye of heaven. There is inferred violence in this blotting out of one face by another. We practically hear the concussion of a rubber stamp marked vom! That

God's face is in permanent eclipse for Dickinson is confirmed by her remark about her family: "They are religious—except me—and address an Eclipse, every morning—whom they call their 'Father.'"4

In "Renunciation is a piercing Virtue," the "putting out of Eyes" again refers to the separation of two people, here by the poet's choice (745). Renunciation is piercing because it is a self-blinding, like Oedipus with the golden brooches. The freedom with which Dickinson waves sharp instruments about the face and body leads to this extraordinary metaphor about a neighbor's death: "like a Skater's Brook / The busy eyes congealed" (519). The expiring eyes congeal, like pudding or bacon fat in the frying pan, because they literally glaze over (cf. "The Eyes glaze once—and that is Death"; "Should the glee glaze / In Death's stiff stare"; 241, 338). The skaters are the movement of life, quickness in the Renaissance sense. They are darting thoughts, slowing and stopping. We feel the poignancy of the poet's self-created distance and isolation, as in the great "Because I could not stop for Death," where the speaker sees children playing in a schoolyard (712). The point of view is telescopic: a boisterous scene is elegiacally washed in sepia. Whatever the higher levels of the brook metaphor, we must notice how Dickinson boldly juxtaposes eyes and skates. Flashing blades zip over the cornea, scoring it with arabesques.

A poem describes death as "when the Film had stitched your eyes" (414). Here Dickinson inflicts injury on lids rather than eyes. The lids are sewn together, basted like a hem. The "film" comes from a sinister Mr. Sandman, who glues sleepers' lashes together. Death, says Dickinson elsewhere, "only nails the eyes" (561). The lids are tacked like a carpet or nailed like a shutter or coffin lid, surely nicking the eyes in the process. Another alarming example: "I've seen a Dying Eye / Run round and round a Room . . . And then obscure with Fog / And then be soldered down" (547). Like the detachable brain, the eye takes off on its own, charging around the room like a caged animal. It is captured and secured by being soldered down, like a loose cannon. Dickinson means dead eyes will never open again, but the metaphor makes us see a soldering iron applied to an eye, something like Odysseus blinding Cyclops with a red-hot stake. The dying eye may be desperately searching for God in the room. Ironically, therefore, compassionate Jesus appears with a soldering iron in his hand, since it is either he or death acting for him who executes this brutal operation (cf. 1123).

Soldering appears in another corpse poem: "How many times these low feet staggered / Only the soldered mouth can tell— / Try—can you stir the awful rivet— / Try—can you lift the hasps of steel!" (187). Here

it is lips melded together, as dreadful a vision for a poet as Christabel's muteness. Dickinson's death has gotten carried away with enthusiasm and added on lock after lock, like a stage magician or bank manager sealing the vault. After soldering, he drives a rivet through the lips and lays on steel hasps like a gag. Mordantly, Dickinson urges the reader to test these fetters, and one imagines oneself trying to pry open the corpse's mouth like a hungry diner struggling with a tin can. As with the lidded head, the skull is a manufactured object, a constructivist sculpture of metal and nails, like Frankenstein's monster.

Dickinson relishes blood and is lavish with her red palette. "Sang from the Heart, Sire, / Dipped my Beak in it, / If the Tune drip too much / Have a tint too Red / Pardon the Cochineal— / Suffer the Vermilion—" (1059). The poet is a self-maiming pelican, tearing clots of flesh from her breast to feed her song, whose notes and bars float through the air in a red trail, a bloody skywriting. Elsewhere she taps the heart again, like a cask of burgundy: "The Mind lives on the Heart / Like any Parasite— / If that is full of Meat / The Mind is fat" (1355). The mind suckling on the nutlike heart is a barnacle or verminous borer, like canine heartworm. The hungry mind becomes Donne's bedroom flea, with Dickinson taking the parts of both male and female.

Dickinson's world is crowded with deaths, which she collects for her poetic archives. There are accidents and suicides: "[He] Caressed a Trigger absently / And wandered out of Life" (1062). There are executions of invented characters: "Grief is Tongueless—before He'll tell— / Burn Him in the Public Square" (793). There is even an elegy for rodents caught in traps: "A Rat surrendered here / A brief career of Cheer / And Fraud and Fear" (1340). But Dickinson gets her best black comedy from the graveyard: "No Passenger was known to flee / That lodged a night in memory— / That wily subterranean Inn / Contrives that none go out again" (1406). This is like the commercial for Black Flag Roach Motel, a little box tiled with insecticide glue: "Bugs check in, but they don't check out!" The Procrustean host of the subterranean inn is probably a Christ of mixed motives, avenging the No Vacancy of his infancy by keeping a perpetual open house with one-way doors.

Much of Dickinson's sadism comes from her sardonic speech, a rustic bluntness about birth and death. Victorian euphemism was a bourgeois phenomenon, and Dickinson as much as Baudelaire is anti-bourgeois. Here is a complete poem:

A face devoid of love or grace,
A hateful, hard, successful face,

A face with which a stone
 Would feel as thoroughly at ease
 As were they old acquaintances—
 First time together thrown. [1711]

No charity here. Face and stone are "thrown" or brought together by felonious assault. The successful potentate is a social Goliath struck in the brow by our obscure David, a persona Dickinson assumes elsewhere (540). Note the satiric surrealism: the flinty face is also thrown, sailing off to collide with the stone, as in a lawn game of bowls. Dickinson shares many images and moods with Lewis Carroll, another celibate fantasist whose principal creative years, the 1860s, were the same. This poem is like Carroll's croquet match, with the ball whomped by the head of a human flamingo.

Dickinson is a pioneer among women writers in renouncing genteel good manners. She cultivates knavish insolence. The dying once went to "God's Right Hand": "That Hand is amputated now / And God cannot be found" (1551). Off with His hand, commands Amherst's Queen of Hearts. The shocking amputation of God's hand symbolizes the suddenness of the modern crisis of faith. God has vanished and left his severed hand behind, like Constantine's colossal fragment in the Capitoline courtyard, a favorite theme of eighteenth-century prints. All that remains of God is the dead hand of the law, devoid of moral substance. His hand appears elsewhere: "Of Heaven above the firmest proof / We fundamental know / Except for its marauding Hand / It had been Heaven below" (1205). Death-decreeing God is like Scylla on her cliff, snatching victims from below. He is a bandit or pillager, a Scourge of Men. By Decadent partition, the "marauding Hand" is another free agent, a spidery beast with five fingers. Doctor Dickinson may have to amputate because of gangrene: God suffers from rotting obsolescence. But more likely she is judge and he is thief. She calls him a "Burglar" or "Mighty Merchant" and accuses him of fraud: "'Heavenly Father' . . . / We apologize to thee / For thine own Duplicity" (49, 621, 1461). Thus Emily Dickinson, with her love of gore, drags God to the chopping block, hacking off his hand in one of the most daringly dissonant images in nineteenth-century poetry.

Dickinson's humor is jarringly curt. A poem begins: "Split the Lark—and You'll find the Music" (861). This means, take an ax to a songbird! She splits the lark like a log or peach. It is the goose who laid the golden egg carved for a Sadean banquet. She archly denies her vocation: "Nor would I be a Poet. . . . What would the Dower be, / Had I the Art to stun

myself / With Bolts of Melody!" (505). One must laugh. Like Ben Franklin flying his kite in a thunderstorm, there's Emily Dickinson sitting in the yard, hitting herself in the head with lightning bolts. Zeus needs Hephaestus' hammerblow to give birth to Athena, but Dickinson needs no one. "Dower" suggests, as R. P. Blackmur observes, that the poet "marries herself."⁵ Therefore these flashes of lightning are the autoerotic strokes of her conjugal duty. Her creative ecstasy is not afflatus but anvil chorus. If the Muses were to give this poet a heraldic crest, it would be an arm and hammer, as on a box of baking soda. Violence is her love song and lullaby.

Dickinson's rough speech can be impenetrable. She says of wintry thoughts, "Go manacle your icicle / Against your Tropic Bride" (1756). Heidi Jon Schmidt told me this sounds like a street insult, like "Up your nose with a rubber hose!" Approaching pornographic invective, it is an anti-Keatsian seasonal ode: winter embraces summer, hoary Hades capturing Persephone. The manacle (Blake's word) recalls Hephaestus' chain net, thrown over adulterous Ares and Aphrodite, but it has a dark Gothic ring. The icicle, probably the reader's body, resembles the cold phantom penis of witch-cult. I wonder if, in its unwieldy grossness, it was inspired by those dangerous two-story icicles that dangled from rural roofs in pre-insulation days. Dickinson's perverse metaphor has multiple suggestions of lust, force, bondage, and impotence. The icicle could be a phallic sword strapped to and Amazonizing the tropic bride. Either it gives her frostbite, or she melts it. The metaphor ends in a release of tension, a urinary *letting go*, a sudden warm drenching.

Dickinson has a zeal for indelicacy. She creates primitivistic pictorial effects, as in this description of a sunset: "Whole Gulfs of Red, and Fleets of Red / And Crews of solid Blood" (658). It is unusual, to say the least, to make the western sky a sea of coagulated blood. Dickinson's Late Romantic sunset is a Turner repainted by Delacroix. Here is her pleasant paean to a fall day:

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

Great Globules—in the Alleys—
 And Oh, the Shower of Stain—
 When Winds—upset the Basin—
 And spill the Scarlet Rain—

It sprinkles Bonnets—far below—
 It gathers ruddy Pools—
 Then—eddies like a Rose—away—
 Upon Vermilion Wheels— [656]

A mass murder seems to have been committed in Amherst. The red streams and pools recall the curse upon Pharaoh, when the waters turned to blood. Dickinson may be showing Jehovah's rape-murder of pagan mother nature. Sadean reality triumphs over Wordsworth's illusions. The artery and vein decking this grisly bespattered landscape belong to Blake's Cosmic Man, dismembered in an orgy of sparagmos. Tasty morsels. Who else but Dickinson could think of autumn leaves as blood clots, "Great Globules in the Alleys"? I would reject a menstrual reading of these images. We're dealing with a woman who spent a lot of time with the help in the kitchen, so if any personal experience backs this poem, it's probably the decapitation and evisceration of chickens!

Her letters too display Dickinson's witty flouting of decorum. She writes her cousins, "No one has called so far, but one old lady to look at a house. I directed her to the cemetery to spare expense of moving." The tone is pure Vincent Price, a self-satirizing ghoulishness. It comes early to Dickinson, for she is barely fifteen when she remarks in a letter, "I have just seen a funeral procession go by of a negro baby, so if my ideas are rather dark you need not marvel." To another friend, a newspaper editor, she says: "Who writes those funny accidents, where railroads meet each other unexpectedly, and gentlemen in factories get their heads cut off quite informally? The author, too, relates them in such a sprightly way, that they are quite attractive. Vinnie was disappointed tonight, that there were not more accidents—I read the news aloud, while Vinnie was sewing."⁶ The two sisters are Fates chuckling over earthly fatalities. Vinnie is like Madame Defarge knitting at the guillotine.

Dickinson's sense of vocation is full of the harrowing and cataclysmic. She tells her mentor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize—my little Force explodes—and leaves me bare and charred." Anarchy, revolution, powder magazines blown sky-high. Dickinson is at war with her own metric. "Bare and charred," she is like a stand of Wordsworthian trees hit by Sadean forest fire. At his first visit, she told Higginson: "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way."⁷ Poetry is assault and battery on

the body. Shamanistic vision demands physical trauma. Her topless head is like an exploding boiler or a bottle of fermenting cider blowing its cap. Poetry is a kind of scalping, the pastime of ignoble savages (cf. 315). In the Arctic tropics of art, the poet's head is a coconut clipped by a machete.

Another vivid portrait of the artist occurs in Dickinson's letter to her cousins: "I noticed that Robert Browning had made another poem, and was astonished—till I remembered that I, myself, in my smaller way, sang off charnel steps." Elizabeth Barrett Browning had died three years earlier. Claiming surprise at Browning's resumption of his work, Dickinson says she too writes in the face of constant grief and loss. But notice how she depicts herself in a garish tableau of late-Renaissance theatricality, like a Bernini papal tomb: we see her standing and singing on the steps of a charnel house, a depository of corpses. This is a version of whistling past a graveyard (she told Higginson, "I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground—because I am afraid").⁸ But she is posing on the steps like a Dickens waif holding out her tin cup. Behind the metaphor may be *Hamlet's* singing gravedigger or, I suspect, George Herbert's charming "Church-monuments," where the poet sends his body to school in a chapel of dusty tombs. Thus we should see Dickinson as a tiny scholar emerging from her ghastly lessons and bursting into song! It's like a *New Yorker* cartoon, a portly man with a newspaper turning away from the window to inform his wife, "Oh, it's just Emily Dickinson singing on the steps of her charnel house."

Dickinson's metaphors, based on the Metaphysical conceit, resemble James's in their Decadent overliteralization. But his metaphors are sporadic and delusive, while hers are on the epic scale and mean business. I said Swinburne's alliterations and incantatory rhythms are primitivizing devices, returning poetry to its origins in religious ritual. In Dickinson, it is not rhythm but image that is regressive. She uses metaphors more literally than anyone else in major literature. Her lurid concretization is her mode of Late Romantic materiality, that contraction from idea to thing we have followed through French and English Decadence. In her poetry, things become persons and persons things, and all press physically on each other in nature's brutal absolutism.

Thus far we have established Dickinson's unrecognized appetite for murder and mayhem, her sweet tooth for sadomasochistic horror. Her first posthumous reputation was based on her Wordsworthian roulades, her flights of fancy involving birds, butterflies, and beggar lads. Richard Chase declares, "No great poet has written so much bad

verse as Emily Dickinson." He blames "the Victorian cult of 'little women'" for the fact that "two thirds of her work" is seriously flawed: "Her coy and oddly childish poems of nature and female friendship are products of a time when one of the careers open to women was perpetual childhood."⁹ Dickinson's sentimental feminine poems remain neglected by embarrassed scholars. I would maintain, however, that her poetry is a closed system of sexual reference and that the mawkish poems are designed to dovetail with those of violence and suffering.

It is easy to misread the many lyrics affecting complacent Christian faith. Sing-song rhythms and neat rhymes are always spurious in Dickinson, the first modernist master of syncopation and atonality. Metric regularity means naive credulity in the speaker (cf. 193). The mood may be cheerful and upbeat, as in "Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord, / Then, I am ready to go!" (279). But the bride happily surrendering herself to celestial marriage is usually in for an unpleasant surprise. Death, not a Redeemer, waits at the top of the stairway to heaven. Dickinson is obsessed with *termination*, her Decadent variation on Christian apocalypse. In "Our journey had advanced," a rare instance of the female mind turned toward cosmology, the speaker gazing at New Jerusalem sees "God—at every Gate." Ominously proliferating like Hindu avatars, God is not welcoming humanity but blocking the way to eternal life (615). This is allegorical repletion, the filling up of fictive space with a single identity in different forms, a technique I found in Leonardo, Rossetti, and Emily Brontë.

Dickinson's chirpy newlyweds exit from their poems under suspicious circumstances: "I'm 'Wife'! Stop there!" (199). To keep abreast of Dickinson, like Alice running with the Red Queen, the reader must know where the bodies are buried. The speaker is under arrest; heaven is stasis, a permafrost of nonbeing. The bride poems are clever hoaxes that turn princesses into pumpkins, mere chunks of debris. Corpses drop into the grave with a thud. A frequent finale is a slow fade, the voice fumbling for words, as consciousness gutters out.

These poems require patient detective work, for they are intricate with sophisticated puns. Dickinson was a devoted student of her Webster's dictionary. Her wordplay is Alexandrian bookwork, Decadent erudition. But not all her sentimental poems contain hidden ironies. The ones I am most concerned with are just what they seem to be—pert, peppy trifles. What meaning did such poems have to so great and commanding a poet? She told Higginson, "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse—it does not mean—me—but a supposed person."¹⁰ Dickinson's many voices are sexual personae. They fall into

her two major modes, the Sadean and Wordsworthian. The sentimental poems are feminine personae, representing a primary response to nature, glad and trusting.

Dickinson's nature has two faces, savage and serene. Lightning sears saplings; volcanos eat villages for breakfast (314, 175). Nature's lips are "hissing Corals" that open and shut, as "Cities ooze away" (601). The volcano steams with the sultry sibilants of Milton's hell. Civilization liquefies at nature's touch. Erupting Etna "shows her Garnet Tooth": pirate nature, red-fanged, has a sinister crooked smile (1146). Sadean nature suffuses Dickinson's poetry in the violent metaphors. Her sentimental and sadistic personae constitute a seasonal allegory. The feminine voices are the vernal phase: they are *the pretty*, a meadow of flora and fauna, sunny and placid. The sadomasochistic poems are *the tectonic*, the slow brute contortions of the frigid mineral world. It is botany versus geology, spring destroyed by winter.

The sentimental poems continue a theme we saw in Spenser and Blake: femininity as pockets of undefended consciousness in nature. These are Dickinson's versions of Blake's chimney-sweep poems, where the poet incarnates himself without satire in a simpler consciousness. As in Spenser, femininity brings its opposite into existence, in a rush of voracity. Dickinson's brides are always rape victims, duped by the trickster lover, death. Early in this book, I traced the ancient evolution from femaleness to femininity, which I defended as an artifice of high culture. Dickinson performs a stunning operation on these terms. She accepts femininity but denies femaleness, sweeping it out of her cosmos. Her flowering world is without fructification, Keatsian pregnancies. In the 1,775 surviving poems, I find only one lush Keatsian moment, in "It will be Summer—eventually": "The Lilacs—bending many a year— / Will sway with purple load" (342). There are no other swelling images of sensual female weight and mass. Even this one is a future projection, not a present reality. The poet has "an Acorn's Breast"—hard and nubby (296). Nature's processes are erotic but not fertile. Stunting and mutilation are the rule.

We saw that because there was no American nature-mother, Romantic writers had to invent her. When dealing with a major woman artist, we must reverse our terms. One reason Dickinson so surpasses Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom she admired, is her disturbance of sexual identification. She remarked to Higginson, while her mother was still alive: "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled."¹¹ Male Romantic genius crosses the line of gender to create, but his opposite, already female, must divide

mind from body to embrace the Muse. Dickinson, following Blake, says to her mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"

Chase sees a "rococo style" in Dickinson.¹² Rococo perfectly describes her feminine personae of Wordsworthian or Emersonian credulity toward nature. I find a second representational style, used in her sadistic poems of freezing, fracture, and storm and in her great vaulting visions of mountains, planets, and stars: *monumentality*. "Ah, Teneriffe!" she hails a volcanic peak, "Clad in your Mail of ices— / Thigh of Granite—and thew of Steel" (666). I argued that monumentality, as in Egyptian and Assyrian art, is masculinizing and that gigantism in a female artist, as in Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair*, is a technique of self-desexing. The titanic Dickinson is a disciple of Blake, the disciple of Michelangelo, who thus indirectly transmits his style from the late Italian Renaissance to late Puritan America. Feminine Dickinson follows Blake's *Songs of Innocence*; masculine Dickinson follows Blake's "The Tyger" and the clashing long poems. Her poems of colossal monumentality are the theater of her Brontëan swerve from gender, her alienation from the female body.

Dickinson's sadomasochistic metaphors are a technique of self-hermaphroditization, for as externalizations of internal events, they are an emptying out of female internality. Sexual ambiguities abound in her poetry and letters. She calls herself boy, man, bachelor, brother, uncle. "When I was a Boy," she likes to say.¹³ She may be imitating Shakespeare's transvestite comedies: boyhood would correspond to Rosalind's androgynous adolescence. Dickinson's quirky boy-self signifies an early freedom from socialization, which she is able to evade as an adult only by lock-up in her house and room. "When I was a Boy" could also mean "before I married my Muse." She signs six letters to Higginson with the proud manly "Dickinson," breaking a lingering gender convention. Until twenty years ago, it was still ungallant to refer to a woman writer simply by her last name.

If "boy" is the past, Dickinson's other transsexual titles are the future. Her religious poems use a bizarre terminology of royal promotion: "I'm Czar—I'm 'Woman' now" (199). For Christ's bride, death is spiritual menarche; but speech falters, thought is sluggish, and heaven is a blur. The male honorific signifies the absolute power of immortality. Czar (derived from Caesar) applies only to males. Therefore to be czar and woman simultaneously is a chimera of gender. The source might be Shakespearean: the speaker is Caesar and Cleopatra. Or Byronic: Sardanapalus is the "she-king" and Semiramis the "man-queen."

Dickinson's male ranks include prince, duke, and emperor.¹⁴ She

applies her favorite title, earl, to God or death (ironically interchangeable). For example, a formally dressed corpse is "Riding to meet the Earl" (665). Her Webster's says, "Earl is now a mere title, unconnected with territorial jurisdiction."¹⁵ So this is one of the poet's jokes at the expense of a diminished God. Sometimes she awards earldom to herself: "When I'm Earl / Won't you wish you'd spoken / To that dull Girl?" She will wear an ermine gown, with imperial eagles on her belt and buckles (704, 452). She progresses from girl to earl like Alice from pawn to queen. Her projected sex change is like a fancy French royal portrait. This flirtatious and swashbuckling poem is addressed to a "Sweet" who just might be another woman, which would explain the satisfactions of future maleness.

Dickinson says of a flower: "I had rather wear her grace / Than an Earl's distinguished face— / I had rather dwell like her / Than be 'Duke of Exeter'" (138). Choosing nature over society, earth over heaven, she expresses these oppositions in sexual polarities. She could "wear" an earl's face but chooses not to. The rejected face is like an ancestor's mask hung on a hat rack by the door. She elsewhere uses the place name Exeter for heaven or the murky afterlife (373). Hence the Duke of Exeter is probably God—that is, the Exiter, dragging men off the world stage with his shepherd's crook. One of her letters, echoing Achilles in Hades, again projects the option of a future sex change: "I had rather *be* loved than to be called a king in earth, or a lord in Heaven."¹⁶

The poet dons her earl's face in a bridal poem opening with a boudoir flurry: she wears trinkets, cashmere, "Raiment of Pompadour"; servants' fingers dress her hair "as Feudal Ladies wore." She has "Skill—to hold my Brow like an Earl" (473). The earl's brow is the coldness of her new corpselike state. We are left with the peculiar picture of a male face peering out from a bridal veil—a feature, we saw, of ancient fertility rites. This heroine is another divine bride left at the altar. The road to the church in Amherst is full of potholes. "I'm saying every day / 'If I should be a Queen, tomorrow' . . . If it be, I wake a Bourbon" (373). Ominous intimations of immortality: to wake a Bourbon means, in Dickinson lingo, to ascend the guillotine.

Dickinson's royal titles are honorary degrees of extremity, marking advance into the afterlife. They are hermaphroditic because transcendental. Death makes woman an earl in the same way impersonality makes her an androgyne, by masculinizing her into abstraction. In her transsexual leaps into eternity, Dickinson is like Swinburne's Sappho, who turns male at death by sloughing off her passive female body. In some poems, the sex scheme of spiritual evolution is boy/woman/man,

conforming to Blake's traditional pattern innocence/experience/ redeemed innocence. Woman is merely the social mask of adult life.

Dickinson's stark juxtapositions of personae—czar/woman, earl/girl—are a kind of sexual collage. She enjoys disconcerting the reader with freakish conjunctions. In a poem about neglecting her garden, she says, "My Cactus—splits her Beard / To show her throat" (339). Why *her*? Why not its or his? She provocatively sexualizes the cactus to make it a bearded lady, a circus hermaphrodite. She automatically uses language of gender to suggest the visual and tactile contrast between cactus spines and fleshy core, exposed by the cracked stalk. Dickinson's female cactus is grossly sensual, a vulval arroyo, a swatch of sleekness in a trough of nettles. It pleases the poet, luxuriating in solitude, to conjure up androgynes unknown to man. Note again the epiphanic style: the cactus parting her beard to show her throat is like Jesus or Mary pointing to their burning, pierced hearts or like St. Francis displaying his stigmata. This eroticized religious exhibitionism belongs to the Italian and Spanish Baroque, not to American Protestantism.

Dickinson can sexualize any situation, even the picking of a flower:

So bashful when I spied her!
 So pretty—so ashamed!
 So hidden in her leaflets
 Lest anybody find—
 So breathless till I passed her—
 So helpless when I turned
 And bore her struggling, blushing,
 Her simple haunts beyond!

[91]

The poem, apparently light and frothy, is perverse psychodrama. Dickinson assumes the persona of male raptor, Hades bearing down on Persephone in the meadow. She is a giant among pygmies. As in her poem about the dying balloon, a delectable eroticism is produced by feminine flutterings of vulnerability and resistance—"bashful," "ashamed," "hidden," "breathless," "helpless," "struggling," "blushing." Even Dickinson's most innocuous poems stir with dark undercurrents.

The most blatant of Dickinson's masculine self-portraits is "My Life had stood a Loaded Gun," where she is a totem of phallic force (754). The "Owner" or "Master" is only *he*, a pronoun. She is the real power, without which he cannot act. Her consciousness engulfs his, for he sleeps while she watches—as voyeuristic as Whitman in *The*

Sleepers. I find multiple sources for the poem. The woman-as-gun is like Aaron's rod turned serpent: Aaron similarly acts for Moses and at his bidding. Second, she is a modern Excalibur, the magic sword given Arthur by the Lady of the Lake. Third, she is Spenser's Talus, Artegall's robot squire, "the iron man" (*F.Q.* V.vi.16). Fourth, as her master's "Eye" and "Thumb," that is, his sight and hands, she reenacts the sadomasochistic romance of Charlotte Brontë, one of Dickinson's favorite writers: the woman-as-gun is spunky Jane Eyre finally ruling Rochester, blinded and maimed, at novel's end.

The executioner-gun is the inanimate point of contact between man and nature. Owner and Amazonian gun pursue a doe, Belpheobe's prey in *The Faerie Queene*. When the gun speaks, the mountains "reply": she is nature's Sadean voice. We have seen the "smile" of her "Vesuvian face" before, in Etna's evil garnet tooth. Woman-as-gun is predatory and annihilating: "None stir the second time / On whom I lay a Yellow Eye / Or an emphatic Thumb." To see is to slay. She has Petrarchan looks that kill. The yellow eye is the gun's smoky flame, a savage tiger's eye. Laying an eye on is a familiar locution (for example, "I've never laid eyes on him"); here it projects a target circle onto the victim, pierced by the gun's bullet-eye. The emphatic thumb is the master's trigger finger metamorphosed into sound. It is also her thumb, a crushing hammer. The metaphor reminds me of my Vermont landlord, a carpenter, nonchalantly grinding out live wasps on a windowpane with his thumb. Hence I wonder whether the eye and thumb come from Dickinson's actual observation of artisans at work, especially masons. The emphatic thumb is, finally, the thumbs down in life's bloody arena.

This poem is one of Romanticism's great transsexual self-transformations. Dickinson's self-projection into the gun is exactly like Coleridge's into ravished Christabel: the poet is reaching for the remotest extreme of sex experience. The vampire who violates Christabel symbolizes anti-Wordsworthian daemonic nature. "My Life had stood a Loaded Gun" is another Romantic vampire poem. The gun with "the power to kill, / Without the power to die" is the vampire who paralyzes by eye-contact. She is mechanical, a bride of metal who enters but cannot be entered. Unlike Jane Eyre, she does not share her master's pillow, because she is barren. The loaded gun is Dickinson as denatured vampire, a masculine maker of sadistic poetic speech. She is another androgyne as nineteenth-century manufactured object.

I view as a companion piece to this a fantastic poem where Dickinson switches sexual point of view: "In Winter in my Room / I came upon a Worm / Pink, lank and warm." She ties the worm with a string but

returns to find it grown into a hissing snake: "He fathomed me— / Then to a Rhythm *Slim* / Secreted in his Form / As Patterns swim / Projected him." She flees to a distant town to write, "This was a dream" (1670). Eden's serpent as con man and shaker of faith? I see only sexual theater: Any eely creature that manages to blow itself up from "Pink, lank and warm" to a long wiener doing the hula tends to seize the attention of us moderns. After Freud, this poem would be unwritable, except by a child or psychotic. Its unself-conscious clarity is astounding.

The gun and worm poems are reverse images of each other. Aaron's serpent now refuses to resume its original shape. The menacing worm is the gun as not-self. In the first poem, the poet fuses with her masculine half; in the second, she is alienated from it. Here she is in her feminine persona, which perceives only Wordsworthian nature. The snake is unbearable because it is chthonian nature's abrogation of beauty, dignity, and hope. It is a symbol of the Sadean nature force that the poet herself spewed out upon the doe in the gun poem. The worm poem takes place in winter because nature is devastated. Remember the autumn poem drenched in crimson gore: autumn marks the year's massacre of creatures, Dickinson's "Green People" (314).

Other poems show the snake's meaning as a nature symbol for Dickinson. The wily snake lives in "the swamp" (1740). "A narrow Fellow in the Grass," he likes "a Boggy Acre; / A Floor too cool for Corn." The poet never meets him "Without a tighter breathing / And Zero at the Bone" (986). Swamp and bog are the chthonian swamp that antedates agriculture. The popular myth that snakes are slimy, when they are smooth and dry, contains an imaginative truth. The snake bears the invisible slime of the swamp of human origins. Speaking of the widespread "horror of reptiles," G. Wilson Knight claims we would prefer death by tiger to death by boa constrictor or octopus: "From such cold life we have risen, and the evolutionary thrust has a corresponding backward disgust. . . . And since we do not know what to make of tentacles mindlessly groping and distrust the clammy sea-moistures of the body, we fear especially our sex-organs with multiform inhibitions, seeing in them shameful serpentine and salty relations. And yet this fear is one with a sort of fascination."¹⁷ Dickinson's snake poems are ritual encounters with the primitive and uncanny. She feels zero at the bone—a phallically penetrating cold—because the archaic snake nullifies evolution. Sadean nature's brute cycle swallows up individual beings and smashes the things made by man's mind and hand.

How did the worm poem, with its nery performance of erection and ejaculation, come to a poet whom Higginson described as "that virgin

recluse?"¹⁸ Dickinson had an older brother, Austin, whose adultery has recently come to light. I suspect, however, that the penile model, common in rural Amherst, may have been a stallion. The string with which the poet binds the worm (like tying a string round one's finger) is a Wordsworthian leash or halter, unequal to the task, for the chthonian can burst any human chain.

In a poem with the same sexual pattern, "I started Early—Took my Dog," a sociable shoreline scene turns into a rape, as the sea assaults the incautious tourist. He rises up her apron and bodice and threatens to eat her. She flees; he follows: "I felt His Silver Heel / Upon my Ankle— Then my Shoes / Would overflow with Pearl" (520). The glutted vaginal shoe is a conceptual receptacle, moral and literary. It is first an inherited, internalized sexual restraint (cf. 340). The shoe is a male gift, not a prince's glass slipper but a paternal tyrant's iron boot. The image recurs in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," where the Nazi father is a "black shoe" jailing the slug-white adult daughter. Second, the sea overflows Dickinson's "simple Shoe" because the revelation of nature's coarse reality is always a rape of sentimental illusions. In the worm and sea poems, the speaker flees to a town for safety. An ironic refutation of Wordsworth: civilization, into which the poet normally did not venture, is our only defense against nature.

Snakes have suppleness, a quality Dickinson mistrusts. She says, for example, "Death is the supple Suitor / That wins at last" (1445). Her males or male surrogates have a facility of movement or unctuous self-assurance, corresponding to men's complacent ease in their bodies in Woolf novels. In mythology, men are paralyzed by Medusan females, symbols of nature. In Dickinson, women are paralyzed by male hierarchs of heaven and earth. The worm epiphany is shocking because it is an invasion of the room of one's own, for Dickinson as for Woolf a sacred ideal, a temenos of the inner self. I would reject a reading of the worm poem that reduced it to a New England spinster's fear of sex. The error would be in dissociating the poet from the snake, when in fact it is her self-severed member. She has dropped it by autotomy, like the tail or claw of a fleeing lizard, lobster, or starfish. I see the scene as a surrealist film, like *Un Chien andalou*. The poet is like a man who drops his umbrella and suddenly finds himself in female clothes. He turns around to discover the umbrella changed into a condor, staring at him malevolently. In other words, the poet in the privacy of her room momentarily lays aside her loaded gun, her male persona. But when she returns, it is puffed and distended like Lucille Ball's bread dough ballooning out of the kitchen.

The snake is a fantasy of power escaping Dickinson's control. It is the poet's *swelling ambition*, which menaces the feminine persona by which she passes unseen through society. Why does it take reptilian form? Everyone thinks of the serpent of Genesis. But a snake in a poet's chamber could be Delphi's resident python, a symbol of prophecy. The serpent's schooling has been somewhat spotty, so when our sibylline poet is in her feminine phase, an oracle reigning on a trivet rather than a tripod, discipline is difficult. Second, woman and snake in a second-story chamber recall Shakespeare's Cleopatra and her phallic asps—with one asp driving the queen out of her monument into the streets of Alexandria. Third is the snake coiled round the dove's body in *Christabel*, a sleeping poet's vision of the maiden ensnared in her bedchamber by the vampire. In the gun poem, Dickinson is the vampire hunting female prey. In the worm poem, she switches roles and is the feminine dove resisting the vampire-serpent's advances. She saves herself only by dashing out of the house and skipping town. Fourth is the mysterious meeting in the tower of Byron's Manfred with his sister or female double. This is an incandescent moment in Romanticism, one of whose farflung influences, we saw, is Dorian Gray's fatal encounter with his double in the locked room at the top of the stairs.

Dickinson's worm poem is a Romantic confrontation of doubles. The snake is a materialization of her own phallic potency, her Jungian *animus* or repressed masculine half. Jung says, "Psychologically, demons are interferences from the unconscious."¹⁹ Dickinson's snake is both demonic and daemonic. Incest in Byron, I said, may reflect a desire to copulate with the self in sexually transmuted form. In her Byronic tower, Dickinson as Wordsworthian naif refuses sexual relations with her chthonian double. But in this meeting of moral and sexual antitheses, the sadistic principal triumphs, driving its opponent from the field. The snake has intelligence ("He fathomed me," mentally and sexually) and the power of poetry ("Rhythm," "Form," "Patterns"). He is both a Sadean speaker and the *idea* of a Sadean poem. The snake is what Dickinson is and what she has made. But he is out of control, for Wordsworth can never put down a Coleridgean sedition. The snake is an archaic apparition disestablishing its mistress' social persona and filling the bourgeois home with its Delphic fumes.

The first poem has a further sexual ambiguity. The gun has "stood in Corners," dormant, until put to use by her master. Her masculine power is greater than his, but for it to take effect, he must drag her about and aim her. The gun is potent yet dependent. Aquinas

says, "A body is composed of potentiality and act; and therefore it is both active and passive."²⁰ The loaded-gun metaphor is hermaphroditic because of its sexual metathesis (the poet's phallic self-transformation) and because of its synthesis of action and reaction.

Dickinson likes this binary trope. "He found my Being—set it up— / Adjusted it to place— / Then carved his name—upon it / And bade it to the East / Be faithful—in his absence" (603). The psychodrama is like that of the gun poem, except that limited travel has become immobility. The poet sees herself as a toppled gravestone or cromlech, claimed by a vagabond male (probably the bridegroom Jesus). That he "carves" his name into her, like a cattlebrand, is another of Dickinson's sadomasochistic adornments. She is like a tree initialed by a romantic swain. She is a marred block, a pillar turned toward the light, like Lot's incinerated wife.

Dickinson as scarred tombstone is a *passive phallic monument*, both masculine and feminine. Her "Columnar Self" stands on a "Granitic Base" (789). She is thinking of obelisks in the town cemetery: "And the livid Surprise / Cool us to Shafts of Granite— / With just an Age—and Name / And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian" (531). The variant for the latter is "latin inscription." Such metaphors illustrate Dickinson's monumentality, which I interpret as a self-masculinizing style. Her stone towers are sexual monoliths, slabs of aggressive assertion caught between potency and paralysis. Signed and sealed by the divine lover who will never return, she portrays herself architecturally as a fallen caryatid or armless Venus. Dickinson's experiments with active and passive echo those of Sade, who invents exotic conjunctions where an individual both penetrates and is penetrated. However, like Baudelaire's vampires, she seals up female inner space, compressing herself into impermeable blocks. The granite shafts are tombstones but also the corpses themselves, labeled like mummies in a museum.

Dickinson thinks of death as *enforced passivity*, agonizing impediment of movement. She dwells on the moment a person becomes a thing, as in "The last Night that She lived," where the pronoun disappears in the last stanza: "And We—We placed the Hair— / And drew the Head erect" (1100). A human has passed into the object-world. Some death poems use no personal pronoun at all: "'Twas warm—at first—like Us." It, it, it, she says of the dying one (519). Mind, body, and gender have gelatinized. Dickinson's death is a great neuter state. A dead female is a frozen phallic shaft; a dead male is a felled tree of humiliating inertness. Death is a maker of sterile androgynes. A corpse is soldered with rivets because it is a manufactured object, an android.

Dickinson's notorious preoccupation with death is thus a hermaphroditizing obsession, a Romantic motif in its Decadent late phase.

Both men and women are passive toward death, God's vizier. This intensifies the sexuality of "Because I could not stop for Death," a parodic "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The lady kidnapped by her gentleman caller feels a chill, "For only Gossamer, my Gown— / My Tippet only Tulle" (712). Gulled into the grave, the speaker finds herself ill-dressed. Her garments of fairy-tale delicacy are Christian illusions about resurrection. This feminine persona is universal, symbolizing all mankind. That is, humanity is feminine in relation to death, fate, God. Men too wear the flimsy gown of false hope, transvestized by their own credulity. Men too are raped by the trickster lover, God/death. This illustrates the richness with which Dickinson invests femininity. As in Sade and Swinburne, God condemns man to fascist oppression and sexual subordination. Unable to advance or retreat, the dead rest in an infinity of checkmate (615). Dickinson declares, "I saw no Way—The Heavens were stitched." There is no entrance to the tent of the inhospitable Bedouin god (378, 243). Death's victims, like serfs fallen into peat bogs, are sod androgynes, gelded or virilized into monuments of God and nature's indifference.

Dickinson's poetry, as an art of sexual personae, comes from Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. She thinks in theatrical or masquelike terms. She writes capsule screenplays of agony and ecstasy where someone is tortured, dying, transfigured. The poems are sexual scripts, like Sade's. Dickinson turns Wordsworth's nature into an inferno, ring upon ring of pain. As in Spenser and Blake, personae stand for spiritual states.

The masculine personae of savage nature have several tones. One is that of routine, as when a jaunty bird strolls down the walk, bites a worm in half, and eats "the fellow, raw" (328). Frost acts with the same matter-of-fact pitilessness: "the blonde Assassin" beheads a flower at play (1624). The frail victim represents human and vegetable nature, conquered by the cold abstractions of natural and divine law. Sometimes a cat is the assassin, teasing a mouse, then mashing it to death (762). Or the sea pursues seductively, before drowning its human guest: "My pantry has a fish / For every palate in the Year,— / To this revolting bliss / The object floating at his side / Made no distinct reply" (1749). Dickinson unreels her own *cinéma vérité*, anticipating the day when Americans would be regaled at suppertime by newsfilms of corpses being dragged from harbors. Nature can kill by patient ambush:

"How the Waters closed above Him / We shall never know. . . . Spreads the Pond Her Base of Lilies / Bold above the Boy / Whose unclaimed Hat and Jacket / Sum the History" (923). Glug, glug. The assassin is a dark sump, personified in the French Decadent manner as a haughty, handsome archetypal female, her "pancake" train the base of a leafy Tiffany lamp.

Dickinson's weather reports seem written by Sade: the wind is "like hungry dogs"; "yellow lightning" shines through fissures in "Volcanic cloud"; the trees hold up "Their mangled limbs / Like animals in pain" (1694). Nature is an ashy war zone of greed and suffering. Dickinson's usual style is gruesome Sadean comedy: "the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies," as if it were a giant kitten playing with boats in its milk dish. The tiger "fasts Scarlet / Till he meet a Man / Dainty adorned with Veins and Tissues / And partakes": a Spenserian moment of exquisite gore (872). Snack time rocks around the clock in Sadean nature. Drowsy Keatsian satiety is impossible in Dickinson. She condemns her creatures to wakefulness and deprivation.

Humanity's Wordsworthian illusions about nature are always being sabotaged. Dickinson asks why birds on a summer morn "Should stab my ravished spirit / With Dirks of Melody" (1420). The poet is being raped and assaulted by a flock of warblers. She means nature's beauty is cruel because transient. But her stage set is a Wordsworthian landscape filled with Baudelaire's drill-beaked birds. Their chirps are a shower of knives falling on passersby (cf. "The Awful Cutlery"—forked lightning—dropped from "Tables in the sky"; 1173). Dickinson composes a clashing Sadean music, a Decadent cruel beauty. Another poem has a similar soundtrack: "The Man to die tomorrow / Harks for the Meadow Bird / Because its Music stirs the Axe / That clamors for his head" (294). Nature is in league with social forces of extermination. Its pretty sounds incite the ax to blood-lust. Dawn wakes the executioner, of course, and not the ax. But in Dickinson's dark vision, the nonhuman world telegraphs its Sadean signals from hill to hill. The ax rises up and avidly rings, just as the scaffold "neighs" in another poem, an eager whinny fusing by dream-logic the horse-drawn tumbril to the naying or negation of execution on the creaking platform (708).

In "I dreaded that first Robin, so," a Wordsworthian bird again agitates the poet with its thoughtless felicities: "I thought if I could only live / Till that first Shout got by— / Not all Pianos in the Woods / Had power to mangle me" (348). The pianos are trees sighing in the wind. Their branches against the sky, black keys on white, are played like an Aeolian lyre. Baudelaire too hears vocal trees, "living pillars" speaking

"confused words" ("Correspondences"). Dickinson thinks of pianos, just as she thinks of an oppressive cathedral organ in "There's a certain Slant of light" (258). The word "mangle" is attractive to her for the number and devastation of its implied wounds. But what are mangling pianos?—certainly louder than duelling banjos. One imagines a victim tangled up in piano wires and lashed by felt hammers, like a farmhand caught in a thresher. That she sees many pianos is highly surreal, like a Busby Berkeley film. The poet is merely listening to the wind from her house or garden. But in her metaphor, she is in the woods running the gauntlet past rows of voracious pianos, their lids open like maws. Horror show again: Dickinson's nature is an unnerving spectacle of madly playing pianos escaped from human control. Even small things can mangle: she says of a spiritual problem, "This is the Gnat that mangles men" (1331). Making a Carrollian leap from midge to behemoth, a man-mangling gnat is what viciously waits amid Wordsworth's daffodils.

Like Swinburne in *Anactoria*, Dickinson shows sadomasochism suffusing the world: "The Sun took down his Yellow Whip / And drove the Fog away" (1190). Snow and wind are "Brooms of Steel," iron flails of the sky-god (1252). The moon is "like a Head a Guillotine / Slid carelessly away"—a constellation of decapitation (629). "The Black Berry wears a Thorn in his side": a wound for him or us? (554) The sea is "An Everywhere of Silver / With Ropes of Sand" (884). Dickinson's global equilibrium is harsher than Spenser's: the beaches are shackles, and her sea lies in bondage. A favorite word is "iodine," which she uses to describe sunset light in sky or water, as in "the Iodine upon the Cataract" (853, 673, 710). She is punning on its Greek root: *iodes* means "violet." But characteristically, she makes sky and stream running wounds daubed with carmine antiseptic. This resembles those two poems in which the fall landscape and western sky are great blood puddings—the universe as abattoir. She sees sunset as conflagration: "The largest Fire ever known / Occurs each Afternoon." It consumes "An Occidental Town, / Rebuilt another morning / To be burned down again" (1114). Disaster is nature's norm. The scarlet western hills and clouds are cities rising and falling, like ancient cities. The poet is Nero singing while Amherst burns.

Like Swinburne's Sappho, Dickinson thinks God jealous and vindictive, an attitude she got from Blake. God lures mankind into the grave with promises of a fair future, only to default on his contract. His credit history is a spree of embezzlements. He condemns man to death and

loss: "Earth is short / And Anguish absolute" (301). Pleasure and pain are yoked: we pay for every ecstasy with anguish, "In keen and quivering ratio" (125). The rose's attar is "the gift of Screws" (675). Life is governed by sadomasochistic extremes: "A Wounded Deer leaps highest"; the "Smitten Rock" gushes; the "trampled Steel" springs (165). Nature's dynamism is an excruciating seesaw. God's sadism determines the poet's own. Her brutal metaphors record her search for a rhetoric equal to what God has wrought. A sadist woman speaker, one of the west's unique sexual personae, avenges the feminine passivity into which God thrusts mankind.

Dickinson reserves her most contemptuous witticisms for the Son who came to justify the ways of God to men. Unlike her precursors, she refuses to glamourize the primary Romantic persona of the martyred male heroine. "The Auctioneer of Parting / His 'Going, going, gone' / Shouts even from the Crucifix / And brings his Hammer down" (1612). Christ turned moneychanger is conducting a slave auction from the cross. He is selling souls to the highest bidder, the shadowy God who is death. "Ineffable Avarice of Jesus," murmurs Dickinson in a letter.²¹ Christ's hammer is the gavel of the Last Judgment, already striking men with daily blows. Here the holy carpenter's nail wounds are masochistically self-inflicted. Keats says of himself, "Imaginary grievances . . . nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross."²² "Going, going, gone": life's funeral train chugs into motion to Christ's ominous "All aboard" (cf. the puns on crucifix boards). His "It is finished" becomes a parodic diminuendo, fading echoes of *à Dieu*.

Dickinson's cynical surrealism is unparalleled among great women writers. For an analogy to the auctioneer poem we would have to turn to Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" (1968), the Golgothan dream-vision of a Jewish satirist who treats Christ much more sympathetically. Dickinson says, "God was penurious with me, which makes me shrewd with Him."²³ More of her sharp irreverence: "In passing Calvary," she likes "To note the fashions—of the Cross— / And how they're mostly worn— / Still fascinated to presume / That Some—are like My Own" (561). The faithful speak of death or sorrow as a cross to be borne. Dickinson compares her crosses with others', noting their shape, weight, and number. How are they "worn"? Does the condemned staggering up Calvary carry the cross on his left or right shoulder? What "fashions" does he model on the cross—a tunic? a loincloth? The poet is a bystander at an Easter parade or a pedestrian pausing before a shop window, planning a future purchase. Perhaps her unorthodox train of

thought was begun by the episode of Veronica's veil, for at that moment, Christ was adorned with a woman's chador. Dickinson's campy mix of religion and couture is like Baudelaire's and Wilde's.

Christ is in Dickinson's line of fire because his testament misrepresents his godfather's business. The poet is Little Red Ridinghood discovering a wolfish divine face hidden within the flowery fringes of Wordsworthian nature. Christ's incarnation had a bloody climax, reached by a road paved with good intentions. One of Dickinson's most brilliant metaphors: "Mine—by the Sign in the Scarlet prison— / Bars cannot conceal!" (528). The body is Poe's Red Death and shrinking torture cell. The body's netting of veins and arteries (like a bale of chicken wire) are the bars on door and window. What is "mine" is the certainty of extinction. The bright sign in the scarlet prison is mortality, which cannot be concealed by the bars or tribunals of future divine judgment. Dickinson agrees that life imitates Christ, for our extension in the body lays us on the cross of Blake's tree of nature.

Consciousness in Dickinson takes the form of a body tormented in every limb. Her sadomasochistic metaphors are Blake's Universal Man hammering on himself, like the auctioneering Jesus. Her suffering personae make up the gorged superself of Romanticism. I argued that modern sadomasochism is a limitation of the will and that for a Romantic like the mastectomy-obsessed Kleist it represents a reduction of self. A conventional feminist critique of Emily Dickinson's life would see her hemmed in on all sides by respectability and paternalism, impediments to her genius. But a study of Romanticism shows that post-Enlightenment poets are struggling with the *absence* of limits, with the gross inflation of solipsistic imagination. Hence Dickinson's most uncontrolled encounter is with the serpent of her antisocial self, who breaks out like the Aeolian winds let out of their bag.

Dickinson does wage guerrilla warfare with society. Her fractures,cripplings, impalements, and amputations are Dionysian disorderings of the stable structures of the Apollonian lawgivers. God, or the idea of God, is the "One," without whom the "Many" of nature fly apart. Hence God's death condemns the world to Decadent disintegration. Dickinson's Late Romantic love of the apocalyptic parallels Decadent European taste for salon paintings of the fall of Babylon or Rome. Her Dionysian cataclysms demolish Victorian proprieties. Like Blake, she couples the miniature and grandiose, great disjunctions of scale whose yawning swings release tremendous poetic energy.

The least palatable principle of the Dionysian, I have stressed, is not sex but violence, which Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Emerson exclude

from their view of nature. Dickinson, like Sade, draws the reader into ascending degrees of complicity, from eroticism to rape, mutilation, and murder. With Emily Brontë, she uncovers the aggression repressed by humanism. Hence Dickinson is the creator of Sadean poems but also the creator of sadists, the readers whom she smears with her lamb's blood. Like the Passover angel, she stains the lintels of the bourgeois home with her bloody vision. "There's been a Death, in the Opposite House," she announces with a satisfaction completely overlooked by the Wordsworthian reader (389).

But merely because poet and modern society are in conflict does not mean art necessarily gains by "freedom." It is a sentimental error to think Emily Dickinson the victim of male obstructionism. Without her struggle with God and father, there would have been no poetry. There are two reasons for this. First, Romanticism's overexpanded self requires artificial restraints. Dickinson finds these limitations in sadomasochistic nature and reproduces them in her dual style. Without such a discipline, the Romantic poet cannot take a single step, for the sterile vastness of modern freedom is like gravity-free outer space, in which one cannot walk or run. Second, women do not rise to supreme achievement unless they are under powerful internal compulsion. Dickinson was a woman of abnormal will. Her poetry profits from the enormous disparity between that will and the feminine social persona to which she fell heir at birth. But her sadism is not anger, the a posteriori response to social injustice. It is *hostility*, an a priori Achillean intolerance for the existence of others, the female version of Romantic solipsism.

In the beautiful hypothesis of "Shakespeare's sister," Virginia Woolf imagines a girl with her brother's gifts whom society would have "thwarted and hindered" to insanity and suicide.²⁴ Women have been discouraged from genres such as sculpture that require studio training or expensive materials. But in philosophy, mathematics, and poetry, the only materials are pen and paper. Male conspiracy cannot explain all female failures. I am convinced that, even without restrictions, there still would have been no female Pascal, Milton, or Kant. Genius is not checked by social obstacles: it will overcome. Men's egotism, so disgusting in the talentless, is the source of their greatness as a sex. Women have a more accurate sense of reality; they are physically and spiritually more complete. Culture, I said, was invented by men, because it is by culture that they make themselves whole. Even now, with all vocations open, I marvel at the rarity of the woman driven by artistic or intellectual obsession, that self-mutilating derangement of social relationship

which, in its alternate forms of crime and ideation, is the disgrace and glory of the human species.

Dickinson was one of those who convert every reverse into an impulse to create. Humiliation and disillusion were whisked into abstract structures, posted on the map of the world in her war room, with its game tokens of advance and retreat. Her premiere subject is power, psychological, natural, and divine, to which woman has free access only in eras of earth-cult. Hence her fondness for the word "electric." Her poems are thermal sensors, registering nature's surges of animating energy. But her changes are abrupt and traumatic. "A happy lip breaks sudden," she typically remarks (353). This stiff upper lip belongs to a marble statue with a hairline fracture. Matter thwarts spirit's urges. As a scientist of nature, Dickinson is a Decadent catastrophist, predicting transformation by convulsion.

Dickinson's breakage of objects signifies the collapse of meaning. She imports amputation, her favorite limiting device, from Dionysian nature into society. For example, she says of her mother's stroke, "Her Hand and Foot left her." When a neighbor died, "He had no hands."²⁵ Infirmary is *severance*, because Dickinson is a Late Romantic separatist practicing Decadent partition. Like the brain escaping the lidded skull, Mrs. Dickinson's hand and foot march out of the house like servants giving notice. The poet's amputations are like Kleist's mastectomies. Brutal self-reduction is a restocking of nature's organ bank.

Clinically, hypochondria takes two forms. The less serious is anxiety about internal disease; the more pathological is obsession with loss of limbs. Since they have more appendages to lose, men might be expected to suffer from the latter, but, just from common observation, this does not seem to be so. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which I find utterly unfunny, may be a male hypochondriacal construction, for it is an accident series of disasters to body parts—a flattened nose, shattered knee, crushed groin bone, a penis circumcised by a falling window. Our amputational Dickinson exhibits the graver of the hypochondrias. This may be the castration-anxiety of a hermaphrodite poet. For we saw that the moment she detaches herself from her phallic *genius loci*, the pink worm, trouble begins like a rumble in the boys' lavatory.

Significantly, Dickinson shows little concern with disease. Her sado-masochistic horrors are confined to piercings, slashings, hackings, scorchings, and dislocations. Why? Poe's *Red Death*, Baudelaire's "Voyage to Cythera," and Huysmans' flower episode make disease a major Late Romantic metaphor. It is the depraved touch of female nature. Dickinson's substitution of accidents for disease is part of her extraordi-

nary effort to wipe chthonian femaleness out of nature. Her nature, I said, has two faces: one benevolent, one hostile, turbulent with storm and volcano or dead with stone and ice. I argued that lapidary Decadent beauty, the bronzed and jewelled surfaces of Baudelaire and Moreau, are a protest against the chthonian. Like Poe, Dickinson is exiled from European objets d'art. Therefore her ice images, expressing a revulsion from nature identical to the French Decadents', are a great leap forward into modern metaphor.

One of Dickinson's stunning achievements is her prophetic vision of intergalactic nothingness. A funeral turns into a science-fiction film: "Boots of Lead" cross her soul, "Then Space began to toll, / As all the Heavens were a Bell, / And Being, but an Ear, / And I, and Silence, some strange Race / Wrecked, solitary, here." She drops "down, and down— / And hit a World, at every plunge" (280). Dickinson's glimpses of futuristic desolation, minimal in Jules Verne, precede H. G. Wells's by thirty years. What of her lead boots? Only we, her true contemporaries, can identify them, for we have seen them walk on the moon. Dickinson's lonely plunge into Pascal's abyss is the severest thought, to my knowledge, of any premodern woman writer. Even despairing Wordsworth gives himself one withered companion in his stark desert basins.

In "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers," a masterpiece, the "meek" dead wait for resurrection under their "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—

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The alabaster chamber is the tomb and also the corpse's marble flesh, a palace turned prison. The coffin's satin coverlet is like the gossamer gown of the kidnapped maiden, a hope that will be rent. The stone roof is the sky that will never open. The meek *have* inherited the earth. The heavens revolve in great mathematical arcs; history speeds up, kings' crowns falling like snowflakes. The poem ends with a soft numbing of the tongue, as syllables sputter out into silence. The poet takes a position of visionary distance from which human life seems a speck in the cosmos. Especially brilliant is the muted movement of "Doges" into "Snow," all the colors of Venice—art, imagination, and worldly glory—vanishing into eternity.

This frigid, godless universe is a major theme of modern literature, as in Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man" (1923). Dickinson anticipates Kafka in combining emptiness and absurdity with tyrannical authority. How amazing that this is the work of a solitary, neglected, untravelled woman. How did she make so remarkable an advance on contemporary literature? Dickinson's modern ice world is the direct result of her Brontëan swerve from gender, her refusal to accept femaleness in herself or nature. Science fiction's glacial wastes, which she is the first artist to see, are a landscape from which maternal procreation has been blasted. Her dreams of death by freezing are a poetic anorexia or willed starvation. There is no disease in her because disease is a female miasma, an infection. There are no contaminations, only mutilations, because nature is in a state of cold purity, its accidents a Newtonian collision of hard objects. The blood the poet sheds is lustral, a self-detoxifying bath. There is never any *disgust* in her, only *horror*, for disgust is a male response to female nature, which she has purged out of existence.

Dickinson projects chthonian unintelligibility onto phallic daemons, whom she flees because they would betray her into fecundity. Her sexual premises also determine her rhetorical forms. Whitman extends himself outward to be impregnated in huge, sprawling prose-poems. But Dickinson's small lyrics are a sexual closure, the cage of a self-sequestered sibyl. Whitman's poems aggregate while Dickinson's consolidate ego. She declares, "The Soul selects her own Society—/ Then shuts the Door." The soul must "Choose One"—herself—"Then close the Valves of her attention / Like Stone" (303). The inflexible heart of metal spigots is a tomb-monument of the self.

Jane Austen calls her own writing "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush," an allusion to the modest scope of provincial life that she took for subject.²⁶ But her ivory is not so small, first because the novel as a genre has social breadth and second because her work revives the English Renaissance ideal of marriage. Dickinson, on the other hand, is a monastic. She chooses *one* because the self must be sealed up and its integrity defended. Her poems are Apollonian cells of the *principium individuationis*. Baudelaire's poems, I noted, are corrupted entities, projections of a diseased body. Dickinson's major poems are bursting hermaphrodite lozenges, a small feminine body charged with a mighty masculine mind. The rhetoric itself is powerfully bisexed.

Language too is confined. Whitman and Huysmans' proliferation of vocabulary is the opposite of Dickinson's contraction of syntax. Her

poems are *imploded*, their contours jagged and torn by suction. Poring over her dictionary, she introverts words, doubling them back in puns on their roots. Her ellipsis produces broken metrical accents, a queer lurching rhythm. She cites Higginson's prior criticism: "You think my gait 'spasmodic.'"²⁷ Dickinson has a *halt* meter, like a hobbled horse or a Chinese woman who has bound her own feet. Her harsh pressures on language are another ritual limitation, by which the Romantic self returns to governable dimensions from its monstrous immensity.

There is inherent irony in the idea of female Romantic genius, which I have examined in two cases, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson. Romanticism is an imaginative realignment of western male will toward female powers, which it internalizes. The reason the work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her fellow poetesses is so weak is that Romanticism is a sex-crossing mode which adds femaleness to maleness. Femaleness added to femaleness is a Romantic redundancy, to which the Muse will make no visitation. Brontë and Dickinson succeed as Romantics because they are women of masculine will who tend toward sadism.

I portrayed the High Romantic poet as a passive sufferer or male heroine. Dickinson unites this inherited persona with its opposite. As a woman Romantic, she must suffer *and* assert. She is male heroine *and* sex-defying Romantic hero. Both extremes must be forcefully materialized, which is why her sadistic metaphors are among the most grisly in major poetry. They are injections of synthetic male hormone into a hermaphroditic genre that resists female practitioners. I spoke of Wordsworth's shamanistic sacrifice of virility: Dickinson makes this Romantic surgery literal. Lacerating self-abuse is her ritual consecration, by which she makes her vows to art.

Dickinson's sadomasochism is most intense during her most creative decade. She says, "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind— / As if my Brain had split" (937). Her poetry is a war of personae, a clash of opposites; it is sexually, psychically, morally, and aesthetically bivalent. Over eternity, her pastoral Wordsworthian poems must yield to their daemonic counterparts. Criticism's error has been to regard the sentimental poems as indistinguishable from period *vers de société*. But Dickinson's contemporaries had no secret wells of savagery, no grand philosophical system. Her sentimental personae do not stand alone. The purest feminine poems are without internal ironies. They are acted upon by their *contexts*. Read any of her bird and butterfly poems while keeping her sadistic lyrics in mind, and you will find them magically transformed, their borders agitated by malign influences. In her Wordsworthian

verses, the poet is a virgin odalisque, titillated by the pressure of erotic menace around her.

Sentimentality is one of Dickinson's major techniques. It is her sexual allure, the magnetism drawing her masculine and feminine personae together. She uses femininity to drive femaleness out of nature. Rejected by many women of our time, femininity attracts her as a poetic mask, partly because men too wear this mask in their encounters with God and death. Dickinson endorses femininity's artificial or rather unnatural character: it is both of and against nature, since spring always loses to frost and decay. Thus she treats femininity as simultaneously spurious and authentic. She exaggerates the social frivolities of her gender in order to thrust nature's force into the masculine, bypassing mythology's chthonian females.

The polarized sexual powers of Dickinson's poetry form a huge circle, an uroboros of pursuit and flight. Masculine devours feminine, as in Spenser. All personae are in motion, turning with the pagan solar year. The poet enters among her characters, the mark of Romantic as opposed to Renaissance literature. She is both Proteus and Florimell, rough rapist and coy maiden. She is like the onanist Genet, of whom Sartre says, "He is the criminal who rapes and the Saint who lets herself be raped."²⁸ Dickinson works by sexual polyphony. We cannot speak of her individual poems as "good" or "bad" but rather as *more or less masculine and feminine*.

Wordsworth and Rousseau posit hostility between nature and society, which they define as respectively female and male. Dickinson unexpectedly unites society with Wordsworthian nature by linking them both to femininity. Wordsworth's nature is chthonian and deeply female. But it isn't in Dickinson because she got Wordsworth through Emerson, and Emerson is in American flight from the female. Through her feminine personae, the poet pretends to be what she seems to be to the social eye. She has gone out the front door of her gender and come in the back. Sentimentality restores her poetic equilibrium. It adds representational weight to the light end of the sexual seesaw. Her feminine personae are mental calisthenics by which she dissuades herself from sadism. Already at a peak of masculine tension, she swings them about like Indian clubs or thistledown barbells, which enable her to maintain her muscle tonelessness in prison.

Wordsworth's poetic gifts come through the opening he makes to the mother. Dickinson's poetry requires separation from the mother, whom she demotes from creative authority. Here again she uses Blake against

Wordsworth. Her relations with her real mother should not be exaggerated, since in Romanticism it is imagination, not fact that is primary. But she told Higginson, "My Mother does not care for thought." She said of her sister Lavinia, while both parents were still alive, "She has no Father and Mother but me and I have no Parents but her." This is like Woolf calling herself her sister Vanessa's "firstborn."²⁹ Dickinson and Brontë cultivate the Romantic sister-relation, at its most incestuous a denial of ancestral indebtedness.

There are very few mothers in Dickinson's nature poetry, nearly all qualified by some irony. "Gentle" mother nature puts her "Golden finger" to her lip, willing "Silence—Everywhere" (790). Gold fingers are sunset rays, signaling sleep for man and beast. But nature's silence may be golden because it is the mineral coldness of death. When nature "smiles" at "Her eccentric Family," we should think of Leonardo, not Raphael (1085). I admire these lines: "In Ovens green our Mother bakes, / By Fires of the Sun" (1143). Believers in the mawkish Dickinson, a Shirley Temple who wakes when the genius nods, will dismiss such things as idle Victoriana: aproned mother nature bustles about, whipping up batches of cookies. But the kitchen scene has a cruel subplot. Nature is *Hansel and Gretel's* witch, grilling her children in her German ovens. Here is the sober truth:

But nature is a stranger yet;
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.

To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.

[1400]

Nature is no meadow of green promise but a spectral Gothic chamber that will not let history be born. All knowledge is a return to the past. Dickinson writes Higginson, "Nature is a Haunted House—but Art—a House that tries to be haunted."³⁰ Romantic art is daemonic: it finds the pagan spiritualism in matter.

In Dickinson's year, false spring supplants summer. She rejects fecund ripening for herself as well as her metaphors. Habitually dressed in white, she was always nun or bride, never mother. Her boy personae are also deflections of maturation, an anorexic suppression of sexual

shape. Sentimentality in Dickinson, as opposed to Wordsworth and Wilde, is a road away from the mother rather than toward her. It is no coincidence that while some major female artists have married, very few have borne children. The issue is not conservation of energy but imaginative integrity. Art is its own self-swelling, proof that the mind is greater than the body.

In biology, neoteny is the protraction of juvenile traits into adulthood or the premature development of adult sexual traits in a hostile environment. Dickinson's feminine personae are neotenic. They are juveniles trying to stop the aging of the year, a delay that makes winter's sudden arrival more catastrophic. Her feminine personae are self-delectating fictions, in which a recluse toys with exhibitionism. There is an erotics of smallness in Dickinson resembling the seductive preciousness of Blake's "Infant Joy." She loves to appear frail and pitiable—but only to make more delicious her vamping between hierarchic levels. There are satiric tableaux of human subordination: "I hope the Father in the skies / Will lift his little girl— / Old fashioned—naughty—everything— / Over the stile of 'Pearl'" (70). Pearl is her word for the resurrected realm of white frost. She is a naïf gamboling in the feminine glad rags of Christian trust. Here are three hierarchic levels: "Papa above! / Regard a Mouse / O'erpowered by the Cat!" (61). She sent the poem to her headstrong sister-in-law Susan—the cat in whose jaws the poet pleasurably struggles. Such superficially simple passages are cascades of hierarchical force, tiered fountains splashing with sadomasochistic refreshment.

Dickinson calls herself "Sparrow," "little Girl," "child." She refers to "my little Gypsy being," "my little sunburnt bosom."³¹ The most cunning self-description occurs in a letter to Higginson, who had requested a photograph: "Could you believe me—without? I had no portrait, now, but am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut Bur—and my eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves— Would this do just as well?"³² What a psychodrama! The poet is small, mild, pathetic. Even her eye color is a tincture of abandonment. But she wrote every word of this in perfect consciousness of her secret greatness and power. She is like Cleopatra breathing, "I am pale, Charmian," one line before clobbering the messenger. The simile of the leftover sherry is a triumph of the Jewish-mother type of masochistic, guilt-inducing trope. Dickinson scholars are tone-deaf to this element in her. Italians and Jews tend to be alert to self-dramatizing gambits where force masquerades in personae of infirmity. For example, my formidable grandmother would respond to telephone inquiries by claiming she was

"Sola sola com' un' aiuch'," "Alone alone like an owl"—watching, in other words, in dismal solitude.³³ Now this Italian owl is bird of a feather with the Amherst wren and sparrow. A ferocious hierarch is practicing an adroit mime of misery.

Dickinson's sherry eyes appear to withdraw and be withdrawn from, when in fact they aggressively advance on the reader. What causes exasperation or panic in the children of Italian and Jewish matriarchs is being directed toward a genteel stranger with no suspicions of the poet's profound doubleness. Higginson is a fish whom Dickinson lures into reach by appetizing quavers of dependency. In her next letter, she tells him, "All men say 'What' to me, but I thought it a fashion."³⁴ She is the beggar girl banned from the common table. She is Cassandra, never believed, or Coleridge's poet isolated in his holy circle. Her plaintiveness is rich with gloating. It's clear everyone said "What?" to her because, like a guest without small talk, she had a bad habit of sinking dialogue under Delphic meteorites, great thudding conversation-stoppers. One has known persons who do this, fatiguingly. It is one of the most aggressive forms of speech, intimidation cloaked as revelation. Dickinson is Salomé dancing into her seven veils.

Many critics remark on the irony of Dickinson's veneration of Higginson, a man well-known in his day but now just a footnote in literary history. She called him "Preceptor" and signed herself "Your Scholar." He was the ambassador of the great world to the sequestered poet, who joked about her own nonentity: "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (288). Her relation to him was like Shelley's to Mary Godwin or Mill's to Harriet Taylor, a symbolic deference where a stronger intelligence bows to a lesser. Dickinson's ritual self-abasements are nearly Swinburnian. A poem begins: "I was the slightest in the House—/ I took the smallest Room" (486). She likes lowness for its tingling sensations of hierarchic distance. She stretches and squeezes the artificial gap between superior and inferior, as if working an accordion or chest-expander, exhilarating herself with inhalations of subordination.

A diminutive friend of mine, a native Bostonian and paragon of archaic WASP decorum, has a psychodramatic stratagem under stress that never ceases to amaze me: *she appears smaller*. This conchlike spiral of spiritual and physical retraction is not in the Mediterranean arsenal. Quite the contrary, the beset southerner follows the animal principle of raised hackles, an emphatic enlargement of personality: one leaps to one's feet, waves the arms, raises the voice. Dickinson's most cherished maneuver is to appear smaller, a camouflage in society.

This compression of persona is a hallucination projected upon the unwary by a gamesman of tough will. The poet has duped and beguiled not Higginson alone but generations of her readers and critics.

Higginson recorded his first meeting with Dickinson in a long letter to his wife. We see the poet's calculated presentation of self with wonderful clarity:

A step like a pattering child's in entry & in glided a little plain woman with two smooth bands of reddish hair & a face a little like Belle Dove's; not plainer—with no good feature—in a very plain & exquisitely clean white pique & a blue net worsted shawl. She came to me with two day lilies which she put in a sort of childlike way into my hand & said "These are my introduction" in a soft frightened breathless childlike voice—and added under her breath Forgive me if I am frightened; I never see strangers & hardly know what I say—but she talked soon & thenceforward continuously—and deferentially—sometimes stopping to ask me to talk instead of her—but readily recommencing.

Dickinson plays the child entering her own kingdom of heaven. Supposedly not knowing what to say, she manages to talk nonstop. Higginson is under attack by the Delphic priestess. The inner reality of their encounter is registered in his extraordinary closing words: "I never was with any one who drained my nerve power so much. Without touching her, she drew from me. I am glad not to live near her."³⁵ Higginson felt a strange spiritual oppression in her presence. Even without this lucky corroboration by an urbane witness, I contend we are able to tell from the poetry alone, with its sadomasochistic duality, that Emily Dickinson is one of the great examples of the vampirism of the artist. In a survey of vampire legends, Montague Summers speaks of the "spiritual vampire" or "psychic sponge" who has the ability to "re-energize" him or herself "by drawing upon the vitality of others": "Such types are by no means uncommon. Sensitive people will often complain of weariness and loss of spirits when they have been for long in the company of certain others."³⁶ Pressing the beam of her mental eye on Higginson, the poet extorts his vitality from him, in shamanistic transfusions of soul-plasm.

The vampire as artless child: as with Brontë's ghostly waif at the window or Coleridge's fainting Geraldine in her white robe, Dickinson's approach to visitor and reader alike is a cinematic mirage, a silvery vapor of entrancement. Of the century's major American writers, Dickinson is the most Decadent in religious and sexual psychology. Her

fondness for corpses far exceeds the Victorian cult of bereavement. She is closest here not to Sir Thomas Browne and the *Metaphysicals* but to the Hamlet who casually says of dead Polonius, "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room" (III.iv.213).

A typical Dickinson love poem begins, "If I may have it, when it's dead." To heck with warm flesh; she'll take the corpse. "Forgive me, if to stroke thy frost / Outvisions Paradise!" (577). The male is "it" because death neutralizes gender. He is sexually and emotionally tolerable only after he has been processed into passivity, patted and kneaded like a pie crust. Keats's Isabella waters her lover's severed head with her tears. But Dickinson sheds no tears. As she fondles the corpse, she flashes a dazzling smile.

Stroking corpses of both sexes is Dickinson's literary hobby (187). People used to die at home, and their bodies were laid out in the parlor. The quick trip from hospital to funeral home—curious term—was not yet invented. Suppression of the mechanics of death is a recent bourgeois phenomenon; at Italian funerals, for example, friends and relatives file past the open casket on the morning of burial and kiss the corpse's forehead. Nevertheless, Dickinson's corpse fantasies are beyond the norm. They are perverse because her intimacy requires inertness. Her consciousness exults in the unconsciousness of its objects. Twin to Whitman of *The Sleepers*, she is a phantom lover in the world of the dead. She values corpses as artifacts: personality has passed from Dionysian mutability into Apollonian perfection. But her language is always amorous: "By the dead we love to sit, / Become so wondrous dear" (88). She focuses on the deathwatch, prior to the shift of states: "Promise This—When You be Dying— / Some shall summon Me." To her belongs the last sigh and the right to "Belt" the dead eyes with her lips (648). Dickinson's erotic claim, like insurance compensation after an accident, is activated only by suffering and death. Her passionate kisses are for faces that can make no return. She is a priestess of the Mysteries, materializing just in time for the last rites.

Death, as a collision between time and eternity, has a transfiguring glamour: "To know just how He suffered—would be dear" (622). Soul and body in agony leave their psychic imprint, which the poet as sleuth ruthlessly ferrets out. She never bothered to conceal her ravenous curiosity. She is just twenty-three when she writes a complete stranger, Edward Everett Hale, to dig up data on the last hours of a childhood friend. Had she a current address, she says, she would be pumping the wife of the deceased instead.³⁷ Her eye longs to penetrate the inmost

sanctuary, medical and marital. She dreams of exposing herself to death's radiation and joining the victim in the blaze of mortal fission.

Dickinson is a Decadent voyeur, and her corpse poems are specimens of sexual objectification, the primary principle of Decadent eroticism. She turns men into corpses, just as Poe turns Berenice into a box of teeth. The corpse poems formalize that eye-object relation which oppresses Romantic poets in their stultifying freedom. Seeing across space and time, Dickinson ritually fixes the distance between self and world, freezing it with her Medusan eye. She is that rarity, a female necrophiliac and sexual fetishist. Necrophilia was devised by the modern psyche to control and place sex after its sudden detachment from hierarchical systems. Like hysteria, necrophilia has gone out of fashion. People no longer paralyze their arms, like Breuer's Anna O., or root about in cemeteries, plucking up corpses to violate or snack on.³⁸ Dickinson hastens her lovers toward death to draft them into her poetry. She binds them with immobility, like turkeys dressed for the oven, to ready them for her post-mortem embraces. She is a connoisseur of death, a Decadent collector. Like the maiden of Blake's "Crystal Cabinet," she traps her lovers in dark bowers to which, she boasts, she owns the key (577). Each corpse poem is a glass coffin with the withered beloved on display. These are the trophies of the belle of Amherst, a Circe who shrinks men with a tap of her wand.

Like Rachilde's Raoule de Vénérande, Dickinson makes a mausoleum out of a bedchamber. Her men are living dolls, like Raoule's wax gigolo. They are manufactured objects, a romance of prosthetics. Death is the black paint in which the poet dips her brush, because the objet d'art lacks prestige in nineteenth-century American culture. Even well-born James must go to Europe to procure his golden bowl, and significantly, it is ritually broken within its novel. Decadent Dickinson makes objets d'art of her loved ones, but for lack of artistic models, she turns them into ice sculptures, corpi delicti of God's crimes.

The lingering Puritan taboo on visual gratification, I noted, inflamed the eye in American Romanticism. Poe, Hawthorne, Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson suffer fluctuations between voyeurism and paranoia. Dickinson flattens her chosen ones by her ocular force. She drops on them like a hawk, her eye sadistically glittering. Her Decadent voyeurism is abundantly clear in her letters, which increasingly become a chain of condolences. Death and calamity are the only subjects on which the poet speaks. Life is a string of black pearls.

The letters can be in questionable taste. Dickinson writes to a woman whose cousin drowned in, of all places, Walden Pond:

Dear friend,

What a reception for you! Did she wait for your approbation?

Her deferring to die until you came seemed to me so confiding—
as if nothing should be presumed. It can probably never be real to you.

The poet, with her avid eye, rapturously theatricalizes the death so as to sharpen grief rather than relieve it. Victim and rescuer seem actors rehearsing a play. The lingering pondside death is critiqued as if it were a summer charade in a gazebo. Here is a letter to a woman whose house caught fire:

Dear friend,

I congratulate you.

Disaster endears beyond Fortune—

E. Dickinson

Thomas H. Johnson, Dickinson's Harvard editor, comments, "The letter does not sound as though the damage had been serious."³⁹ Poor trusting man. The fire was obviously a catastrophe! Dickinson sends a congratulations card because victimization means canonization in her Sadean cosmos. There is maniacal glee in her sepulchral letters. She makes strange hard jests at tender moments. To a friend whose infant son had an operation for a congenital foot problem: "How is your little Byron? Hope he gains his foot without losing his genius."⁴⁰ Flattery and tartness queasily mingle. The letter raises the fleeting possibilities that the boy will be either a brilliant clubfoot or an agile dolt. Our poet's honeyed words have a secret sting.

Letter after letter memorializes the deaths of friends or relatives of the addressees, on whom are heaped strained, hieratic epigrams and paradoxes. There is not a grain of Christian compassion in these letters. They are a Late Romantic prose-poem, a stunning chronicle of necrophilia and voyeurism. The recluse chooses the moments to show herself to the multitude. Bereavement is her opportunity: daily life stops, and people are paralyzed. Dickinson as oracle and ritual mourner injects herself into their suffering. The letters of condolence are death-day rather than birthday gifts, handcrafted by the poet in her secret forge.

Dickinson tells Higginson: "A Letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend. . . . There seems a spectral power in thought that walks alone."⁴¹ This stalking spectre is the vampire-poet scanning the world for disasters. She imag-

ines the mourners receiving her letters. She is there, by telekinesis, suddenly appearing like Poe's raven on Pallas' head, ready with words of wisdom. The mourners' social masks are off. They are naked and at their most passive. This is when the poet *makes contact*. She unites with them as they confront elemental realities. She senses death's primitivistic energy, which excites her. She is a shark lured by spilled blood, a rustic hog snuffing out black truffles of woe. All of Dickinson's letters are archly seductive, but the letters of condolence are a sadomasochistic congress. She is like Blake's God creating Adam, smothering the bereaved while they are prostrated.

The letters of condolence are erotic, self-conscious, ritualized, and therefore Decadent. Like the governess of *Turn of the Screw*, Dickinson is a Romantic terrorist, presiding over eruptions of horror. Like the governess, she constructs a Decadent world of voyeuristic sightlines. Her eroticized lust to *see all* is combined with intense fear of the visual. Like Gautier's Queen Nyssia, Dickinson feels contaminated by others' eyes. She defends her perceptual purity by walling herself up in her Danae's tower or snowbound "Pearl Jail."⁴² She dreads being seen precisely because *her* eye is so powerful and intrusive. Letters and poems allow her to be heard at a distance while remaining invisible, as if on a public-address system. Nothing is more terrible in her poetry than when her barriers are breached and the visual pours in on her uncontrollably: "Creation seemed a mighty Crack / To make me visible"; "Space stares all around" (891, 510).

These mirrorlike returns upon her of her own ocular aggression explain many of Dickinson's eccentricities. She refused to be photographed or to receive most callers; she would not address letters in her own hand, and she carried on conversations with visitors from behind a screen or from the next room. This is partly a rejection of stable social identity, the poet of many personae refusing to commit herself to one. But her ostentatious withdrawals are tactical. She drives up her market value by spiritual hoarding and taxes her friends by withholding herself. Her tarrying in the wings is frictional. Her appearances are delayed ejaculations, meant to bring her audience to a peak of frenzy. Her aggravating affectations, which would now be called passive-aggressive, evoked a memorable response from Samuel Bowles, who shouted up the stairs: "Emily, you wretch! No more of this nonsense! I've traveled all the way from Springfield to see you. Come down at once."⁴³ Her bluff called, the poet calmly descended.

Dickinson's manipulative letters are masterful in their subtle calibrations of conditional visibility. Here is her account, in a letter to her

Norcross cousins, of a great fire that destroyed downtown Amherst. Fire bells awoke her in the middle of the night:

I sprang to the window, and each side of the curtain saw that awful sun. The moon was shining high at the time, and the birds singing like trumpets.

Vinnie came soft as a moccasin, "Don't be afraid, Emily, it is only the fourth of July."

I did not tell that I saw it, for I thought if she felt it best to deceive, it must be that it was.

She took hold of my hand and led me into mother's room.⁴⁴

Sensitive, childlike Emily—then forty-eight years old! The perversity is not so much in Dickinson's docile consent to her sister's deception as in the eerie reproduction of the scene for the Norcrosses, drawing them in as another audience and so tripling the poet's impersonations. Is Vinnie, "soft as a moccasin," Indian or snake, consoler or seducer? This is another scene of Spenserian ambiguities. Donning her mask of Wordsworthian femininity to turn from a Sadean spectacle, Dickinson is the soft focus of row after row of observing eyes, beginning with her own. She invites the gaze of the Norcrosses so that she can watch them watching *her*—like Wilde's Gwendolen. It is a theatrical triangulation of sadomasochistic perception, part coercion, part self-immolation. A similar complex moment occurs in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (1904), when Sharpless asks the geisha's half-American child his name. Butterfly herself responds, rhetorically addressing her son and putting words of rebuke in his mouth, her voice rising to an ecstatic climax: "Answer: today my name is Trouble. But tell my father when you write to him that on the day he returns *Joy*, *Joy* will be my name." Affect snakes through person after displaced person, with Madame Butterfly cleverly gathering all the ricocheting sightlines of pity back toward herself—the only person she does *not* mention. The analogues to Dickinson's sexual personae are usually Italian. Her antecedents are not in Puritan probity but in Baroque sensationalism.

The mild personae and endearments of Dickinson's letters are an artifice of courtship, Sunday dress. Her real attitude toward her correspondents is deeply ambivalent: "Are Friends Delight or Pain?" (1199). Everything in her world is governed by a sadomasochistic dialectic. She experiences oscillations of attraction and repulsion, toward and away from people. Like Baudelaire and Swinburne, she thinks love an affliction. Emotion enervates, a waste of psychic energy for unworthy or indifferent objects. She bitterly complains of others' inability to sustain

her level of intensity: "Bind me . . . Banish . . . Slay" (1005). She would agree with Wilde, who speaks of pain as "a mode of self-realization": "Pleasure for the beautiful body, but Pain for the beautiful Soul."⁴⁵ Pain for her is mentalized sex, a Decadent specialty.

Dickinson turns Metaphysical paradox into Sadean combat, pull and counterpull. Divine love "invites—appalls" (673). Or "Hawthorne appalls, entices." Relationships are wrestling matches of domination and submission: "He was weak, and I was strong—then— / So He let me lead him in— / I was weak, and He was strong then— / So I let him lead me—Home" (190). These symmetrical reversals are like Kleist's sexual scheme in *Penthesilea*, where hero and Amazon repeatedly win and lose. A poem begins, "I rose—because He sank" (616). Dickinson sends a one-line note to her sister-in-law: "I can defeat the rest, but you defeat me, Susan." She has a pagan view of love as a hazardous sphere of primitive power. She applies antagonistic formulas to everything: "I saw two Bushes fight just now—The wind was to blame—but to see them differ was pretty as a Lawsuit."⁴⁶ Dickinson lived off her father and brother's law practice, but that lawsuits are "pretty" is something else. She applies a Wordsworthian word to Sade's wrangling nature. Like Wilde, Dickinson makes hierarchical placements, but only as a prelude to sudden inversion: "Cakes reign but a Day" (1578). Even cakes are victim to elevation and overthrow! Gwendolen, we saw, also makes cake a caste symbol. The snobbish Wildean analogy is clear in lines like, "The parasol is the umbrella's daughter / And associates with a fan" (1747). Dickinson sexualizes common objects and classifies them by gender and rank.

Because her eroticism is visual rather than sensual, Dickinson's love affairs take the form of adoration and apotheosis. Another one-line note to her sister-in-law: "Susan's Idolator keeps a Shrine for Susan." An early letter to her brother speaks of herself and Susan's sister: "Martha and I are very much together—we fill each niche of time with statues of you and Sue and in return for this, they smile beautiful smiles down from their dwelling places." These shrines and statues, along with her references to nuns and Madonnas, belong to Dickinson's heretical Catholicism. Here she is like Hawthorne, introducing Madonna and child into the Puritan *Scarlet Letter*. Her editor says of a poem composed on the fourth anniversary of Charlotte Brontë's death, "Throughout her life ED was especially sensitive to such occasions."⁴⁷ In other words, the poet had her own Calendar of Saints, holy days consecrated to deceased friends and great ones. Like the French and English Deca-

dents, she is attracted to Catholicism for its ritualism, not its morality. She zeroes right in on Roman Catholicism's pagan heart.

Dickinson is a fan, a hero-worshipper, a creator of hierarchic preeminence even when, as with Higginson, there is none. Like Shelley in *Epipsychidion*, she falls in love with charismatic personality. Like Swinburne in *Dolores* and *Faustine*, she is a sexual cultist, electing gods and saints to whom she lights votive candles. Affect is dependent on hierarchic distance, so married intimacy with either sex is impossible. The letters sternly enforce a sense of estrangement even toward her principal favorites. A note to Susan, apparently after the latter returned from a trip: "I must wait a few Days before seeing you—You are too momentous. But remember it is idolatry, not indifference."⁴⁸ Elaborate ceremonial restrictions and demarcations. Susan and Austin lived next door: good fences make good neighbors. Dickinson hopes, in a poem to Catherine Scott Anthon, whom she may have turned away at the door, that someday her loved ones will understand "For what I shunned them so": "We shun because we prize her Face / Lest sight's ineffable disgrace / Our Adoration stain" (1410). For the Romantic, reality is always vulgar. The *idea* of the beloved is superior to actual fact. Dickinson has a curatorial relation to her gods: for them to retain their glamour, she must refuse to see them. She perpetuates the divinity of her chosen ones by imprisoning them in the cell of her mental eye, from which they cannot break free into concrete presence. Seclusion is her perceptual weapon against disillusion.

Until the publication of her complete works in 1955, Emily Dickinson was the heroine of an American romance. Disappointed in love, she languished alone, striking off poems on the birds and bees and lowering gingerbread to urchins from the window. Candidates were nominated for the mysterious heartbreaker—a minister, a married man, an invalid. To their credit, Dickinson scholars quickly discerned this as reductive. Her poetry shows that men in general did not press deeply on her imaginative life. We saw how the most vivid poems show the lover dead or *in extremis*. One heterosexual fantasy takes three stanzas to describe the bad weather before getting to the cozy domestic scene: "How pleasanter—said she / Unto the Sofa opposite— / The Sleet—than May, no Thee" (589). Enter and exit the master as a stuffed divan. The sofa is simply the usual corpse planted in the parlor like *Psycho's* rocking-chair mummy. Man, always temporarily indisposed in Dickinson, is strapped into place like a convict in the electric chair. Quadriplegia and rigor mortis are her way of dealing with male suppleness.

Dickinson's contemporaries noticed her equivocations about marriage. She often addressed letters only to the wife and used showy euphemisms for the word "husband." The writer Helen Hunt Jackson says to her, "The man I live with' (I suppose you recollect designating my husband by that curiously direct phrase) is in New York." This quirk is like Lewis Carroll's pointed exclusion of husbands and brothers from dinner invitations. Dickinson aggressively elides husband into wife. One victim is Higginson, who writes his wife, "E.D. dreamed all night of you (not me) & next day got my letter proposing to come here!! She only knew of you through a mention in my notice of Charlotte Hawes."⁴⁹ The poet has evidently reconstituted her mentor, like frozen orange juice, in sexually more palatable form.

While they have discarded the popular image of the lovelorn Dickinson, many commentators still entertain the improbable idea that in her late forties she seriously considered marriage to Judge Otis P. Lord, a close friend of her late father. I cannot reproduce the name "Judge Lord" without smiling. The mere recitation of so imposing a conflation of hierarchisms must have provided the poet with exquisite shivers of Sadean subordination. I suspect Dickinson exploited Lord for a cinematic rematerialization of her father's forbidding presence. Her father (whom Higginson described as "thin dry & speechless") was her symbolic agent of *limitation*, by which she curbed and disciplined her overexpanded Romantic imagination. That she could or would have tolerated a single day of abridgment of her monastic autonomy is preposterous. Her letters to Lord are contrived and artificial. The voice belongs to her twittering feminine personae, whom she tucks in becoming postures of devotion. The Lord letters are completely blotted out in emotional intensity by those to the one person with whom she was passionately involved: her sister-in-law Susan. By every standard except the genital, the stormy thirty-five-year relationship between the two women must be called a love affair.

Susan Gilbert was Dickinson's best friend before marrying her brother Austin. Therefore the poet's claim upon Susan was the primary one. Austin's adultery may have been a side effect of the erotic intensities between his sister and wife. Dickinson's allusions to Susan begin in chatty, girlish Wordsworthianism and end in dark, charged ambivalence. In other words, their relationship recapitulates the movement from High Romanticism to Decadence. The young poet recalls kisses and confesses heartthrobs and fever: "I want to think of you each hour in the day. What you are saying—doing—I want to walk with you, as seeing yet unseen." As the years pass, tension grows. "Egypt—thou

knew'st," writes Dickinson, playing humiliated Antony to Susan's Cleopatra. Four years before her death: "With the exception of Shakespeare, you have told me of more knowledge than any one living—To say that sincerely is strange praise."⁵⁰ So Susan is also Iago to her Othello. Susan has provided her with the full range of emotional experience, from love to hate.

The most disturbing of the surviving messages to Susan: "For the Woman whom I prefer, Here is Festival—Where my Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside."⁵¹ Flesh of my flesh: the women are Romantic twins, mentally and physically one. But Susan has aggressively invaded and occupied the poet, like the vampire penetrating Christabel. She is like a commensal crab taking up residence in a live oyster or mussel. Here as elsewhere, Dickinson adapts the story of doubting Thomas, who thrusts his fingers into Christ's wounds. The self-divinizing poet advertises her love by exhibiting her cut hands, like the statue of a Catholic martyr. Surreally, it is Susan who cuts her and Susan who painfully probes the wounds she has made. And one cannot avoid the hallucinatory sexuality here, where female fingers have buried themselves through a slit in another woman's flesh. This is Dickinson at her sadomasochistic best.

In *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson* (1951), Rebecca Patterson boldly argued that the person who drove the poet into seclusion with a broken heart was the possibly bisexual Catherine Scott Anthon, a revolutionary theory even if it misunderstands Dickinson's monasticism. Unfortunately, the book preceded the first wave of Dickinson scholarship, so it misreads the poems and ends up as a fuzzy, schmaltzy novelette. Patterson sees most of Dickinson's males as Anthon in disguise. I call such literary transsexualism "sexual metathesis" and have found it in many Romantic writers. Perhaps it is operating at unsuspected moments in Dickinson's poetry. My feeling, however, is that she is more interested in masculinizing herself than in masculinizing other women. The self-projections of boy, prince, and rapist are her favorite transsexual mode. Furthermore, her erotics of Sadean hierarchy require most of her males to *be* male—but without any necessary heterosexual desire on her part. At her most rigorous, Dickinson is a Wildean Apollonian aroused by rank alone, irrespective of gender. She is one of the last scholastics of the great chain of being.

Psychobiographers like the astute John Cody recognize Dickinson's lesbian tendencies, but criticism has not assimilated such perceptions into explication of the poetry. For most scholars, lesbianism is no way to treat a lady. The long conventionalization of Dickinson is epitomized in

the early retouching of our one photograph of the homely poet, who ends up with a frilly white ruff and fluffy Jane Wyman hair. It ludicrously feminizes her uncompromising austerity. Dickinson knew she deviated from female respectability. She says, with her usual rape language: "What Soft Cherubic Creatures / These Gentlewomen are— / One would as soon assault a Plush / Or violate a Star" (401). The well-bred lady with her opulent bosom is half angel, half velvet cushion, materialism masquerading as virtue. Dickinson's niece remembered her standing in the upper hall, as women visitors departed, and saying, finger to her lips, "Listen! Hear them kiss, the traitors!"⁵² In a line like "I like a look of Agony, / Because I know it's true," she is using her cheerful sadomasochism to wipe out the empty tea-table smiles of her modish sex (241). Her homoerotic flirtations were integral to her masculine poetic identity. To love like a man is a first step away from social and biologic destiny.

Robert Graves declares: "The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse. . . . I cannot think of any true poet from Homer onwards who has not independently recorded his experience of her." Male homosexuals, he claims, cannot write great poetry, since their indifference to women severs them from the Muse or White Goddess. Women poets are crippled for the same reason: "Woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing." He denies Sappho was a lesbian, blaming the idea on "the malevolent lies of the Attic comedians."⁵³ Addled by homophobia, Graves fails to follow his interesting theory to its necessary conclusion: Sappho is a great poet *because* she is a lesbian, which gives her erotic access to the Muse. Sappho and the homosexual-tending Emily Dickinson stand alone above women poets, because poetry's mystical energies are ruled by a hierarch requiring the sexual subordination of her petitioners. Women have achieved more as novelists than as poets because the social novel operates outside the ancient marriage of myth and eroticism.

Understanding of Dickinson has been hampered by her complex use of sexual personae. Her sentimental feminine personae are paradoxically a tool of her poetic self-masculinization. For Blake, imagination must liberate itself from female nature. For Dickinson, a rare woman Romantic, that femaleness is in herself, which she must jettison to be free. By polarizing nature's powers into masculine and feminine, a duality that ensures the destruction of undefended femininity, she expels chthonian femaleness from her world. Her Brontëan detachment from her gender makes possible some of her most brilliant innovations. "Twas just this time, last year, I died"; "I heard a Fly buzz—when I

died": these incredible first lines, like the technical experiments of *Wuthering Heights*, have been produced by a displacement of point of view coming from sexual abstraction and self-estrangement. By no coincidence, it is married or marriageable women who fascinate and enamour Dickinson. The femaleness she makes external to herself she isolates and honors in others. But she must be their only spouse and child. She makes them sterile with her own desire. Her beloved women, particularly the volatile, willful Susan Gilbert Dickinson, are the avatars of the Muse whose presence is indispensable to poetry.

Even the best critical writing on Emily Dickinson underestimates her. She is frightening. To come to her directly from Dante, Spenser, Blake, and Baudelaire is to find her sadomasochism obvious and flagrant. Birds, bees, and amputated hands are the dizzy stuff of this poetry. Dickinson is like the homosexual cultist draping himself in black leather and chains to bring the idea of masculinity into aggressive visibility. In her hidden inner life, this shy Victorian spinster was a male genius and visionary sadist, a fictive sexual persona of towering force.

Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, apparently so dissimilar, are Late Romantic confederates of the American Union. Both are self-ruling hermaphrodites who will not and cannot mate. Both are homosexual voyeurs gaming at sexual all-inclusiveness. Both are perverse cannibals of others' identities, Whitman in his gluttonous self-engorgements and invasions of the chambers of the sleeping and sick, Dickinson in her ritualistic condolences and lubricious death-connoisseurship. Voyeurism, vampirism, necrophilia, lesbianism, sadomasochism, sexual surrealism: Amherst's Madame de Sade still waits for her readers to know her.

- 20 *The Ambassadors*, ed. R. W. Stallman (New York, 1960), 208, 134.
- 21 *Ambassadors*, 305. *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (Philadelphia, 1964), 9:95. *The Wings of the Dove*, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1964), 124, 61, 71, 118-19.
- 22 *Wings of the Dove*, 420, 359, 242, 241, 278, 257.
- 23 *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Oscar Cargill (New York, 1963), 34-35, 312, 111.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 227, 376, 477.
- 25 *Wings of the Dove*, 126, 331-32.
- 26 *The Bostonians*, ed. Irving Howe (New York, 1956), 37, 337, 339.
- 27 *The Triple Thinkers* (New York, 1938), 128.
- 28 *The Blithedale Romance*, 274, 273.
- 29 *Great Short Works of Henry James*, ed. Dean Flower (New York, 1966), 356, 402.
- 30 *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 117.
- 31 *Beyond Formalism*, 53.
- 32 *Great Short Works of James*, 368, 370, 381, 383.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 401, 416.
- 34 Although James was in London during the final performances of *The Importance of Being Earnest* after Wilde's arrest, Leon Edel claims James did not see it until 1909. *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York, 1987), 308. Wilde's son, Vyvyan Holland, says the first publication of the three-act play was in a limited edition in 1899. *Original Four-Act*, xii.
- 35 *Great Short Works of James*, 394, 445.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 414, 383, 413, 426. *Great Short Works of Poe*, 193. *James*, 372, 382.
- 37 *The Blithedale Romance*, 276.
- 38 *Henry James* (New York, 1916), 107-10.
- 39 *The Golden Bowl*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1963), 50.
- 40 *Ambassadors*, 279.
- 41 *Aspects of the Novel* (New York, 1927), 160-61.
- 42 "The Decay of Lying," in *Selected Writings*, 6.
- 43 *Golden Bowl*, 299.
- 44 *Wings of the Dove*, 20.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 166, 173.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 47 *Ambassadors*, 191, 274.
- 48 *Golden Bowl*, 441, 186.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 50 *Wings of the Dove*, 124.
- 51 *Golden Bowl*, 273.
- 52 *Henry James*, 112-13.
- 53 *Ambassadors*, 101. *Wings of the Dove*, 178. Robert L. Caserio drew the latter to my attention.
- 54 *Portrait*, 33. *Wings*, 298.
- 55 *Portrait*, 283. *Great Short Works of James*, 50.
- 56 *Portrait*, 448.
- 57 *Golden Bowl*, 230.
- 58 *Avowals*, 209.

CHAPTER 24. AMHERST'S MADAME DE SADE:
EMILY DICKINSON

- 1 556. All other poem numbers will be indicated in the text. Numbering follows *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, Mass., 1955). For ease of reading, I sometimes remove dashes from poem lines run in with the text.
- 2 For Dickinson's familiarity with Poe, see Jack L. Capps, *Emily Dickinson's Reading 1836-1886* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), 19, 120-21.
- 3 243, 1123, 1612, 488, 1433.
- 4 To Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 25 April 1862. *Letters*, 2:404.
- 5 "Emily Dickinson's Notation," in *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard B. Sewall (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), 81.
- 6 To Louise and Frances Norcross, 7 Oct. 1863, *Letters*, 2:427. To Abiah Root, 12 Jan. 1846, 1:24. To Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, autumn 1853, 1:264.
- 7 Aug. 1862, *Letters*, 2:414; 473-74.
- 8 To Louise and Frances Norcross, ca. 1864, *Letters*, 2:436. To Higginson, 25 April 1862, 2:404.
- 9 *Emily Dickinson* (New York, 1951), 203, 93-94.
- 10 July 1862, *Letters*, 2:412.
- 11 Quoted in letter from Higginson to his wife, 17 Aug. 1870, *Letters*, 2:475.
- 12 *Emily Dickinson*, 226.
- 13 Poems: 986, 1487, 1545, 389, 689, 652, 1466, 801, 1499, 230, 312, 497. Letters: to Mrs. Holland, 2 March 1859, 2:350. To Louise and Frances Norcross, Oct. 1871, 2:491. To Mrs. Holland, March 1866, 2:449. To her nephew Ned Dickinson, ca. 1878, 2:622. To Mrs. Holland, Aug. 1876, 2:561. To the unknown "Master," ca. 1861, 2:374.
- 14 466, 1090, 368, 980. Cf. also 683, 98.
- 15 Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (New York, 1828). George F. Whicher calls the 1847 edition of Webster's "the lexicon that she studied." *This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson* (New York, 1938), 232. I am assuming that the first edition of 1828 must also have been in her father's collection.
- 16 To Mrs. Holland, Aug. 1856, *Letters*, 2:330.
- 17 *Atlantic Crossing*, 106-07.
- 18 In a letter to Mabel Loomis Todd after Dickinson's death: "One poem only I dread a little to print—that wonderful 'Wild Nights',—lest the malignant read into it more than that virgin recluse ever dreamed of putting there." 21 April 1891. Dickinson, *Poems*, 1:180.
- 19 *Psychological Types*, 138.
- 20 *Summa Theologica*, in *Basic Writings*, 1:1057.
- 21 To Martha Gilbert Smith, ca. 1884, *Letters*, 3:823.
- 22 To Charles Brown, 23 Sept. 1819, *Letters*, 2:181.
- 23 To the Hollands, Sept. 1859, *Letters*, 2:353.
- 24 *A Room of One's Own*, 51.
- 25 To Higginson, July 1875, *Letters*, 2:542. To Louise and Frances Norcross, Aug. 1876, 2:560.
- 26 To J. Edward Austen, 16 Dec. 1816. *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London, 1952), 469.

- 27 To Higginson, 7 June 1862, *Letters*, 2:409.
 28 *Saint Genet*, 398.
 29 To Higginson, 25 April 1862, *Letters*, 2:404. To Mrs. Holland, Summer 1873, 2:508. Woolf, *Letters*, 2:312.
 30 To Higginson, 1876, *Letters*, 2:554.
 31 84, 237, 791, 425, 873, 874, 130, 163.
 32 To Higginson, July 1862, *Letters*, 2:411.
 33 The phrase, transcribed by my father from my grandmother's Ceccanese dialect, sounded like "Sola sola cómina yuke." Since the standard Italian word for owl is *gufo*, this bird must be the *allocco*, a bigger, stockier tawny mountain owl. Its Latin name, *Strix aluco*, seems to survive in the Ceccanese pronunciation.
 34 To Higginson, Aug. 1862, *Letters*, 2:415.
 35 16-17 Aug. 1870, *Letters*, 2:473, 476. Writing to his sister, Higginson jokes somewhat condescendingly about "my partially cracked poetess at Amherst." 28 Dec. 1876, 2:570.
 36 *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (London, 1928), 133-34.
 37 13 Jan. 1854, *Letters*, 1:282-83.
 38 For startling examples of the fondling and delicatessenlike carving and devouring of corpses, see Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (1886; New York, 1965), 78-82. Wilhelm Stekel, *Sadism and Masochism: The Psychology of Hatred and Cruelty*, trans. Louise Brink (1925; New York, 1953), 2:248-330.
 39 To Abbie C. Farley, Aug. 1885, *Letters*, 3:883. To Mrs. James S. Cooper, ca. 1876, 2:556.
 40 To Mrs. Holland, 1860, *Letters*, 2:369.
 41 To Higginson, June 1869, *Letters*, 2:460.
 42 To Mrs. Holland, early 1877, *Letters*, 2:572.
 43 *Letters*, 2:589-90.
 44 Early July 1879, *Letters*, 2:643.
 45 *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, in *Plays, Prose Writings, and Poems*, 287. *De Profundis*, *Letters*, 474.
 46 On Hawthorne: to Higginson, Dec. 1879, *Letters*, 2:649. To Susan Gilbert Dickinson, ca. 1878, 2:631. Prose fragment to unidentified recipient, 3:924.
 47 To Susan Gilbert Dickinson, ca. 1868, *Letters*, 2:458. To Austin Dickinson, 10 Oct. 1851, *Letters*, 1:146. Nuns and Madonnas: 648, 722, 918. Johnson, in *Poems*, 1:106.
 48 Ca. 1878, *Letters*, 2:631 (complete).
 49 *Letters*, 2:639; 2:473.
 50 27 June 1852, *Letters*, 1:215; 27 Nov.-Dec. 1854, 1:310; ca. 1874, 2:533. From *Antony and Cleopatra* (III.xi:56-61). Ca. 1882, *Letters*, 3:733 (complete).
 51 Ca. 1864, *Letters*, 2:430.
 52 Emily Dickinson, *The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime*, intro. Martha Dickinson Bianchi (Boston, 1915), xv.
 53 *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (New York, 1966), 14, 24, 446-47.

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