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# **Emily Dickinson's Poetic Mapping of the World**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is of my own composition, and that it contains no material previously submitted for the award of any other degree. The work reported in this thesis has been executed by myself, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Li-Hsin Hsu

## Abstract

This thesis investigates Emily Dickinson's spatial imagination. It examines how her poetic landscape responds to the conditions of modernity in an age of modernization, expansionism, colonialism and science. In particular, I look at how the social and cultural representations of nature and heaven are revised and appropriated in her poems to challenge the hierarchical structure of visual dominance embedded in the public discourses of her time. Although she seldom travelled, her writing oscillates between experiential empiricism, sensationalistic reportage, and ecological imagination to account for the social and geographical transition of a rapidly industrialized and commercialized society. The notion of transcendence, progress and ascension in Enlightenment and Transcendentalist writings, based upon technological advancement and geographical expansion, characterized the social and cultural imagination of her time. Alternatively, an increasingly cosmopolitan New England registers a poetic contact zones as well as a Bakhtinian carnivalesque space, in which colonial relations can be subverted, western constructions of orientalism challenged, and capitalist modernity inflected. Dickinson voiced in her poems her critical reception of such a phantasmagoric site of a modern world. I explore how her cartographic projection registers the conflicting nature of modernity, while resists the process of empowerment pursued by her contemporary writers, presenting a more dynamic poetic vision of the world.

In the first chapter, I explore her use of empirical mapping as a poetic approach to challenge the Enlightenment notion of progress and modernity. I look at her poems of social transitions, especially her poems of the Bible, the train, the pastoral, and the graveyard, to show how she addresses the issue of modernization. Her visit to Mount Auburn and the rural landscape movement are explored to show her complex poetic response toward modernity. In the second chapter, I focus on her poems of emigration and exploration to see how she appropriates frontier metaphors and exploratory narratives that dominated the discourses of national and cultural projects of her time. The colonial expeditions and national expansionism of her time are examined to show her revision and deconstruction of quest narratives. In the third chapter, I examine her commercial metaphors in relation to cosmopolitanism. I discuss her metaphors of tourism to see how her poems are based upon the notion of consumption as a poetic mode that is closely related to the violence of global displacement and imperial contestation. Her tourist experiences and reading of travel writings will be examined to show her critical response towards the dominant visual representations of her time. In the last chapter, I explore her poems of visitation and reception to show her elastic spatial imagination through her notion of neighbouring and compound vision. In particular, I discuss her poetic reception and appropriation of the theories of Edward Hitchcock and Thomas De Quincey. I conclude suggesting that her spatial imagination reveals her poetic attempt to account for the conditions of modernity.

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## Introduction

### Emily Dickinson's Poetic Mapping of the World

#### “You've seen Balloons set - Haven't You?": Balloons and Battlefields

Generally speaking, Emily Dickinson does not like height in her poems.<sup>1</sup> One poem about balloons, “You've seen Balloons set - Haven't You?” (Fr730),<sup>2</sup> reveals her perception of ascension as a precarious business:

You've seen Balloons set - Hav'nt You?  
So stately they ascend -  
It is as Swans - discarded You,  
For Duties Diamond -

Their Liquid Feet go softly out  
Opon a Sea of Blonde -  
They spurn the Air, as t'were too mean  
For Creatures so renowned -

Their Ribbons just beyond the eye -  
They struggle - some - for Breath -  
And yet the Crowd applaud, below -  
They would not encore - Death -

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

The Crowd - retire with an Oath -  
The Dust in Streets - go down -  
And Clerks in Counting Rooms  
Observe - “'Twas only a Balloon” -

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<sup>1</sup> All my quotes of Dickinson's poems are based on R. W. Franklin's variorum edition. Thomas H. Johnson's manuscript variant book are also consulted for additional textual information.

<sup>2</sup> The following abbreviations are used to refer to the writings of Emily Dickinson:  
Fr *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998. Citation by poem number.  
L *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Citation by letter number.

For Dickinson, and for most of her contemporaries, balloons were no longer a novelty in the nineteenth century, but they were indeed gilded creatures, retaining their charm for the popular association of flying with immortality. As an 1851 article “The Pleasures and Perils of Ballooning” in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* remarked:

It would appear that, in almost every age, from time immemorial, there has been a strong feeling in certain ambitious mortals to ascend among the clouds ... But the element of air has hitherto been too subtle for all his projects, and defied his attempts at conquest ... there is every physical indication that it is not intended man should ascend as its lord. Traveling and voyaging man must be content with earth and ocean; the sublime highways of air, are, to all appearance, denied to his wanderings. (96-97)

Twenty years later, J. R. Thompson still compared ballooning to the fall of Icarus, lamenting the denial of flight to humans in *Scribner's Monthly*: “The air still refuses, as it did of old, to be made a highway for other created beings than the fowls thereof” before he moved on to give examples of several balloon-related tragedies (385). Several of Dickinson's poems are about this “sublime highway of air”, and some, like this balloon poem, respond to this cultural imagination in flying in a similarly cautious manner. Ascension might seem a signal of improvement from the perspective of science and religion. From the pragmatic perspective of economics, however, it is a form of inflation. Robert Weisbuch calls the fall of the balloon in “You've seen Balloons set - Hav'nt You?” “the emblem of tragic action” (1972 42). Renée Bergland further remarks that the poem “discusses the emptiness of witnessing imperial spectacles of violence from afar” (2008 153). It appears that for Dickinson, an overlooking position is often associated with violence, death or even mass murder. In “My friend attacks my friend!” (Fr103), written before the Civil War, glory is achieved through genocide, and one's commanding position becomes a vantage point for military execution:

My friend attacks my friend!  
Oh Battle picturesque!

Then I turn Soldier too,  
 And he turns Satirist!  
 How martial is this place!  
 Had I a mighty gun  
 I think I'd shoot the human race  
 And then to glory run!

From the uplifting view to the disturbing murder scene, Dickinson's poem conjures up a grotesque scenario of disoriented individuals in a spinning battleground of geographical and ideological reshuffling.

Brita Lindberg-Seyersted notes that Dickinson frequently fuses colloquial speech that contains “imperatives, exclamations and questions” and “contraction of verb forms” with formal writing such as “archaic-literary inversion” that inverts sentence elements, as shown in lines such as “For Duties Diamond -” in the first poem and “Oh Battle picturesque!” in the second poem above. Such rhetorical-syntactic structures in her poems, Lindberg-Seyersted states, “are conspicuous signs of a poetic language that refuses to be tamed and leveled” (214 & 227-8). Dickinson's fusion of conversational and literary styles seems to be in accordance with her blending of various spatial representations in these poems – the glorious, imperial and picturesque with the martial, dusty and mundane. As Inder Nath Kher notes, Dickinson “creates the landscape of beauty out of her own landscape of terror ... for whom terror and beauty are one” (21). “In her poetic world”, Kher observes, “the agreeable and harsh edges of existence intermingling freely” (21). Dickinson had taken relish in creating her poetic landscape through the intermingling of seemingly incongruous poetic spaces. Robert E. Abrams calls such mixture of topography “negative geography”, space “which constitutes the dark, alien aspect of all positively conceived landscapes and spectacles”, space that subtly alters “everything encountered and known” (2).<sup>3</sup> As Abrams explains, “aesthetic technique can invoke a

<sup>3</sup> Abrams' “negative geography”, however, should be differentiated from Kher's so-called “the landscape of absence” in Dickinson's poetry, which stresses the interaction between the eyesight and the insight. In *The Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson's Poetry*, Kher argues that for Dickinson “the presence is presence only insofar as it is absence, because it is beyond scientific verification. The complexity and richness of this presence have induced me to call Emily Dickinson's poetry the landscape of absence: the phrase itself is paradoxical and suggests something tangibly intangible, concrete yet vanishing, near and remote, apprehensible and

space of minimal spectatorial mastery within which the eye fails to find definitive orientation and bearing” (4). Dickinson's fusion of terror and beauty, the positive and the negative also indicates such an intentional obscuration of visual mastery, which creates a poetic space of “minimal spectatorial mastery.”<sup>4</sup> Her landscape of disorientation resembles Abrams' “negative geography” in antebellum literature. Her perception of a modern world shows an optical experience of zooming and focusing from fuzzy illusion into disillusioned lucidity.

In the thesis, I intend to explore the spatial fusion or obscuration in Dickinson's poem. I suggest that her poetic landscape embodies her ambiguous attitude towards the notions of mobility, progress and modernity, concepts that characterized the social confidence of her time. Robin Peel has pointed out the prominent use of balloons during the Civil War “for observation and reconnaissance”, a fact that Dickinson might have been aware of (208). In her discussion of balloon photography and Dickinson's aerial perspective, Renée Bergland further asserts that the aerial photograph in Dickinson's time “fails to provide a coherent aerial perspective, or indeed, any sort of a coherent image” (2008 150). As Bergland argues, Dickinson's balloon poems show such incoherence of aerial perspectives by “represent[ing] violence and the overlooking of violence, death and disembodiment” (2008 153). Dickinson's poetic landscape highlights such issues of technological and human limitation. In his discussion of the threat of technology in William Shakespeare's play

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elusive ...” (47-8). Abrams focuses instead on the instability of one's sense of place in nineteenth century novels. Abrams' “negative geography”, as he explains in *Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature: Topographies of Skepticism*, emphasizes the emergence of “an alternative, subtler, more freely floating antithesis to mapped, domesticated space, not evident in prior painting and cartography” in antebellum American literature (5).

<sup>4</sup> The discussion of Dickinson's refraining from “visual mastery” here differs from Domhnall Mitchell's association of Dickinson's speakers as viewers of exclusive privilege with her class. Mitchell convincingly argues that the speaker's roles in Dickinson's poems are generally observers rather than participants, a gesture that shows the privileged social background of the poet (2006 107). As will be discussed in the first chapter, Mitchell argues that Dickinson's sense of her superiority allowed her to “enjoy the train as a spectacle” (1998 18). See also Mitchell's comment on Dickinson's preference for window views (2002 207). I agree that Dickinson's positioning of her speaker reflects the distinguished social standing of her family. However, my thesis proposes to see Dickinson's spatial imagination, especially her obviation of visual dominance and the lack of a seemingly more “active” speaker in her poem, as an attempt to shift the focus from man to nature, redressing the overemphasis in the intellectual discourses of her time on the association between mobility, progress and modernity.

*The Tempest*, Jonathan Bate comments on Walter Benjamin's "dictum" that "there is no document of civilization which is not also a document of barbarism" (76). Dickinson's poems about the danger of height and a "picturesque" battle view seem to foresee the critique of progressive thought embedded in Enlightenment by twentieth century scholars such as Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.<sup>5</sup> Instead of expanding her poetic horizon to the point of transcendence, her balloon and battle poems show the expansion and contraction to the point of explosion, fracture and dissipation.

### **"Done with the Chart!": Dickinson's Poetic Mapping and Travel**

Despite a strong sense of disillusion conveyed in these poems, Dickinson remained enchanted by the modern world. Her speaker never foregoes the transformative possibility of exploration, if not through transcendence and ascension. In particular, she was deeply interested in the exotic world outside New England. As Jane Donahue Eberwein notes, "Dickinson loved geography and found the world fascinating – particularly its exotic reaches" (1987 109). Despite her limited travel experience, Dickinson's poems show her relish for the foreign and the exotic in her rich geographical vocabulary. Her poems exhibit the ambition of a global trekker, referring to more than 160 places, covering areas from the North Pole to the Austronesian islands. Judith Farr also points out that the poet was "profoundly attracted to the foreign and especially to the semitropical or tropical climes that she read about in *Harper's* and the *Atlantic Monthly*" (2004 99). In many poems, Dickinson's speaker is eager to reach out for otherworldly existence. In "Wild nights - Wild nights!" (Fr269), for example, the speaker strives for the "port" of Eden with her "Compass" and "Chart":

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<sup>5</sup> In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate notes that the notion of Enlightenment is a liberating program with enslaving effect. He refers to the essay of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer "The Concept of Enlightenment" who state that "The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy" (76-77).

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

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

Rowing in Eden -  
 Ah - the Sea!  
 Might I but moor - tonight -  
 In thee!

As Farr suggests, Dickinson's Eden poems show her fascination with Latin America exotica (1992 231).<sup>6</sup> This combination of exoticism and eroticism in the poem transforms sexual passion into an oceanic enterprise. In another poem "I never saw a Moor." (Fr800), the metaphor of travel is evoked again to depict the exotic site of heaven:

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

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

As will be explored further in the first and second chapters, Dickinson would have been aware of the significance of exploration and travel in an age of modernization and expansionism. Images such as compasses, charts, spots and checks all indicate her potential interest in and response to the travel fashion of her time to see, to explore, and perchance to purchase and to own. Her spiritual quest reflects the cartographic ambition of oceanic explorers, who, as Charles W. J. Withers states, "led

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<sup>6</sup> The imagery of the sea in the poem, Judith Farr notes, reminds one of the seas "that separate or unite Charlotte Brontë's heroines and their 'masters'" (1992 229).

the reordering of geographical space in the Enlightenment by using maps as a technology of relative spatial knowledge” (2007 102). This scientific urge to impose order and reason upon the unknown territory is also prevalent in Dickinson's poems. Mapping, as David N. Livingstone and Withers point out, served as the emblem of certainty by reducing the world's geographical complexity to cartographic clarity (1999 121). Dickinson's poems adopt this instrument of Enlightenment dexterously to conduct various poetic exploration.

Paradoxically, in both poems, empirical tools and modern transportation are eventually discarded in this spiritual expedition. The undetermined location of Eden and heaven, suggested by the hypothetical tone of “Were I”, “should be” and “Might I” in the first poem, and the three “nevers” in the second poem, further renders the use of charts and compasses not only dispensable, but also disputable. The adoption or obviation of travel metaphors informs Dickinson's ambivalence toward a sense of place. Although her poetic mapping echoes the Enlightenment spirit of her time to explore, to survey and to progress, she seems hesitant to embrace the sanguine future that Enlightenment thinking and modernization had promised for her contemporaries. As a scientific discipline, geography is often used in Dickinson's poems to highlight the inadequacy of science to equip modern individuals for spiritual quests.<sup>7</sup> Her attitude toward the notion of human progress remains ambiguous. Empiricism and expansionism, based upon knowledge of geography and the world, seem to suggest human limitation rather than advancement in her poems.

My thesis examines this ambivalence in Dickinson by looking at her spatial imagination. In particular, I propose to explore her poetic landscape in terms of four scales – the social, the national, the cosmopolitan and the global. In his discussion of

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<sup>7</sup> Dickinson was fascinated by the technological advancement of her time. Marianne Erickson notes that “Dickinson was not only aware of, but positively influenced by nineteenth-century progress in science and technology” (1996 48). Scholars such as Nina Baym, Hiroko Uno and Robin Peel also show how Dickinson adopts scientific methods to solve poetic problems. Baym explores Dickinson's use of scientific imagery in her poems in relation to the scientific discourses of her time (2001). Uno examines Dickinson's notions of nothingness in relation to the scientific inventions of her time (2002). Peel further proposes reading Dickinson as “a concealed natural philosopher/scientist, using parallel methodologies and inspired by the same questions as her contemporary scientists” (2010).

geography and the production of space in American Literature, Hsuan L. Hsu emphasises the significance of nineteenth-century authors in reshaping “our senses of domestic, urban, regional, national, and global belonging”. As Hsu remarks, their writings contributed to the production and compartmentalization of space; however, as Hsu notes, these literary texts are “as 'double-edged' as scale itself” by “expressing anxieties, contradictions, and possibilities situated at the boundaries between different scales” (15). Hsu uses Dickinson's “Volcanoes be in Sicily” (Fr1691), a poem I will discuss in the third chapter, as an example to demonstrate the “malleable scales” of metaphors (18-19). I propose to explore such a mutable sense of place and space in Dickinson's poems. Her optical oscillation between the heavenly and the earthly, and her poetic appropriation of travel metaphors could be taken as both symptomatic and diagnostic of a modernized society, when overwhelmingly heterogeneous images of the world were displayed as a result of prevailing practices of photographic survey, geographical exploration and scientific advancement.

During Dickinson's formative years, discourses of progress and mobility were growing popular in the public consciousness. As Susan Roberson notes, a “national narrative of progress, a Manifest Destiny, was clearly tied in American minds to mobility and movement and was made evident by the territories claimed and settled” (3); however, as Roberson observes, “a narrative of domesticity” was also emerging “as an answer to the unsettling of society” in antebellum America: “a cult of domesticity and stressed sessility, immobility, and the interior recesses of the self, competed for women's ideas of themselves and the nation they inhabited” (3-4). Although Roberson's discussion applies mainly to the antebellum women writers in mobility, this developed cult of domesticity, sessility, immobility, and interiority is also visible in the work of Dickinson, a poet famous for her reluctance to travel in her later life. Her poetic landscape is often ambiguously placed between domesticity and mobility, progression and regression, creating spatial effects distinctly different from the conventional representations of self, home, nation and the world in the nineteenth century. While Robertson's observation is based on the narratives of female travel writers, pioneers, war reporters, slaves or refugees, Robert E. Abrams

also sees the emergence of “negative geography” in antebellum American art and thought, embedded in the works of mostly male writers, as challenging “official geographical premises” and “the logic of the scale map”. As Abrams argues, such “negative” topography marked “a ubiquitous and pervasive rather than a westwardly receding limit to the settlement of interpretative and linguistic power in an era officially committed to the doctrine of 'Manifest Destiny' and to the nationalization of alien land” (5). Despite her lack of travel, Dickinson's poetic landscape presents a similar challenge to such compartmentalized space and narratives of progress and mobility. Her spatial imagination is full of ambiguities that could be read as part of the topographical imagination of her time to address the issue of space and one's sense of place.

By examining her poetic mapping of the world, the thesis intends to present a Dickinson that is more worldly, outward-looking and cosmopolitan, while necessarily tentative and circumspect. Dickinson reconfigures her contemporary world, a world of extreme mobility, into a snapshot of her poetic landscape, and I explore the world view presented through these snapshots in her poems. I argue that her poems resist a visual overview of the world, inscribed by the Enlightenment notion of an encyclopaedic knowledge of the world, and embedded in the Transcendentalist belief in one's expansion in and unity with nature and God. Instead, her poems disclose a more cyclical view of history, and a more cautious and sceptical approach toward mobility and human progress. In particular, her poems develop a heightened sensitivity towards space by dwelling upon transition and displacement. Her portrayal of these transient and elastic spatial relations reveals a critical reception of visual dominance, which played a fundamental role in not only the philosophy of Enlightenment and Transcendentalism, but also in the travel and scientific discourses of her time. I suggest that her poems register the conflicting nature of modernity, and her spatial imagination informs her poetic involvement in the conditions of modernization in which rootless individuals strive for self-preservation as well as for social development.

The intention of the thesis to investigate Dickinson's spatial imagination demands some explanation here. Dickinson has been considered a more private poet, whose poems mainly concern the interiority of the mind. Her travel metaphors, in particular, are often associated with her exploration of one's interiority. Jane Donahue Eberwein, for instance, remarks that for Dickinson "travel is always a metaphor for pilgrimage and that the goal is forever beyond mortal circumference". Her journeys, Eberwein argues, are regarded as "danger-fraught venturing into the unknown" and "every kind of travel" is presented "as a prefigurement of death" (1987 110 & 209).<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Patterson, similarly, states that Dickinson would use maps and geographical facts "symbolically to identify and order the more subtle elements of the mind's world" (141). Scholars such as Richard Wilbur and Timothy Morris also claim that her work is mainly directed inward.<sup>9</sup> However, her exploration of the interiority is also intricately linked with her reception and perception of the external world. Robin Peel states that Dickinson's frequent use of sailing and sea images can sometimes "express delight in the natural treasures of the world" instead of representing "a spiritual allegory" (212). Shira Wolosky also proposes looking at Dickinson's poems in her cultural moment, claiming that her texts are "scenes of cultural crossroads" (2002 138). David S. Reynolds similarly considers Dickinson as a "private-public poet" who is "both inscribing her culture and personalizing it" (2002 189). Dickinson's poems reveal not only her sharp awareness of, but also her consistent response to and potential appropriation of the social, cultural and material elements of her time.

Most scholarship has recognized Dickinson's profound involvement in the world, despite her seclusion in her later life. As Jay Leyda notes, her poems and letters are deeply rooted "in national and community life, in family crisis, and in her daily reading" (xxi). Cynthia Griffin Wolff also asserts that her poems depict "a compelling interior drama" that "has become central to an American life as we understand it" (9).

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Donahue Eberwein argues that Dickinson's poetic perspective is mainly "vertical", and "more attuned to speculations on immortality" (1998 42). For Eberwein, "it is futile to treat Dickinson as other than a religious poet" (1987 40).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wilbur, for example, emphasizes the "truthfulness" of her exploration of "the facts of her inner experience" (2008 10). Timothy Morris also argues that "there are hardly any uses in her poetry of the language of other poets" despite her constant references to literature (2008 40).

“Dickinson's private lyrical voices”, Domhnall Mitchell further argues, “are fundamentally social” (2000 170). Nevertheless, as many critics point out, her retreat in her late life is also symptomatic of her reaction against the oppression of society or the masses. For Helen McNeil, Dickinson “chose her 'difference' above a compromised success” by giving up hopes of a posterity. She “used the absence” of “fame, success and publication” to become a free writer. “This hopelessness”, McNeil argues, “is essential to her truth-telling” (36-7). Lyndall Gordon further considers the New England society oppression and Dickinson's withdrawal as resilience against “a society with a habit of fundamentalist bullying” (66). Alternatively, Betsy Erkkila sees Dickinson's withdrawal as a dedicating gesture to art “as the privileged mode of social transformation” (1992 73). The poet's retreat, for Erkkila, was a sceptical reaction towards “the democratic masses” and “utopian social reform” (1992 73). Mitchell further suggests that Dickinson's refusal to travel might be a way to cope with “[t]he rapid progress of industrialization and urbanization, the accelerated intake of millions of immigrants with their alien cultural practices” that would threaten the established order (2000 99). For Alfred Habegger, Dickinson's privileged life accounts for her lack of interest in politics (161 & 211). As Habegger notes, she “turned from nature and the outdoors to the conservatory of the imagination” (161). As shown by these critics, Dickinson's withdrawal shows a complex response towards the outside world. She seems to be both too privileged and too deprived to fit in a New England society that demanded various degrees of compromises. Dickinson's reclusion from the outside world would come to define her as a more passive, reactive or even agoraphobic poet.

In this thesis, I intend to explore the potentially more proactive elements in Dickinson's poems, examining her subtle but active participation in the intellectual discourses of her time, despite, or exactly because of her reclusive tendency. I agree with most recent critics that Dickinson's poems are profoundly shaped by her social experience as a privileged, upper-middle-class woman in a distinguished Whig family; I aim at seeing how her poems reflect her worldliness, particularly her share of concerns with the intellectuals of her time, when so many of her close

correspondences, such as T. W. Higginson, Samuel Bowles and Helen hunt Jackson, were social commentators, political activists or world travellers. By looking at a number of her poems that can be read as social reportage or cultural commentaries, I propose showing a Dickinson that is more engaged in the development of modernization in the mid-nineteenth century. It seems that when Dickinson was physically retreating from society, she was most mentally engaged with it, and her spatial imagination discloses such an ambiguous interplay between the private and the public, between invisibility and performativity.

In particular, Dickinson seems to feel more comfortable at the borders. She claims in an 1862 letter to Higginson, the then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and her spiritual mentor that “I could not stop that – My Business is Circumference –” (L268), an enigmatic message that is often interpreted in relation to the sphere of interiority, such as the mind, imagination, poetry, death, infinity and God. Critics such as Joanne Feit Diehl notes that Dickinson's notion of centre and circumference, distinctly different from Wordsworth's, indicates “the core of her creative self and the extent to which her poetry can carry her” (56). Judith Farr similarly remarks that circumference is one of Dickinson's metaphors for poetry or poetic imagination (1992 29 & 98). Jane Donahue Eberwein further reads Dickinson's imagery of circle and circumference as a metaphysical venture outside the boundary of the consciousness into death (1987 164-65). Inder Nath Kher, alternatively, takes an existential-aesthetic stand, regarding Dickinson's circumference as a notion that can “encompass both the inner and outer limits of man's being” (37). Charles R. Anderson, alternatively, considers her circumference not to be a boundary, but the limitless sphere of “infinity” (59), “a symbol for all that is outside” (55). “Her centre”, Anderson explains, “is the inquiring mind whose business is circumference, intent upon exploring the whole infinity of the universe that lies before her” (55). Josef Raab also argues that circumference is both internal and external, at work both inside the imagination and outside (284). Paul Giles further remarks that Dickinson's idea of 'circumference’ “implies a global rather than just a transcendentalist consciousness” (2011 1). In his discussion of Dickinson's seeing “New Englandly”

(Fr256), a poem I will discuss in the fourth chapter, Giles explains that it “reinscribe[s] New England within a global circuit, where the rotation of the Earth renders all vantage points equally refractory” (2011 19). In this thesis, I would also like to examine such a Dickinson who intends to dwell on the borders of both the society and the globe, exploring the infinite universe before her.

Paradoxically, this infinite and unstable universe for Dickinson is best conceptualized through the notion of boundary and limitation. In one letter to Dr. and Mrs J. G. Holland, possibly written around the same time as her “circumference” letter,<sup>10</sup> Dickinson states that “Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can't stop for that! *My* business is to love ... '*My* business is to *sing*'” (L269). Dickinson seems to enjoy imagining her isolation as an insignificant individual facing an unsympathetic community that would “laugh at” her. The same Dickinson would still write to Mrs J. G. Holland two decades later that “The Bible dealt with the Centre, not the Circumference –” (L950). As Helen McNeil points out, Dickinson perceives the Bible “as largely a repository of untruths” and “a survival from an early human era” (106). Dickinson's interest in the peripheral, instead of the central could be seen as her attempt to explore the transition into a modern era. Robert E. Abrams points out that “the question of an absent communal focal center within a forever shifting and incalculable reality rises to the surface” in antebellum American literature (15). The gesture of positioning throughout Dickinson's poetic career also characterizes her notion of the role of the poet as both a pioneer and an outsider who deals with the circumference. For Dickinson, poetry as the real centre of her life is composed of peripheral spaces.

This thesis explores Dickinson's poetic frontier, her business of circumference, in the light of modernization and expansionism during her lifetime. Antebellum America was not only industrialized and commercialized at a dizzying speed, but its fluctuating boundaries also became emblematic of modernity, within which

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<sup>10</sup> As Johnson comments, although this letter is only dated by conjecture, its reference to the Civil War and the close parallel of its sentences to Dickinson's “circumference” letter to Higginson earlier shows that Dickinson in 1862 “felt that her business was to sing” (1958 413).

individuals experienced excessive geographical shuffling. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner remarked retrospectively that American development could be explained through “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement, westward” (25). From colonial exploration to the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1869, America was radically reshaped by industrialism, expansionism and capitalism. Dickinson's poetic emphasis on questing, mapping and positioning reflects the unstable social and geographical boundaries in America. By addressing the issue of travelling, boundary-making and setting, Dickinson's poems respond promptly to such tumultuous geo-political atmospheres.

In reality, Dickinson had been deeply involved in the modern world. She received the news of the outside world from her voracious reading of travelogues and periodicals. Apart from regional and national papers such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Springfield Republican*, and *Scribner's Monthly*,<sup>11</sup> she had been interested in travel references and travelogues that had permeated the writings of the Transcendentalists and Romanticists, who were, as Wai Chee Dimock puts it, “internationalists to a fault” (2007 163). Maritime adventures and colonial history, depicted in popular adventure and travel stories such as Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* and *Columbus: His Life and Voyages*,<sup>12</sup> are frequently alluded to in Dickinson's poems and letters. Her reception of scientific and aesthetic theories, such as Edward Hitchcock's *The Religion of Geology* and Thomas De Quincey's theories about science and the human brain would also have helped the poet imagine the connection between oneself and the infinite cosmic world. Furthermore, Dickinson had enjoyed several tourist experiences during her formative years, visiting quite a few metropolitan cities on the east coast, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington D. C.<sup>13</sup> As will be examined in this thesis, her visits to Mount Auburn, a municipal

<sup>11</sup> On the Dickinsons' subscription to newspapers and periodicals, see Jack L. Capps' *Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836-1886* (128).

<sup>12</sup> On Dickinson's references to Washington Irving's “The Life and Voyages of Columbus”, see Cynthia L. Hallen's “Brave Columbus, Brave Columba: Emily Dickinson's Search for Land” (1996 171-174).

<sup>13</sup> Hiroko Uno offers a detailed picture of Dickinson's Boston experience in *Emily Dickinson Visits Boston* (1990). On Dickinson's trip to Philadelphia, see Georgiana Strickland's “Emily Dickinson's

cemetery in Boston, the concert of Jenny Lind in Northampton, and the Boston Chinese Museum in antebellum America all provided Dickinson the most direct access to distinctively different cultures from the old worlds. She also corresponded with friends who travelled frequently. Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Springfield Republican*, for example, published the account of his transcontinental trips in *Our New West* (1869), while taking several journeys to Europe for health reasons.<sup>14</sup> Helen Hunt Jackson, another frequent traveller and Dickinson's childhood acquaintance, brought Dickinson her own book about her domestic travel, *Bits of Travel at Home* (1878), during her visit to Amherst.<sup>15</sup> Dickinson's close correspondence with them made the multifarious world systems outside New England more accessible to her. Their travel experiences and social observations offered her glimpses of an increasingly cosmopolitan New England and a rapidly expanding America.

The spatial imagination in Dickinson's works shows her keen observation of such a vibrant world. Her poetic speaker is often a traveller, both internal and external, seeking both the truth of the world and the mind. Eric Leed states that for the modern people, travel "is an expression of freedom and an escape from necessity and purpose" – "a pleasure and a means to pleasure"; for the ancient travel is "a suffering, even a penance" (5). Erik Cohen further differentiates pilgrimages from modern tourism: "they involve movement in opposite directions: in pilgrimage from the periphery toward the cultural centre, in modern tourism, away from the cultural centre into the periphery"; however, as Cohen notes, "the *roles* of pilgrim and tourist are often combined, particularly in a modern world" (34). Dickinson's traveller persona seems to move in-between by travelling both to and away from the centre. She could be a pleasure-seeking traveller or a suffering pilgrim, a literary tourist and a religious quester, and often both in one poem. By blending the ancient and the modern, the pious and the commercial types of travel, her poetry reveals a tension

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Philadelphia" (2004).

<sup>14</sup> About the illness of Samuel Bowles, see George Mamunes's "*So has a Daisy vanished*": *Emily Dickinson and Tuberculosis* (62).

<sup>15</sup> Helen Hunt Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home* (1878) is in the Dickinson Collection at the Houghton Library now, inscribed "Emily from the Author" by Susan Dickinson. See Jack L. Capps' *Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836-1886* (178).

between the freedom of a modern individual to travel and to explore, and the violence and hardship one experiences in the process of displacement.

As will be examined in the first and second chapters, her spatial imagination is intricately interwoven with the notion of travel, mapping and boundary-crossing. Her poems probe the uneasy relationship between the centre and the periphery, the empirical and the religious through her social, natural and spiritual mapping of the world. Contrary to her poetic appetite for mapping and questing was her reluctance to travel in her life. In an 1856 letter to her friend Elizabeth Holland, she commented on the traumatic experience of moving three blocks from the house on West Street back to the Homestead (Habegger 340): “I cannot tell you how we moved. I had rather not remember ... I can't help laughing at my own catastrophe ... It is a kind of *gone-to-Kansas* feeling ... without doubt I was a party of emigrants!” (L182). In an 1869 letter to Higginson, she again presented herself as “an emigrant” who dwelt alone. In the same letter to Higginson, she refused his invitation to Boston, declaring that “I do not cross my Father's ground to any House or town” (L330).<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Dickinson frequently identified herself with emigrants and exiles. During her stay in Boston for her eye treatment in 1864-5, when she was banned by the doctor from reading books for eight months, she also compared herself to an exile in Siberia (Lundin 130).<sup>17</sup> Calling the Bible the centre (L950) and her business “circumference” (L268), as shown earlier, Dickinson's philosophy of art and life reminds one of what Eric Cohen names an “existential mode” of travelling, in which the person is attached to an “elective” spiritual centre external to his or her culture of origin, living in exile as a matter of choice (42-43). However, as Edward Said comments on the nature of exile, it “is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one's native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that lost is inherent in the very existence of both” (189). Dickinson's spatial imagination demonstrates such a profound but subtle involvement in her native land

<sup>16</sup> As Thomas H. Johnson points out, this was her third refusal to visit Higginson in Boston. In the same letter, she invited Higginson to come to Amherst for the second time (1958 460).

<sup>17</sup> Cynthia Griffin Wolff points out that Dickinson had enjoyed a vigorous social life from a young age (105-136). The location of the Homestead, where the Dickinsons lived, was central to the town, with the new railway just a block away.

and the world, which in turn would shape her as a poet of the world.

### **“Daffodil delight but/ Him it duplicate -”: Dickinson and the Male Tradition**

It is instructive to understand Dickinson's spatial imagination by looking at her literary responses to her contemporary Romanticists and Transcendentalists. Despite Dickinson's admiration for several such writers of her time, she also seems wary of their philosophical quests for self-reliance or self-empowerment in nature. Robert Weisbuch observes that Dickinson identifies with her contemporaries American Romantics such as Emerson and Melville (9). Weisbuch argues that like them, Dickinson is an outsider, a quester and a rebel against “the life-draining elements of her culture” (7). Inder Nath Kher regards Dickinson as “a true existentialist-romanticist” who “gazes upon the world so intensely, and encounters its mystery and paradoxes so passionately, that the whole external world becomes a concrete metaphor of her life and art” (62).<sup>18</sup> Richard E. Brantley further focuses on Dickinson's influence by the Anglo-American intellectual tradition, stating that her poems “gather momentum from the empirical philosophy, evangelical religion, and Anglo-American Romanticism of her recent past” (2004 3). Undeniably, Dickinson's quest poems are closely related to the literary tradition of Romanticism; nevertheless, her poetics of doubt would also call the fundamental belief of the Romanticists and Transcendentalists in a transcendental reality into question, particularly conventions associated with Christianity, patriarchy, and nationalism. Joanne Feit Diehl differentiates Dickinson from her male literary precursors, stating that the “naturalizing Romanticism” of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Emerson is a tradition “that Dickinson found at once liberating and impossible to share” (9).<sup>19</sup> For

<sup>18</sup> Fred D. White, on the other hand, claims that her poems obviate “a transcendent reality” that characterizes Romantic poetry. “Dickinson’s speakers”, White notes, “ironically are most secure with the doubts and uncertainties of their flawed and finite existence” (2002 95).

<sup>19</sup> Critics have paid much attention to Dickinson's ambiguous relationship with her Romanticist and Transcendentalist precursors. Harold Bloom argues that Dickinson is an agonist against “the whole of tradition” and particularly the Bible and romanticism, who “takes care to differ from any male model, and places us upon warning” (2008 2). Judith Farr suggests similarly that Dickinson's poems reflect her “clear understanding of the Romantic mode”, and then deliberately differ from it with her “peculiar modernist pessimism” (2004 134). Cynthia Griffin Wolff also remarks that Dickinson's work “had always stood outside of the dominant transcendentalist movement” (428). Dickinson's poetic quest, Gary Lee Stonum further suggests, differs from Wordsworth, Hegel,

Diehl, Dickinson's awareness of herself as a female poet isolates her from the male tradition (11). Margaret Homans similarly suggests that Dickinson's "feminine identity" might explain her "readiness to object to" the dualistic language embedded in the tradition of male dominance" (201). Homans argues that Dickinson recognizes "language's fictiveness"; with the manipulation of her linguistic power, Dickinson "disrupts traditional relations between the sexes" and discards "the idea of dominance altogether" (201-212).

Homans' de-constructionist reading of Dickinson is further explored by critics such as Helen McNeil and Mary Loeffelholz. McNeil also claims that "Dickinson's womanliness" is essential in understanding her poetic accomplishment, and "her poetics of difference" (30).<sup>20</sup> McNeil suggests that Dickinson shifts the centre of American poetry from "a Romantic idea of self as developed through the holistic poetics of Emerson and Whitman" towards "a poetic of knowing" (32). Loeffelholz further points out that Dickinson shifts attention away from "the dualistic metaphysics of poetic identity" to "the rhetoric of poetic potency"; by doing so, Dickinson discovers "the figurative defenses that allow a poem to be written despite prior inscriptions" (121).<sup>21</sup> Indeed, however Dickinson is immersed in the literary tradition of her time, her poems also remind her readers constantly the contested and fictitious nature of such a tradition. The relations between self and the other, and language and gender could be seen as the ideological products of human construct.

As McNeil remarks, Dickinson "made the lyric a kind of poetry that can ask anything" (32). I propose to examine this "inquiring" and daring aspect of Dickinson's poems further by exploring Dickinson's sense of place and her notion of space that revise the literary and intellectual representations of nature and nation in her time. Her spatial representations, particularly her depictions of the graveyards,

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Carlyle, and Whitman by "disassociat[ing] the public, objective realm of representable knowledge from the radically private nature of power" (177).

<sup>20</sup> McNeil argues that Dickinson concentrated on "written" instead of "spoken" language, the "reported speech of the Father" (106).

<sup>21</sup> For Dickinson, Loeffelholz states, "romantic errands into nature and 'Nature' herself are loci of human struggle and are ideological constructions" (24).

the heaven, the self, nature, and the globe, are also locations charged with social and political meanings in the nineteenth century. Dickinson appropriates various versions of natural and human landscapes in her poems, revealing her own quest for a sense of belonging in a modernized world. In poems such as “Absent Place - an April Day -” (Fr958), Dickinson uses Wordsworth's imaginary dancing with the daffodils to portray her own sense of loss as a modern reader:

Absent Place - an April Day -  
 Daffodils a'blow  
 Homesick curiosity  
 To the Souls that snow -

Drift may block within it  
 Deeper than without -  
 Daffodil delight but  
 Him it duplicate -

Eric Leed points out that for Wordsworth and the Romantics, and for modern travellers generally, “[t]ravel became distinguishable from pain and began to be regarded as an intellectual pleasure” (10). This pleasure of travel for Wordsworth is revised in the poem into a tour of both literary sight-seeing and spiritual pilgrimage – seeing sights of the Romantic sublime, represented by Wordsworth's daffodils, and experiencing the inner traverse of the speaker's own homesickness through “Absent Place”, or as Paul Muldoon suggests, another version of Eden – “a place notable for its placelessness” (19). With its allusion of daffodils to narcissism in mythology, the poem might suggest that Wordsworth's portrayal of a daffodil-dancing scene in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, a poem possibly inspired by a walk around the lake at Clencoyne Bay, Ullswater in April 1802, is mainly a part of one's own reflection or mental projection. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff points out, Dickinson “rejected Wordsworth's claim that the mind of man was the 'mirror' of what was most beautiful in nature” (347).<sup>22</sup> This Wordsworthian version of nature underscores what her

<sup>22</sup> The difference between Wordsworth and Dickinson has been discussed by critics such as Joanne Feit Diehl, who comments on the notion of “reciprocity between poet and nature” in Wordsworth, and “a damning division between herself and the surrounding landscape” in Dickinson (36). For Diehl, Dickinson's nature is an intrusive and hostile enemy (41). I agree here that Dickinson's poems show an unbridgeable gulf between man and nature, but I would suggest that this

homesick speaker cannot obtain, creating an alienating rather than pleasing effect. Joanne Feit Diehl argues that Dickinson's poems attempt "to free herself of any dependence on an external reality" (44). However, the comparison of daffodils in this poem to "Homesick curiosity" that "duplicates" delight also dramatizes one's inconsolable loss of a sense of place, a lamentation that paradoxically reveals a deep attachment to home, or in the poem, "Absent Place". As a close reader, or a literary consumer of this Romantic "curiosity",<sup>23</sup> a topic I will discuss further in the third chapter, the speaker seems to find the Wordsworthian sublime a reminder of what is absent and irreplaceable.

Dickinson's "bookish" meditation on the Wordsworthian nature can be seen as her revision of the Romantic tradition to account for a modern sense of belonging in an increasingly commercialized and presumably more alienated world.<sup>24</sup> Like Wordsworth's, Emerson's nature can be at times too bright, too expansive or self-indulgent for Dickinson.<sup>25</sup> In particular, Emerson would equate nature with nation, an approach that Dickinson also addresses consistently in her poetic landscape. Robert Weisbuch comments on Dickinson's "own lack of historical concerns", arguing that

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relationship is not necessarily adversarial. As will be shown in my second, third and fourth chapters, I would agree more with Mary Loeffelholz that Dickinson is acutely aware of nature as a notion already being inscribed with human meanings, and some poems show Dickinson's attempt to refrain from such linguistic imposition onto nature.

<sup>23</sup> Dickinson's use of the word "curiosity" in the poem seems ambiguously placed in between a positive and a more disapproving sense of the word that Matthew Arnold explained at the beginning of *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) as a comment upon the turning of culture into intellectual curiosity. Arnold notes that "in English we do not, like the foreigners, use the word in a good sense as well as in a bad sense; with us the word is always used in a somewhat disapproving sense; a liberal and intelligent eagerness about the things of the mind may be meant by a foreigner when he speaks of curiosity, but with us the word always conveys a certain notion of frivolous and unedifying activity ... For as there is a curiosity about intellectual matters which is futile, and merely a disease, so there is certainly a curiosity, – a desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are, – which is, in an intelligent being, natural and laudable" (6-7).

<sup>24</sup> Richard Gravil remarks that Dickinson is "the most bookish poet in the poets of Anglo-American tradition" (188). As Gravil points out, Dickinson "is in a strict sense unreadable without some awareness of the precursor text or texts on which many of her major poems are meditations" (188).

<sup>25</sup> Critics have recognized the difference between Emerson and Dickinson. Fred D. White, for example, points out that in contrast to Emerson, "word and world – mind and nature – are separated by an unbridgeable gulf" for Dickinson (2002 103). Daneen Wardrop also comments on the conceptual difference between these two writers that "Emerson accrues vision to himself; Dickinson limits it so as to claim the wealth of strangeness inherent in the action of limitation" (2002 152).

the poet “is far less concerned than her fellows with the idea of America and far less involved in the particular political issues of the day” (7-8). However, as deconstructionist and feminist critics have shown, Dickinson's poetry has challenged the patriarchal use of language by exposing it as fundamentally an ideological construct. In an age when, as Lawrence Buell points out, “progress” was equated with “improvement” – “first with political liberalization and then with technological development” (1995 3), Dickinson's revision of the relation between self and nature in the Romantic tradition also provides an insight into her “slant” or “oblique” way of conveying her perception of the national narrative of progress. As will be explored further in the second and the third chapters, proponents of a distinctly national literature such as Emerson and Walt Whitman turned the “settlers' material nature” into “the poet's native materials” (Fender 300). Dickinson's speaker, while gazing at the American wilderness, seems to be more puzzled and hesitant.

Besides her Romanticist and Transcendentalist precursors, Dickinson might also have been influenced by her father's Whiggish political stance in Jacksonian America. As will be explored in the second chapter, Dickinson might have been familiar with the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska bill while her father was a congressman in 1853-55, a bill that brought down the Whig party (Pollak 2004 27-28). As David S. Reynolds notes, the Jacksonian focus on land annexation was a controversy that had played a crucial role in the formation of the American political system. Dickinson's father, a staunch supporter of the Whig party, might have been sceptical of the expansionist policies enforced in Jacksonian America, such as the Indian Removal, the Mexican War and the annexation of Texas.<sup>26</sup> Helen McNeil notes that Dickinson “seemed to have followed her father in favouring American expansionism at the time of the Mexican War”; however, McNeil also notes that Dickinson “doesn't share the literary imperialism which sees the North American continent (or the seas) as a

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<sup>26</sup> As David S. Reynolds points out, Jacksonian America was characterized by the emergence of a two-party system that contested the policies of expansionism: “His [Jackson's] supporters, the Democrats, successfully presented themselves as champions of the working class and became ardent promoters of westward expansion. His opponents, the Whigs, emphasized scientific advance, improvements in infrastructure, and an economy guided by centralized institutions” (2009 3).

wilderness to be conquered” (121). Betsy Erkkila, alternatively, argues that the Mexican War was considered by many New Englanders “as an imperialist land grab aimed at extending slavery and the “Slave Power” (141-42), a political gesture, Erkkila suggests, was mocked in one Dickinson letter (2004 142). However, as Habegger remarks, her father and the Whig party in general “opposed the formation of new slave states but brooked no federal interference with state law”.<sup>27</sup> This conflicting political position of her father also informs Dickinson's ambiguous attitude toward the ideologies of cultural and national projects that permeated the public discourses of her time. Her poetic landscape shows a vacillation between progression and regression, contraction and expansion, a feature that might reflect her own perception of modernity.

### **“My position! Cole”: Dickinson's Earthly Vision**

To some extent, Dickinson's poetic mapping not only indicates her interest in one's inner exploration of immortality, but it might also suggest her poetic attempt to account for America as a modern country. Dickinson used “where” in around 130 poems, and in several poems, more than once. This emphasis on location, or the absence of it, is particularly informative of her interest in an age of exploration and travel. Myra Jehlen remarks that America “connotes” geography rather than society or history “in the era of its exploration and settlement” (5). Lawrence Buell also points out that the sense of place plays a central role in defining American literature:

The first writings about America were works of geographical description. Much colonial and early national literature was taken up with exploring, mapping, and celebrating the land. The American literary renaissance of the antebellum period, influenced by romantic naturism, nurtured the image of a wild,

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<sup>27</sup> Dickinson's father, following Daniel Webster, supported the Fugitive Slave Act as part of the Compromise Act of 1850. The Whig party, according to Habegger, tried to “cool the sectional conflict by simply affirming the Union and the Constitution”, “rebuking the intemperate public tone both North and South and recommending compromise and harmony” (293 & 401). Calling the politics of Dickinson's father “stasis”, Helen McNeil depicts Edward Dickinson as “one of the old 'river Gods' of the Connecticut River Valley, a politically and theologically backward-looking area of western Massachusetts” (52-53). Dickinson's seeming indifference towards crucial political issues such as slavery, McNeil suggests, corresponds to her father's political conservatism (53).

unsettled continent as an article of cultural nationalism well into the age of industrial revolution. (1995 14)

Many of Dickinson's quest poems similarly delineate such a basic human need for a "settled continent". However, her quest narratives also confront the notion of settlement and certainty, a concept often associated with civilization. As Hsuan L. Hsu points out, this American fascination with geography "has given rise to exceptionist discourses", discourses that "misleadingly frame American history in terms of the nation's expansion across a continental space imagined as vacant of both history and prior inhabitants" (4). Dickinson's spatial imagination, particularly her constant questioning of "where", could be seen as a response to such a fascination for geographical expansion and national settlement. As will be discussed in the second and third chapters, she often maps placeless locations, such as "Absent Place" (Fr958), "illocality" (Fr824), "reportless places" (Fr1404), "Passive Place" (Fr1090) and "no Geography" (Fr476). In poems such as "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee," (Fr1779), a poem I will discuss further in the first chapter, an American prairie is simply yet to be made:

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,  
 One clover, and a bee,  
 And revery.  
 The revery alone will do,  
 If bees are few.

Buell uses this poem to remind us that "Anyone looking for place-sense in literature had better start with modest expectations, bearing in mind Yi-fu Tuan's dictum that 'topophilia is not the strongest of human emotions' and Neil Evernden's definition of *Homo sapiens* as 'the natural alien,' the creature without a proper habitat" (1995 254). Dickinson's poem indeed showcases such a warning with its reconstruction of the image of a prairie, a distinctly American terrain. However, a real prairie is not necessarily made dispensable here. As Richard Brantley suggests, Dickinson's "revery" in the poem "interacts with, as well as withdraws from, clovers and bees". The prairie she attempts to "make" is a creation from what Brantley calls "subject-

object coalescence and interpenetration” (2004 76). Furthermore, written at a time when American writers were searching for new ways to establish the uniqueness of American identity, and when what an American prairie should be like became a contested field, Dickinson's poems such as this one also dramatize the patriotic attempt of her contemporaries to rewrite nature or to write nation over nature. As Mary Loeffelholz remarks, in Dickinson's poems, “[t]he problem of nature becomes an explicitly human problem” (24). Dickinson seems to be too acutely aware of this human inscription of nature to claim a ready-made prairie for her own.

I find two writers of Dickinson's time – Emerson and Thomas De Quincey, especially helpful in understanding Dickinson's spatial elasticity. Thomas De Quincey's potential influence upon Dickinson is only briefly touched upon by a few scholars; Emerson's influence on Dickinson, however, has been widely explored and largely contested. Dickinson came into contact with Emerson's works early, mainly at the recommendation of her tutor Benjamin Franklin Newton, who gave her Emerson's 1847 *Poems* and 1844 *Second Series of Essays* in 1850, both of which she read with delight (Keller 150). As her childhood friend Emily Fowler Ford states, Dickinson was “steeped” in Emerson's essays (Whicher 194). However, when Emerson gave a lecture in Amherst in 1857 and stayed next door at her brother's house, Dickinson did not choose to see him face to face. Her direct contact with Emerson is, Karl Keller remarks, “the most noticeably missing” and “the one most unexplainable” (149). As Helen McNeil observes, “Dickinson does not adopt Emerson's terminology of masculine power: hero, tyrant, genius, divinely chanting poet” (100). This obviation is telling. Despite her admiration for Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance, Vivian R. Pollak points out that “[u]nlike Emerson ... Dickinson is not obviously a theorist of national identity” and is indifferent “to the role of poet-citizen” (2004 4). Dickinson seems to write her poetry carefully to avoid the Emersonian emphasis on nationalism, heroism and American destiny. After Emerson's 1857 visit to Amherst, Dickinson wrote to Susan Gilbert, her close friend and later sister-in-law, that “[i]t must have been as if he had come from where dreams are born! (Johnson 1958 913)” Such a praise of Dickinson could be double-edged. As McNeil comments,

“Dickinson's praise for Emerson is genuine, but it is praise of someone very ancient, someone who is, moreover, a kind of travelling salesman of optimism ...” (100) For a poet who Higginson calls “Dark” (L268), Dickinson seems determined to have a dream distinctly different from Emerson's. Dickinson's poetic visions of the world – her historical perspective and national outlook, as well as her global and cosmic consciousness, are punctuated with her concurrent echoes of and then emphatic departure from Emerson. Keller remarks that Emerson provides Dickinson “with somewhere to go” (183). The anchorage Emerson serves for Dickinson also becomes her launch point from him.

De Quincey is another important writer in understanding Dickinson's spatial imagination. In a letter to her good friend and later sister-in-law Susan Gilbert, written around 1859, Dickinson included a drawing of an “unfortunate bug” chased by a reptile which she called “my more immediate friend, and connections” in her note.<sup>28</sup> She wrote beneath the drawing “My position”! and signed her name as “Cole” (L 214), which Judith Farr suggests as a gesture of Dickinson's identification with Thomas Cole (1992 69). Nevertheless, this satirical gesture, as Renée Bergland remarks, presents a view “as different from a Cole-ian prospect as it’s possible to get. She is small, ugly, and grounded, not abstract, romanticized, or high above it all” (141). Dickinson often identifies herself with small animals and insects, such as beetles, squirrels, and kangaroos.<sup>29</sup> This sardonic positioning of herself as a bug in this note here, I would suggest, might also refer to another Thomas – Thomas De Quincey, coincidentally also a friend of Cole and famous for being an English opium-eater (Farr 1992 72). In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, originally published in 1821,<sup>30</sup> De Quincey portrays his opium dream about being chased

<sup>28</sup> As Thomas H. Johnson points out, the date of this note is speculative (1958 360). Her drawing and note are available at *Dickinson, Cartoonist*: <<http://www.emilydickinson.org/cartoon/hb114.html>>.

<sup>29</sup> In poems such as “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” (Fr319), as will be discussed further in the third chapter, Dickinson chose between “Daisies” and its variant “Beetles” to describe the position of the speaker as an artist. In “Light is sufficient to itself -”, Dickinson's speaker compares herself to a squirrel in the Himalayas. In her letter to Higginson, she states that “Myself is the only Kangaroo among the Beauty” (L 268). As Mary Allen points out, “Dickinson’s affinity for small animals is that of one unclaimed artistic for another ... it is not an escape from the artist’s responsibility; it is, rather, a buoyant affirmation of it” (36-37).

<sup>30</sup> De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* was first published anonymously in the *London Magazine* in 1821 (Faflak 2009 15).

repeatedly by an Asiatic crocodile (2009 125-126). Later De Quincey analyses his own dream thus: “it may be observed, generally, that wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other” (2009 126). This theory of antagonism is further elaborated in another essay, where De Quincey suggests that the alien being in his dream is actually part of his own nature (1851 156-57). In a manner similar to De Quincey, Dickinson describes the malicious reptile in her note as her “more immediate friend, and connection”, indicating an evolutionary self that De Quincey recognises but repulses.<sup>31</sup> As Sanjay Krishnan points out, De Quincey's fear of the monstrous creature is a “double-edged sword” pointing towards his own weakness (2007 92). In a reverse manner, Dickinson exposes her own weakness as an “unfortunate bug” that, paradoxically, indicates her intimate connection with the seemingly more intimidating and dominant reptile.

Dickinson relishes combining two seemingly opposite positions and perspectives. She juxtaposes the crawling bug with the malicious reptile, her own sketchy drawing with Cole's elaborate portrayal of the landscape, exposing the limitation of both perspectives to a comic effect. It would have been natural that, as David S. Reynolds so called “that rare oxymoronic being” (2002 189), Dickinson showed interest in similarly oxymoronic writers like De Quincey.<sup>32</sup> De Quincey gained his popularity in America when his collected works were published in the 1850s.<sup>33</sup> One 1850 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* praised De Quincey's “genius and logical perception”, and extolled his sentences as “full of life and of joints as a serpent” (147). The Boston publisher Ticknor, Reed & Fields, which began publishing De

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<sup>31</sup> Written around 1859, Dickinson's note might have been a reflection upon De Quincey's *Confessions*, a copy of which she requested in a letter the same year.

<sup>32</sup> As John Evangelist Walsh briefly comments on Dickinson's influence by De Quincey, “His multitude of magazine papers, just then being gathered into volumes may yet turn out a storehouse of Dickinson ideas” (1971 130). Judith Farr also notes that the imagery of the sea of death and sexuality in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* might have appealed to Dickinson as an imagistic source. Farr shows the potential connection between De Quincey's association of Egypt and the Nile with sexuality and Dickinson's association of Cleopatra with Susan Dickinson (1992 148-50, 202 & 290).

<sup>33</sup> Robert Morrison points out that Ticknor, Reed and Fields had sold over 45,000 copies of De Quincey by 1853 (2009 364).

Quincey's writings in four volumes in 1851,<sup>34</sup> also celebrated the “naturalness” and “beautiful thoughts and images” of his writings in the *United States Democratic Review*, depicting his style as “dashing by with a quick, rapid motion, and sparkling with wit” (186).<sup>35</sup> The public praise of De Quincey's “serpentine” style would not have been lost on Dickinson, who was also deeply attracted to the seductive power of language. In an 1850 letter, she compared imagination to a snake that might “lead astray foolish young women” (L31). When she made a request for the copies of De Quincey's *Klosterheim* and *The Confessions of an Opium Eater* in 1858 (L191), one year before she made the drawing of the bug and the reptile, she would have already been familiar with him to a certain extent. The Boston Chinese museum Dickinson visited in 1846 quoted De Quincey as one of the authorities on the danger of opium addiction in its catalogue (67). Dickinson would also have been aware of the publication of De Quincey's writings in up to 20 volumes from 1851 to 1859 by Ticknor, Reed & Fields, a publisher Dickinson later referred to in a letter.<sup>36</sup>

As will be examined more closely in the fourth chapter, the correlation between Dickinson and De Quincey sheds some light on Dickinson's use of compound vision to account for her perception of a modern world. De Quincey and Cole seem to attract Dickinson for similar reasons – their ambivalent attitude toward the notion of Enlightenment, progression and empire. Cole's allegorical series such as *The Course of Empire* (1836) and *The Voyage of Life* (1840) reflect Dickinson's own view of history. As artists of presaging power, both Dickinson and Cole might have shared a

<sup>34</sup> As Joel Faflak points out, “Ticknor, Reed and Fields of Boston began publishing *De Quincey's Writings* in 1851, which ran to 20 volumes by 1859 and was the impetus for De Quincey to undertake editing his collected works in Britain as *Selections Grave and Gay* (1853-60); the first Boston volume was *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater; and Suspiria de Profundis* (1851) ...” (2009 15).

<sup>35</sup> *The American Whig Review* in 1851 also compared De Quincey to Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge, among other, for “the wonderful grace and beauty of his language, the shrewd observation, the profound analytical capacity, and the appreciative sympathy with all that is either refined or great in literature” in “Literary Reminiscences, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater. Thomas De Quincey” (357-358).

<sup>36</sup> In a letter to Susan Dickinson around 1866, Dickinson referred to the publication of Tennyson by the same publisher in her dream, and then made the association between dreams and the brain that “Where the Treasure is, there the Brain is also –” (L320). Susan Dickinson was also interested in De Quincey, quoting him in her “Annals of the Evergreens”, which was published posthumously (No.18). Both typescripts and transcripts are available at *Writings by Susan Dickinson*: <<http://www.emilydickinson.org/susan/tannals18.html>>

more cyclical perception of human progress that foresees human decline.<sup>37</sup> This mixed vision of progression and destruction is also a pronounced feature in De Quincey's work. In "The English Mail-Coach", for example, he compares the coachman of the Bath mail to a crocodile with human functions, for his "monstrous inaptitude for turning round" (2003 V.16 419). However, he also emphasizes the symbolic significance of the mail coach "as the national organ for publishing these mighty events" during war. The English mail coach, driven by a crocodile-man, becomes both an allegorical and a symbolic object, "a spiritualized and glorified object to an impassioned heart" (2003 V.16 409). In another dream, De Quincey portrays a scene of resurrection in a similarly ambiguous manner. He juxtaposes England's victory in the Napoleonic Wars with a horrific vision of death (2003 V.16 449). Mixing honour with horror, De Quincey converts glory and monstrosity, patriotism and cynicism into two sides of one coin. As De Quincey recorded in 1848, after his meeting with Emerson in Edinburgh, "By Emerson's own confession, the Opium Eater is the ruler of the *Night*".<sup>38</sup> As a Gothic Romanticist, De Quincey was certainly attractive to a poet who was prone to the dark and the mysterious.

### **"I stepped from Plank to Plank": Dickinson's Cautious Quest**

The departure of Dickinson from Emerson and her gravitation towards dark writers like De Quincey is reflected in the unresolvable tension in her quest poems. As Paula Bernat Bennett states, Dickinson is straddling "her two basically incompatible positions – her utter immersion in domestic life and her obsessive quest for literary

<sup>37</sup> Helen McNeil considers "the imperial sublime" of Thomas Cole's "Westward the Course of Empire" series of paintings "quite alien to Dickinson" (121). Alternatively, Barton Levi St. Armand suggests that Cole's allegorical series such as *The Course of Empire* (1836) and *The Voyage of Life* (1840) "lived on in the very personal and much more elaborate correspondences that Dickinson made of her passion of the mystic day" (78). Renée Bergland further describes Cole's American Romanticism as "ambiguous," especially his mixture of the uplifting and the decaying in the prophetic vision of his paintings (141-142). Reynolds also comments on Cole's awareness of the damage done to nature through expansionism (2009 285).

<sup>38</sup> De Quincey's attitude toward Emerson was equally ambivalent. As Robert Morrison points out, despite his criticism of Emerson, when these two writers met in Edinburgh in 1848, they seemed to have enjoyed each other's company. Emerson "gave De Quincey an inscribed copy of his *Essays: First Series*, New Edition, which De Quincey "annotated at some length". De Quincey's American publisher Fields also visited De Quincey in 1852 at Mavis Bush, Lasswade, and De Quincey expressed his admiration for Emerson and Hawthorne (2009 355-56 & 369-71).

immortality” (2002a 218). The spiritual journey in her poems seems to be conducted through her negation of its height, not affirmation. By identifying with the small and inconsequential, Jane Donahue Eberwein notes, Dickinson finds space to grow (1987 14). Indeed, her poems gesture toward the regal and the immortal, but this poetic ambition is accomplished through the earthly and the mortal, or more precisely, the blend of these two, and her spatial imagination indicates such a poetic position. In particular, Dickinson's poetic landscape is shaped by her lingering and hesitant style. In “I stepped from Plank to Plank” (Fr926), for example, Dickinson portrays a precarious experience of the world:

I stepped from Plank to Plank  
 A slow and cautious way  
 The Stars about my Head I felt  
 About my Feet the Sea -

I knew not but the next  
 Would be my final inch -  
 This gave me that precarious Gait  
 Some call Experience -

Roger Lundin remarks that Dickinson's poetry “clearly acknowledged the primacy of personal experience over doctrinal beliefs and liturgical practices” (178). Yet, as James McIntosh observes, Dickinson's “Protestant heritage” also offers her “figures for poetry” and “textual strategies” to “keep Believing nimble” (3). Dickinson emphatically addresses the vigilance demanded in her poetic and spiritual quest. If, as Eric Leed notes, pilgrimage is “a formalization of the notion that travel purifies, cleanses, removes the wanderer from the site of transgression” (8), Dickinson's poetic pilgrimage seems to stay in the phase of suspended “transgression” and refuses to transcend or be purified. Her attitude towards exploration, worldly or spiritually, seems to be full of constant circumspection. In another poem “What is - 'Paradise' -” (Fr241), her speaker is equally tentative and cautious:

What is - “Paradise” -  
 Who live there -  
 Are they “Farmers” -

Do they “hoe” -  
 Do they know that this is “Amherst” -  
 And that I - am coming - too -

Do they wear “new shoes” - in “Eden” -  
 Is it always pleasant - there -  
 Won't they scold us - when we're hungry -  
 Or tell God - how cross we are -

You are sure there's such a person  
 As “a Father” - in the sky -  
 So if I get lost - there - ever -  
 Or do what the Nurse calls “die” -

I shant walk the “Jasper” - barefoot -  
 Ransomed folks - wont laugh at me -  
 Maybe - “Eden” a'nt so lonesome  
 As New England used to be!

Barton Levi St. Armand explains that New England was 'lonesome' because of Dickinson's outsider position in the believing community and her own family circle (130). Jane Donahue Eberwein further points out Dickinson's adoption of “a child's persona” to question about not just the religious myth of “Paradise” and “Eden” but “even about here-and-now seeming realities like 'Amherst' and its economy” (1998 39-40). Indeed, Dickinson's locus of heaven in the poem becomes both a duplication of and an alternative to an agricultural Amherst and New England, a parallel universe that is both embraced for its provincial features and discredited for its emotional suffocation. This poetic investment in the significance of location characterizes Dickinson's use of spatial imagination not only to account for one's spiritual yearning, but also to reflect upon and respond to a “lonesome” world that Amherst and New England might have stood for at times.

As Linda Freeman notes, Dickinson's Puritan heritage was “mixed with the liberal Christianity growing up in Boston, and fused with classical mythology”. It was, Freeman argues, “a source of poetic enrichment and not a barrier to creativity that she simply reacted against” (2). By appropriating the imagery of puritan pilgrimage, Dickinson finds her poetic voice. Such a poetic quest, however, is not only replete

with spiritual meditations, but also ambiguous references to the social and cultural transitions that she had experienced in Amherst and New England. Her cautious stepping “from Plank to Plank” could be seen as a poetic method to deal with a social and geographical condition of extreme mobility. As will be shown in the first and fourth chapters, her provincial voice indicates the shift of her poetic quest from the divine to the basic human need for physical and spatial intimacy. Her 1880 letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland explains her poetics of living: “I trust we are grateful for the Life that sees – and steps – and touches, if it is only the thrilling preface to suppremer things –” (L678) This transition from “suppremer things” to the physical aspect of living highlights her tendency to use a seemingly rural voice to argue for a more earthly and sensuous perspective. More specifically, her poetic quest is profoundly rooted in her appreciation of space, or apprehension toward one's sense of place. Her poems about transition, dislocation and quest accentuate one's heightened sensitivity towards space. Through her radical spatial imagination, the poet measures, defines, adjusts and revises her position to the external world.

In this thesis, I propose to explore such a dynamic poetic space in Dickinson's poems, seeing how her spatial imagination informs her complex response to modernity. She addresses the conditions of a modern world by treating her metaphoric mapping as an empirical approach. Thus I propose to look at her spatial imagination not only as a poetic practice, but also as social commentary and literal enactment that sets out to evaluate, negotiate, revise and renovate human perceptions. I suggest that by constantly referring to travellers, expeditions and exotic places, her poetic mapping explores the fundamental question of positioning oneself. In particular, her spatial imagination is indicative of how she addresses the intricate relation between modernization, expansionism, consumerism and empiricism in nineteenth century America, four topics I will discuss in four chapters respectively. By accentuating the significance of mapping and positioning, her poems both reconstruct and drastically destabilize the relationship between the mind and the world. In a manner similar to a map-maker, Dickinson uses mapping and positioning as her poetic strategy to tackle the lack of fixity in a modern world undergoing fast-

spinning social, geographical and ideological transformation.

Recent scholars have provided great insight into Dickinson's poems in relation to the geographical exploration of her time. Rebecca Patterson sets the groundwork for the research by offering a detailed study of Dickinson's use of geographical images and place names in her poems. Critics such as Susan Howe and Cynthia L. Hallen further associate her geographical references and poems of exploration with American colonial history.<sup>39</sup> More recent scholars have placed Dickinson in the social context and material culture of her time. Daneen Wadrop for example, remarks upon how the reference to various fabrics in her work indicates her reliance upon global trade in her daily life (2009 69 & 202). Hiroko Uno and Christopher Benfey, among many others, discuss Dickinson's possible exposure to the commercial and cultural influence from the Far East.<sup>40</sup> Scholars such as Domhnall Mitchell and Timothy Morris also examine her social responses to the northern culture and Arctic expeditions.<sup>41</sup> Recent critics such as Christine Gerhardt and Paul Giles further propose to read the ecological and global consciousness in Dickinson outside its domestic or transcendental context.<sup>42</sup> In his recent book about Dickinson and science, Robin Peel also provides an encompassing account of the nineteenth century geographical knowledge, placing her in the scientific debates of her time. The existent scholarship proves to be tremendously helpful in the investigation of Dickinson's real or potential contact with the outside world.

<sup>39</sup> Hallen proposes reading Dickinson as an epic poet of America, connecting her poetic interest in exploration with the search of Columbus for land (169-175). Howe, alternatively, elucidates Dickinson's poems about explorers and frontiersmen through her puritan anxiety about "Liberty, Exile, Origin" (107).

<sup>40</sup> In "Emily Dickinson's Encounter with the East: Chinese Museum in Boston", Uno offers a detailed account of Dickinson's potential contact with the eastern goods and artefacts in Boston (2008). Christopher Benfey offers an insightful discussion about Dickinson's potential contact with Japan in "A Route of Evanescence: Emily Dickinson and Japan", associating her retreat with an Asian tradition of the scholarly recluse (2007 81-82).

<sup>41</sup> Domhnall Mitchell in "Northern Lights: Class, Color, Culture, and Emily Dickinson" explores Dickinson's use of colour in relation to the popularity of the northern culture in the second half of the nineteenth century (2000b). Timothy Morris also provides an insightful discussion about Dickinson's awareness of Sir John Franklin's Arctic expeditions and the subsequent impact upon society in "Dickinson's Arctic" (1997).

<sup>42</sup> Christine Gerhardt, for example, discusses Dickinson's proto-environmental consciousness in "Often seen - but seldom felt: Emily Dickinson's Reluctant Ecology of Place" (2006). Paul Giles in "'The Earth reversed her Hemispheres': Dickinson's Global Antipodality" further places Dickinson's poems in a global context (2011).

This thesis continues this critical discussion about Dickinson's public consciousness by looking at her poems of social commentaries, her potential reading of travelogues and periodicals, her tourist experiences of exhibitions and performances, and her intellectual engagement with the public discourses of her time. Divided by four areas, modernization, expansionism, commerce, and science, the thesis explores how Dickinson's poems reflect the transition to modernity and how her spatial imagination informs both her social and poetic response. I suggest that her poetic landscape presents more than a metaphoric or metonymic endeavour to define one's relation with God, or to organize the topography of the mind. It also reveals the poet's critical reception of modernization in a wider social and global context. Her emphasis on mapping or her obviation of it can be examined in the light of her participation in the dialogue with the intellectual discourses of her time in relation to mobility and progress. This thesis aims to provide an alternative perspective in reading Dickinson by focusing on the notion of space in her poems. I show how her spatial imagination both registers and resists the public rhetoric of the social and cultural projects of her time, hoping to shed some light on how Dickinson's spatial conceptualization accounts for one's sense of place in the developing course of modernity.

The discussion is divided into four chapters. The first chapter looks at Dickinson's poems as commentaries upon social transition. In particular, I explore her poetic responses to the social dramas of her time, such as the decline of the pastoral, the advent of the railway and the rural cemetery movement towards the mid-nineteenth century. I compare her with her contemporary writers, looking at how she seeks to rewrite older forms for a modern age. For her, as for her contemporaries, the image of the train is an apposite symbol for modernization. I argue that in a manner similar to Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and potentially prefiguring Walter Benjamin, Dickinson is more equivocal about the benefit of technology and industrialization than most critics have suggested. This ambivalence informs her notion of history. Unlike her puritan forebears and patriotic contemporaries, Dickinson sees history as a cyclical process rather than a linear progression. Her

graveyard poems indicate such a resistance to the notion of ascension and the pastoral and republican ideal Mount Auburn represented in antebellum America. This regressive-progressive stance, I suggest, serves as a poetic paradigm for her to modernize human perception. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that her poetic mapping exhibits a longing for spatial intimacy, a topophilic sentiment that explains her adoption of mapping as a suitable poetic tool to address the conditions of modernity.

Dickinson's quest poems are particularly informative of her perception of the expansionism of her time. The second chapter thus examines her poetic mapping more closely by exploring her poems of emigration and exploration in the context of American nationalism. In particular, I look at her use of frontier metaphors and exploratory narratives to see how her depiction of a formless American landscape, in contrast to Emerson, reveals a reluctance to inscribe national destiny onto the natural landscape. By examining one early valentine poem, I show her early ambition to account for an alternative American history, and at the same time to challenge a unified vision of American nationhood. Dickinson's allusions to travellers and explorers, and to events such as the expeditions of Christopher Columbus and Hernando De Soto, and the Arctic expeditions indicate her developing interest in colonial and frontier history. However, compared with Thoreau and Emerson, she is more critical of the American confidence in self-reliance and exploration. Using Washington Irving as another instructive cultural reference, I further explore how Dickinson revises quest narratives in the context of expansion and exploration. Like Edgar Allan Poe, Dickinson's poems express a distrust of any type of confirmation. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that her quest poems express an attempt to revise the national myth of America. She appropriates frontier imagery and exploratory narratives to offer a re-examination of American nationhood.

Dickinson's social and national mapping is also profoundly related to consumerism. Therefore, in the third chapter, I look more closely at her poetic mapping in the context of New England as a cosmopolitan world. Many of her traveller personae are

tourists, taking part in the process of commercial consumption. By examining her treatment of spiritual pilgrimage as tourist trips, I investigate how she uses the metaphor of consumerism to explore commerce as both democratic and enslaving forces. Her tourist experiences at the Boston Chinese museum and at Jenny Lind's concert, in particular, disclose her ambivalent attitude toward viewing as a vehement process of both destruction and creation. Thus I examine her appropriation of the multiple meanings of consumption, in order to illustrate how she creates her poetics of viewing as both consumption and consummation. Like Emerson and Walt Whitman, Dickinson believes in the power of seeing, but she avoids visual dominance by erasing ownership. This obviation could be seen as her critical response toward the popularity of panoramic views prevalent in the travelogues and exhibitions of her time. I then compare Dickinson with her fellow travel writer Helen Hunt Jackson to see how her representation of nature highlights her revision of conventional emphasis on spectatorial mastery. By returning to the notion of consumption and investigating her volcanic and narcotic imagery, I suggest that consumption, both touristic and bodily, serves as one of the core concepts in understanding Dickinson's poetics. Her adept use of commercial imagery to evoke the consuming power of viewing speaks powerfully of her ambiguous response to the conditions of commercialization.

Dickinson's notion of mapping and positioning is not only social or spiritual, but fundamentally physical. Her obviation of visual dominance encourages a more intimate and sensual relationship between the viewer and the view. The fourth chapter thus looks at her poems of visitation and reception, exploring her elastic spatial imagination as a dynamic physical process that connects oneself and the planet in rotation. By appropriating metaphors of neighbours and visitors, her poems indicate a reversible or even transgressive spatial relation between one's self and the globe, a relationship that is distinctly different from the Emersonian positioning of humans at the centre of the universe. Dickinson's use of compound vision and doubling, in particular, indicates her receptiveness to the aesthetic theory of Thomas De Quincey. By investigating De Quincey's notions of "involute" and "palimpsest", I

show how the works of both writers offer alternative ways of seeing apart from the Romanticist and Transcendentalist visions of her time. Dickinson's use of compound vision and her notion of neighbouring further reveal how she deploys and appropriates provincial and local perspectives to argue for multiple visions of the world. This elastic world view is also influenced by Emerson and Edward Hitchcock, who believe in the particle existence of human thought. Dickinson takes a step further and turns this belief in the atomic presence of human consciousness into her poetic mapping of the atmosphere. I suggest that Dickinson's spatial imagination designates an interconnected relationship that drastically redefines one's relationship to space in its very physical sense. I then return to the notion of toponophilia and geopoetics discussed in the introduction and chapter one, showing how Dickinson maps both the landscape and the skyscape to account for the unstable sense of place and space one experiences in the process of modernity.

As is evident from the chapter summaries, this thesis covers much ground, from the literary to the social, from philosophical polemics to recent theoretical debates. This thesis does not seek to offer an exhaustive account of Dickinson's world view. Instead, I begin with Dickinson's poems of social commentaries, contextualize them in the social and cultural projects of her time and her own tourist experiences, either by reading or her own travelling, and then return to her poetics about human perception. I hope to show a Dickinson that is not only socially aware but also intellectually responsive in a wider scope than critically recognized. She wrote to Higginson in 1862 that "when I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean me – but a supposed person –". "The supposed person" in the letter, Margaret Dickie suggests, "is less a person than the power of supposition" (2008 64). I would add that Dickinson indulges herself in the power of supposition, but she is also wary of this empowering gesture to speak for, and over other potential voices. By exploring her poetic landscape, I intend to show how the seemingly marginal, negative, private and passive position of her speaker actually indicates her ambition to be a representative poet in a potentially more democratic manner. By forgoing power, she illustrates how her version of a "representative" voice should be in a

modernized society that paradoxically celebrates overpowering individuals and ever-expanding boundaries. And it is this more proactive and socially involved Dickinson I hope to present in this thesis.

Due to limited space, there are several related topics that I have been unable to pursue. One omission is the discussion concerning gender and race. Such investigation would highlight the issue of the relationship between Dickinson and the literary and social convention of her time. While I do not have the space and time to undertake such a reading, this thesis sets out the framework from which this kind of analysis can be carried out. Another area I would like to examine further is Dickinson's transatlantic connections. While there is a plethora of transatlantic studies that have been achieved, my thesis offers an alternative perspective by looking at the intersection between the textual and the material cultural. These are possible areas of inquiries that have emerged from my research. What I hope to achieve is to provide an alternative way of approaching Dickinson. Recent developments in Dickinson studies are helpful in understanding her reception of the outside world in her domestic and social contexts, but conversely the investigation of her intellectual participation in the public arenas of her time can also provide an insight into and elucidate her uneasy relationship with a society that is often considered to be rejected by her. By exploring her poetic response as social commentaries, I hope to redress conventional assumptions about Dickinson's passive or escapist tendency, while also reappraising Dickinson's poetics in relation to the outside world.

## Chapter I

### **“A statesman's Embryo -”: Dickinson's Social Mapping and Modernity**

#### **Introduction: Mapping, Enlightenment and Modernity**

Dickinson's poetic perception of the world is consistently shaped by the notion of dislocation. The speaker in her poems often finds herself disoriented, feeling the need to search for an anchorage or measure the distance between oneself and the outside world. This poetic urge to explore, to search, to map, and to measure corresponds with a scientific concern for “order” and a belief in “system” which, as Charles W. J. Withers points out, takes the place of “wonder” for Europeans to speculate on “the nature of the human condition” (2007 90). Dickinson's poems present a process of topographic conceptualization resembling the Enlightenment notion of mapping. As shown in the introduction, David N. Livingstone and Withers comment on the symbolic significance of mapping in the age of Enlightenment: “given its capacity to impose coherence on complexity, the map was emblematic of the Enlightenment ideal of encyclopedic knowledge ...” (1999 122) Mapping symbolized certainty and progress. It served as an Enlightenment instrument that encouraged an “encyclopedic” and all-encompassing perception of the world. Mapping is also a significant poetic tool of Dickinson with which her speaker could survey borders and explore boundaries, a poetic strategy I examine more closely in the context of New England social transition in this chapter.

Mapping is not only an act of spatial measurement. It can also be employed for temporal measurement. In Dickinson's poems, both types of mapping are employed. As David Harvey points out, Enlightenment thought “embraced the idea of progress”, seeking actively a break with history and tradition, a notion that “modernity espouses” (12). Quoting Baudelaire who defined modernity in 1862 as “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” (10), Harvey comments that a modern life shaped by “the transitoriness of things” makes the preservation of historical

continuity difficult:

It was ... a secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains ... To the degree that it also lauded human creativity, scientific discovery, and the pursuit of individual excellence in the name of human progress, Enlightenment thinkers welcomed the maelstrom of change and saw the transitoriness, the fleeting, and the fragmentary as a necessary condition through which the modernizing project could be achieved. Doctrines of equality, liberty, faith in human intelligence (once allowed the benefits of education), and universal reason abounded. (12-13)

Dickinson's social mapping registers this radical break by inscribing the meeting points between tradition and modernity. Paradoxically, this force of modernity is not a “maelstrom of change” to be embraced for a poet who is frequently celebrated as a harbinger of modernism. Instead, her poems reveal deep ambivalence toward and anxiety about the notion of progress that an Enlightenment project could achieve in humanity.

In particular, Dickinson's poems about the Bible, the pastoral, the train and the graveyard all express her sharp awareness of the transitory and migratory nature of a modernized society. Sam Halliday points out that in the nineteenth century modernity was identified with “technological advance and progress” – “the realization of social harmony, moral virtue, and intellectual sophistication”; modernity indicated “an end to antagonism” – “hostilities of all kinds will seem increasingly atavistic as the social conditions that cultivate them are consigned to the past” (95). This belief in modernity, technology and progress of her time is scrutinized in Dickinson's poems. Read as social commentaries, her poems capture various modes of modern transformation in the developing course of nineteenth century New England. As Shira Wolosky points out, “Dickinson’s texts are scenes of cultural crossroads, situated within the many and profound transitions taking place around her” (2002 138). Here I suggest that these “scenes of cultural crossroads” in her poems reveal her ambivalent poetic response to the notion of progress. In many poems, Dickinson

seems to lament the decline of the pastoral, the traditional and the provincial. Allen Tate points out that Dickinson, as “a poet of transition”, faced a time when “[t]he energy that had built the meeting-house ran the factory” (155). For Tate, as Christopher Benfey notes, Dickinson is an honorary southerner who reacts against plutocracy and industrialism (2002 37). However, in some other poems, Dickinson seems not hesitant to discard tradition or old ways of thinking. Her social mapping discloses a more subtle and complex participation in the dialogic relation between tradition and modernity. In his discussion of the division between the country and the city, Raymond Williams remarks on writers “who insist on the connections” and “who see the transition itself as decisive, in a complex interaction and conflict of values” (264). Although the focus of Williams' discussion is mainly on twentieth-century writers, such as D. H. Lawrence and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, his comment is still useful in elucidating the ambivalent attitude of such a prophetic writer as Dickinson.

Indeed, Dickinson seems to decisively and emphatically dwelling upon the transitory and the displacing. In his discussion of the social development of New England towns in antebellum America, Robert Doherty remarks that “the central dilemma for people at that time was to gain some means for grappling with problems of freedom and authority in an era of rapid change” (45). This dilemma, I would suggest, also plays a central role in understanding Dickinson's social mapping. The Enlightenment belief in rationality, order and progress could morph in her poems into either the individual assertion of freedom and creativity, or a symbol of scientific authority and religious oppression her speaker struggles against. The division between tradition and modernity in her poems is never stable. Her social mapping presents the Robert E. Abrams' so-called “negative geography” – a topography of doubt, by exposing the insufficiency of definitions and measurement to offer an encyclopaedic and coherent view of the world. As Dickinson states in a letter to Susan, “faith is doubt” (L912). In a way, her employment of mapping is also an expression of faith, although it is not necessarily faith in religious or scientific truth, but faith in one's capability for doubt. By mapping geographical mutability and historical contingencies, her poems address

notions of human progress, social advancement and spiritual ascension.

In this chapter, I look at Dickinson's poems that characterize the social shift from tradition and certainty to individual quest for mobility and freedom. In his discussion of the Civil War and literature, Randall Fuller suggests that "Dickinson's [special burden] was to produce something vital and new from the waning traditions and threatened beliefs of a previous generation" (79). I would add that such a poetic attempt of Dickinson to renovate tradition is ambiguously placed between her nostalgia for the past, and her excitement for the new. For David Porter, Dickinson and Emerson were innovators and language makers "who prepared new eyes and new ears for the modernist era" (1981 7). I would suggest that her poetic renovation seems to also embody her social endeavour to account for both the old and the new. She claims in a letter that "I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse" (L268). Her "representative" voice involves the juxtaposition of the fading with the emerging. Thus this chapter focuses on her poems about the social dramas of her time that feature such a fusion. In the first section, I examine her receptiveness to the shifting social and cultural landscapes of New England, comparing her with Washington Irving and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Borrowing György Lukács' model of the shift from the epic to the novel as a basis of reading Dickinson, I then look at how she seeks to rewrite older forms for a modern age, especially how she uses procedures of mapping as a poetic instrument to both register and revise human perception about social transition. The second section looks more closely at her engagement with the past and the present in the context of the transition from the pastoral to the industrial. For her, as for her contemporaries, the image of the train was an apposite symbol for modernization. In a manner similar to Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and potentially prefiguring Walter Benjamin, Dickinson's depiction of the train discloses a more equivocal attitude toward the benefit of technology and industrialization than has been critically recognized.

Dickinson's ambivalence towards technology, modernity and progress also informs her notion of history. The third section looks at how her perception of human

progress is depicted in her poems about nature and the afterlife. Unlike her puritan forebears and contemporaries such as Edward Young and Edward Hitchcock, Dickinson seems to see history as a cyclical process rather than a linear progression. I suggest that her spiritual and natural mapping shows this lack of teleological confirmation, revealing instead a geological perception of both human and natural history. I examine this cyclical model in her poems more closely in the fourth section by looking at her notion of revolution and the relativity of perception. In particular, I show how her concept of “circumference” is profoundly related to her notion of “revolution in locality”. I then discuss her poetic mapping as an empirical approach to revolutionize human perception not by discarding the past, but by revisiting it. The fifth section explores her spiritual mapping further, examining her graveyard poems in the context of the rural landscape cemetery movement. Mount Auburn in Boston, a pioneer landscape cemetery that Dickinson visited, was a model of the pastoral and republican ideal on which America also based its nationhood. By comparing Dickinson's with Lydia Sigourney's more optimistic portrayal of the necropolis, I show her critical reception of such an ideological product of pastoralism that Mount Auburn represented. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that her poetic mapping reveals a longing for spatial intimacy, a topophilic sentiment that suggests Dickinson's poetic attempt to address the issue of the loss of place in the developing course of modernization.

### **“Never sailed the Bay!”: From the Epic to the Empirical Age**

Dickinson was born into a period of tremendous social and cultural transitions in American history. It was characterized by constant movement and migration, observed and commented upon by intellectuals and historians alike. Washington Irving, for example, recorded such an extreme sense of mobility in New England villages. In his short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, Irving's narrator attributed the lack of folklores and ghost stories to the trend of travel by rootless individuals in the mid-nineteenth century:

Local tales and superstitions thrive best in these sheltered long-settled retreats; but are trampled under foot by the shifting throng that forms the population of most of our country places. Besides, there is no encouragement for ghosts in most of villages, for they have scarcely had time to finish their first nap, and turn themselves in their graves, before their surviving friends have travelled away from the neighbourhood; so that when they turn out at night to walk their rounds, they have no acquaintance left to call upon. This is perhaps the reason why we so seldom heard of ghosts except in our long-established Dutch communities. (309-10)

Irving's comic observation provided an insight into a New England in transition, when tales and superstitions, symbolic of traditional cultural values, could hardly thrive. New England from the 1830s to the 1860s, according to Robert Doherty, was “a society composed of restless individuals whose frequent moves cut them off from communal ties and freed them from such traditional restraints as gossip, family, and neighborhood” (4). The speedy migrations allowed no deposit of fertile soil for tradition to take root and these rootless individuals were in a way emblematic of a process of struggle characterizing a transforming society.

Irving's facetious comment indicates how Enlightenment thinking broke from the past of superstition and unquestioned religious piety. This concern for historical discontinuity is also expressed in Dickinson's poems. Whereas Irving was devoted to the preservation of folklores, Dickinson was prone to dwelling on this moment of transition. One of her early poems “Could live - did live -” (F59) reveals such a tendency by dramatizing the gap between the ancient and the modern:

Could live - *did* live -  
 Could die - *did* die -  
 Could smile upon the whole  
 Through faith in one he met not -  
 To introduce his soul -

Could go from scene familiar  
 To an untraversed spot -  
 Could contemplate the journey

With unpuzzled heart -  
 Such trust had one among us -  
 Among us *not* today -  
 We who saw the launching  
 Never sailed the Bay!

Robin Peel states that in the poem Dickinson “speaks admiringly of the man who has died holding fast to his faith in the unknown” (212). I would add that this admiration for a past mode of belief system seems to be also mixed with a hesitation to embrace such an innocent world view. Instead, Dickinson italicizes “did” and “not” to stress this radical break between the past and the present, tradition and modernity. While emphasizing the gap, the poem also refrains from offering any spiritual confirmation. Hence this commentary voice of “us” and “We” becomes a double-edged sword, questioning the validity of empirical mapping as well as the complacency of the “unpuzzled” heart in the old days. This seemingly objective and analytical tone of this modern speaker not only undermines the Christian trust in meeting “the one he met not”, but also challenges the scientific belief in mapping. After all, spiritual redemption cannot be acquired with empirical evidence. Suzanne Juhasz remarks that Dickinson seeks sources such as the doctrines of Christianity and the facts of empirical knowledge for “ascertaining location”; however, as Juhasz explains, “What she finds when she follows their procedure is inaccurate and inappropriate” (135). Indeed, Dickinson strategically adopts the scientific language of mapping to reveal the problematic nature of trust in the poem. By recognizing the limitation of both science and religion, the poem is transformed into a self-parody.

“Could live - *did* live -” could be taken as a subtle response to Emerson's quest for the totality within. In “The Over-Soul”, Emerson comments upon one's modern search for “the whole”:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles.  
 Meanwhile within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence;  
 the universal beauty; the eternal One. And this deep power in  
 which we exist and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not  
 only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of

seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. (2001 164)

Like Emerson, Dickinson's speaker is also in constant struggle to search for the eternal and the universal over-soul. However, Dickinson seems prepared to see the irony in this Emersonian confidence. What for Emerson is “accessible”, “self-sufficing” and “perfect in every hour” is “*not*” available for Dickinson's modern speaker. Better equipped individuals “today” face a situation not much more enlightened than the one their ancestors of her time were in. By suggesting to “sail the bay”, her poem dramatizes the conundrum of the human condition that cannot be solved simply by Emerson's unity with the over-soul. For Dickinson, it seems not possible to return to the whole, and even empirical knowledge is equally untrustworthy. By offering an epistemology of trust, Dickinson's poem departs from Emerson's over-soul in questioning the possibility of “smiling upon the whole”.

Dickinson's emphasis on the break between the past and the present in “Could live - *did* live -” could be further illuminated by György Lukács' discussion of the epic mode in *The Theory of the Novel*. Lukács assigns a world view of totality to the age of the epic, an age when one's heart is not puzzled, and the whole of life is still trusted:

There is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any 'otherness' for the soul. The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself. Such an age is the age of the epic. (31)

Although Lukács' theory is mainly related to the development of the novel as a literary genre, his analysis is strikingly similar to the delineation of social transition in Dickinson's poem. The empirical voice in her poem can be seen as a modern attempt to fill in the blank space that Lukács' age of the epic confers on its soul. To

some extent, Dickinson's poem could also be seen as predicting the rise of a new literary style that would deal with the notion of the “otherness” within, an expression Lukács calls “transcendental homelessness” (41). As Lukács explains, the differentiation between the novel and the epic lies not only in the form, but also in their philosophical approaches towards life:

The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality. It would be superficial - a matter of a mere artistic technicality - to look for the only and decisive genre-defining criterion in the question of whether a work is written in verse or prose. (56)

Dickinson echoes Emerson and prefigures Lukács with her poem that recognizes the discontinuity between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, her poem can be seen not only as a social commentary, but also her poetic task to account for this transition. Although Dickinson chose lyric voices with predominately hymn meters to express private emotions and individual thoughts, her generic choice does not limit her exploration of the “totality” of life in transformation. For her, the difference between the age of the epic and her time lies in one's approach towards faith. Her adoption of empirical mapping to account for this transition characterizes her response toward modernity in a manner drastically different from Emerson.

Lukács' formulation helps explain Dickinson's historical and social outlook. The vision of totality became a much more problematic term to address for people of her time, and her poetic mapping presents such a challenge. Her notion of mapping takes on its modern significance by experimenting with, and potentially revolutionizing the definition of faith in her contemporary society. Such an endeavour can be seen in a much later poem “The Bible is an antique Volume -” (Fr1577C), a version that Dickinson sent to her nephew Ned, in which the Bible is not just a sacred text, but an ancient story that needs renewal. The poem practices what Roger Lundin's calls “the art of belief” in Dickinson through the notion of mapping. The speaker proposes rewriting the bible as enchanting stories, and this revision is done mostly through her

topographical imagination:

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

Inder Nath Kher notes that in the poem "the story of man, the events, characters, and locales of the Bible do not transcend their historic-geographic dimension" because of the lack of a "warbling Teller" (35). I would add that the poem seems to exactly intend to obviate a transcendental dimension. It shifts its focus from the heavenly Eden to the earthly one to accentuate the captivating power of the art of belief, instead of its transcendental promise. To some extent, Dickinson could be seen as taking on the task of being a "warbling Teller" herself in the poem by locating heaven on earth. To help "lost" boys to "believe" better, the poem turns belief into concrete locations. The "Subjects" of the Bible are "Bethlehem", Eden, "the ancient Homestead," and sin, "a distinguished Precipice". By mapping the sacred with the secular, the poem relocates Eden to Amherst. The process of conceptualization also involves geographical surveying and repositioning. Charles Anderson points out that Dickinson "poked the Scriptures to make them come alive"; and she did so by "test[ing] it against her own experience and rewrite it in her own language" (19). Roger Lundin also remarks that the "gentle sarcasm concerning the Bible and its stories" in the poem is a parody that would serve "the purpose of renewal" (203-04). I would further suggest that the biblical texts are renovated through her remapping of the biblical landscape onto the speaker's physical environment. Through this method,

the poem foregrounds location as not only her poetic subject, but the subject of faith. Charting the sacred landscape materializes her literary renovation.

“The Bible is an antique Volume -” was originally written as a piece of amusement for a collegian nephew, which Dickinson called a “Diagnosis of the Bible, by a Boy -” (Anderson 18). Aside from its playful context, the poem also illustrates her “diagnostic” attempt to reconnect the faded with the modern. Although, as Lawrence Buell states, the “table-of-contents approach” in the poem risks turning this “Orphism” into another sermon (1986 66), this gesture to relocate heaven on earth also exemplifies an attempt to evoke and renew a fading and “superstitious” version of the Christian tradition, implied by “the suggestion of Holy Spectres”. Irving takes relish in narrating stories of the past ghosts. Dickinson, alternatively, goes further back to summon a mythological ghost in the pre-Christian era. Succeeding “Faded men” and “Holy Spectres” in her poem is Orpheus, a pastoral bard who resurrects his dead wife with his music. The resurrecting power of Orpheus is also a literary miracle that Dickinson believes to be able to resuscitate the faded belief. Her poem hence echoes not only religious and classical revivalism, but also spiritualism that gained popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. By fusing empiricism, mythology, Christianity and spiritualism, her poem sets out to map a new terrain of faith through art's captivation.

It is instructive to look at Dickinson's poetic mapping in the light of the cultural environment that shaped her world view during her formative years. As David S. Reynolds points out, her poems were influenced by the popular religious culture of her time, which taught her to write “adventurously beyond doctrine by mixing the sacred and the secular, the Christian and the pagan” (2002 171). I would suggest that this mixture of popular elements in Dickinson might also reflect her understanding of modernization not only as a process of secularization, but also a process of dislocation and repositioning, embedded in the narrative of progress I have discussed in the introduction. Across the nineteenth century, the congregations of religious and agricultural communities developed in tandem with the growth of industrialized

cities. The multifarious coexistence of the secular and the sacred, rural and urban values in an antebellum American society was most evident in her local education system. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes, the religious institute in Amherst offered a comprehensive range of courses, including both secular leaning and spiritual education (17). In the curriculum of Amherst Academy in 1814, of which Samuel Fowler Dickinson, Dickinson's grandfather, was co-founder, both science and spiritualism played major roles. Practical mathematics such as “comprehending navigation”, “surveying”, “mensuration”, and “astronomical calculations” were taught alongside “sacred geography” and “moral philosophy”. Students were equipped with scientific methods to investigate both spiritual and physical continents, both the outside world and the world of the mind.

This liberal mixture of the secular and the spiritual landscape in Dickinson's education helps explain her appropriation of these forces in her poems to delineate social transition. Her experiment with empirical mapping highlights her literary ambition to reconnect the past and the modern. Nevertheless, her quest to hold onto the whole, as shown in “Could live - *did* live -” and “The Bible is an antique Volume -”, is constantly undermined by the hypothetical tone of “Coulds” and “Had but”. Her social mapping is conducted tentatively, speculatively and cautiously. Furthermore, in both poems, Dickinson conceptualizes social transition in terms of confrontation and tension. In “Could live - *did* live -”, we are shown the incompatible approach to faith between past piety and present empiricism. In “The Bible is an antique Volume -”, the Christian past is fading and threatened to be replaced by modernity. Dickinson juxtaposes forces of modernity and tradition in her poems to show their conflicting relationship. Her social mapping shows a critical reception of both forces. Empiricism with its promise of progress and the Christian tradition with its promise of resurrection seem equally insufficient to account for the totality of life.

Dickinson's poems accentuate the difficulties of locating paradise, or what Livingstone and Withers call “the paradise question”, a matter of sacred geography

that exemplifies the tensions within Enlightenment “between scriptural doctrine and secular rationalism” (1999 78). Dickinson delineates this clashing and merging relation between the ancient and the modern, the religious and the scientific in her poems of social transition. In particular, she consistently probes this paradise question by mapping the secular geography onto the sacred one, or vice versa. As I have mentioned in the introduction and will discuss further in this chapter and the next, patriotic discourses in Jacksonian America were often based on manifest destiny, a rhetorical device that mapped the city of God onto the American landscape as a justification for expansion. Dickinson's notion of mapping seems to both reflect and question this rhetorical structure. Whereas her contemporary Americans attempted to secure a divine blueprint on earth, she mapped and tested in her poems the validity of faith and veracity of heaven. Her poetic mapping appropriated the belief systems of the Enlightenment and Christianity to expose the problematic nature of modernity as based upon both reason and faith.

In *Past and Present* (1843), Thomas Carlyle criticizes the social and political corruption of the modern world by referring to a newly published *Chronicles of the Abbey of Saint Edmund's Bury*, an account written by Jocelin of Brakelond in the twelfth century. As Carlyle states, religion at that time was “not a diseased self-introspection, an agonising inquiry”; for religious men then, religion was “like an all-embracing heavenly canopy, like an atmosphere and life-element, which is not spoken of, which in all things is presupposed without speech” (52). For Carlyle, such “a great heaven-high Unquestionability, encompassing, interpenetrating the whole of Life” contrasts with “a horrible restless Doubt, still less a far horribler composed Cant” in the modern life (58). In a way more sceptical than Carlyle, Dickinson's social mapping reveals a deeper vacillation between trust and scepticism toward a paradisaical vision of the whole. Her modern speaker often feels no more well-equipped than Columbus on the Atlantic ocean almost four hundred years ago. The commentary voices in her poems both register and resist the empirical attempt to account for spiritual confirmation, revealing a social reality of transition, confrontation and conjunction. This disappearance of the old bond based upon

chivalry, heroic sentiment or religious piety leads to a disillusion and hence pragmatic tendency for her speaker to assess evidence and question one's spiritual conviction.

**“To pastures of Oblivion —”: Pastoralism and Industrialism**

This vacillation between the past and the present becomes prominent in Dickinson's portrayal of the shift from the pastoral to the industrial, a process of modernization that her father also took an active part in. Edward Dickinson, a proponent of the Whig party and social improvement, was according to Alfred Habegger also “the last man in Amherst who was deemed to be a 'squire’” (505). Called by Dickinson “Chief Marshal” in an 1853 letter, Edward helped build the Amherst and Belchertown railroad in 1852-53 and brought Massachusetts Agricultural College to Amherst in 1868 (Habegger 288-92 & 505). His daughter seems more impressed with her father's political determination than with the Whiggish ideology of social progress and modernization that he had devoted himself to. A sense of unease is conveyed in two poems about the tension between pastoralism and industrialism, “A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes” (Fr1549) and “I like to see it lap the Miles -” (Fr383). Both poems touch upon the topic of social transition, potentially alluding to her father's investment in local interest for social improvement, and both poems are somewhat apocalyptic. The first poem depicts the disappearance of a pastoral past in an almost allegorical manner:

A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes  
 Who drove a lonesome Cow  
 To pastures of Oblivion -  
 A statesman's Embryo -

The Boys that whistled are extinct -  
 The Cows that fed and thanked  
 Remanded to a Ballad's Barn  
 Or Clover's Retrospect -

Echoing the faded men in “The Bible is an antique Volume -”, the faded boy in the

poem becomes another allegorical figure, symbolizing the decline of an idyllic past. Instead of lamenting pastoral decline, however, the poem presents social transition as a rebirth. Ambiguously, the image of an “Embryo” that stands out in the middle of the poem not only suggests the possibility of renewal in a new society, but it also ends with an “o” that might lead to another zero with its capital O, “Oblivion”. In “Barbarism and Civilization,” Higginson alludes to Emerson's statement that “Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other”, commenting that “there is a latent distrust of civilization” in western societies (52). Dickinson's poem seems to echo such distrust towards human progress.

Furthermore, “Remanded” and “A Ballad's Barn” in the second stanza of “A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes” transform the whole sentimental picture of the pastoral past into the contemporary reality of capitalism and industrialism, suggesting that pastoralism is not the opposite, but the very ideological product of entrepreneurs or art curators: the cows that “fed and thanked” are herded like museum objects or commodities into the collection of folk songs or a cattle market, for display or for sale. This subtle depiction of modern transformation might have alluded to the aesthetic interest of Dickinson's brother Austin Dickinson, who, as Habbegger notes, “specialized in architecture, interior decorating, landscaping” (506). “Austin's way of coping with modernity”, according to Habbegger, “was to turn his home and his town into a charming manorial park, out of which he gazed with the cold disdain we see in his photographs” (288-92 & 507). The poem reflects such a reality of social transformation, when pastoralism became an extension of industrialization. Within these two lines from “pastures of Oblivion” to “A statesman's Embryo”, and the two stanzas from loneliness to extinction, Dickinson encapsulates the spirit of modernization.

What is noticeable in “A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes” is that the process of modernization is not depicted in terms of progression but regression. The shepherd is extinct, the cows are sent back to the barn, and the process from the pastoral to the modern is portrayed as a return to the embryo of a statesman. In contrast to the

embryonic symbol of progress and creativity is the pastoral picture of entrapment, suggesting a future outlook that is potentially regressive and apocalyptic. Emerson is an instructive comparison here. In “Politics”, Emerson states that “We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star. In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy” (219). In a similar way, Dickinson's “A statesman's Embryo” associates the political, and presumably industrialist future of America with a symbolic procedure of rebirth, but she also stresses its potential regression. “Pastoral and wilderness tropes”, Greg Garrard states, “typically imply the perspective of the aesthetic tourism, while the apocalypse encodes the vision of prophetic imagination” (108). Dickinson combines both tropes of pastoralism and apocalyptic visions in this poem to portray her both allegorical and mythical perception of modernization. The poem thus informs Dickinson's potential understanding of history in terms of struggle for survival and an apocalyptic vision that parallels renewal with destruction. As Leo Marx states at the very beginning of *The Machine in the Garden*, “The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the discovery” (1). Dickinson's depiction of pastoral decline captures this tension between American identity as a nation of nature, and its modern transformation. Her pastoral mapping suggests the anxiety, uncertainty and regressive tendency of a society that one might experience as a modern individual.

“A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes” is indicative of Dickinson's ambiguous response to modernity and progress. Renée Bergland compares her historical view to that of Walter Benjamin's angel of history who turns his back at the future, facing historical debris piling at his feet. Indeed, social transition in her poem is often delineated through uncertainty and decay, rather than a rosy promise of advancement. Sentimental writers of her time such as Irving laments the worldliness and “dissipation” of the modern world (165). Dickinson's poem exploits this sentimentality towards the idyllic and spiritual past to portray a social rebirth that also threatens to sink into oblivion. Her cautious attitude can be understood better if we look at Henry David Thoreau's response toward industrialization. As one of her

favourite writers, Thoreau portrays the faded pastoral life in an equally unsentimental manner in *Walden*:

And hark! Here comes the cattle-train bearing the cattle of a thousand hills, sheepcots, stables, and cow-yards in the air, drovers with their sticks, and shepherd boys in the midst of their flocks, all but the mountain pastures, whirled along like leaves blown from the mountains by the September gales. The air is filled with the bleating of calves and sheep, and the hustling of oxen, as if a pastoral valley were going by ... A carload of drovers, too, in the midst, on a level with their droves now, their vocation gone, but still clinging to their useless sticks as their badge of office ... So is your pastoral life whirled past and away. But the bell rings, and I must get off the track and let the cars go by ... (118)

Thoreau's pragmatic style that Leo Marx calls “a pleasing freshness” against “popular, sentimental pastoralism” echoes the faded shepherd in Dickinson's poem (254). Marx points out that Thoreau has to “restore the pastoral hope” at the end of his book by removing it from history and relocating it in literature (265). Dickinson, in a similar way, puts the pastoral past back to “a Ballad's Barn” in her pastoral poem. The irretrievable traces of the pastoral past can only be recorded either in the landscape, symbolized by “Clover's Retrospect”, or the poet's imagination, as implied in “a Ballad's Barn”. Reaching the end of her poem, as well as Thoreau's book, one has to wonder if the whole depiction of the pastoral past is just a modern allegory, a poetic conjecture that is stored, or restored only in natural and literary memories.

Besides the imagery of the pastoral, the steam engine is another apposite symbol to define modernization. Thoreau's depiction of the speeding train and the September gale can be seen as symbolic of a modernizing force, echoing the writings of his contemporary Romanticists and Transcendentalists. Emerson, for example, states in *Nature* that man “no longer waits for favoring gales, but by means of steam, he realizes the fable of Aeolus' bag, and carries the two and thirty winds in the boiler of his boat” (2001 30). In a manner similar to Percy Shelley's prophetic “Ode to the

West Wind”, Thoreau's “September gale” and Emerson's “favoring gale” underscore the significance of the engine as a modern force that whirls the pastoral past away. This modern force morphs into Dickinson's more ambiguously portrayed train in “I like to see it lap the Miles -” (Fr383). In the poem, the train is depicted as a demigod beast, both omnipotent and docile:

I like to see it lap the Miles -  
 and lick the Valleys up -  
 And stop to feed itself at Tanks -  
 And then - prodigious step

Around a Pile of Mountains -  
 And supercilious peer  
 In Shanties - by the sides of Roads -  
 And then a Quarry pare

To fit it's sides  
 And crawl between  
 Complaining all the while  
 In horrid - hooting stanza -  
 Then chase itself down Hill -

And neigh like Boanerges -  
 Then - prompter than a Star  
 Stop - docile and omnipotent  
 At it's own stable door -

Scholars have used this poem to explore Dickinson's attitude towards technology and progress. As Patrick F. O'Connell points out, “the assumption” is that the poem is “a comic eulogy of the Amherst-Belchertown Railroad, the pet project of the poet's father” (469-70). Charles R. Anderson, for example, regards the poem as an example of Dickinson's wit, her “ironic tribute to modern science, which invents machines of monstrous power yet firmly controlled, here serving no purpose but her own amusement” (16). Domhnall Mitchell further states that the poem “appears to refute a fear that was evidently shared by the upper-middle stratum of society” about industrialism (1998 19). The poem thus can be read as a humorous and affirmative comment on her father's bringing a railroad to Amherst. However, the combination of

positive and negative depictions of the train in Dickinson's poem, as Mitchell remarks, also "mirror Dickinson's own ambivalence towards the social forces that she symbolizes in the poem" (1998 18). Despite his belief in Dickinson's witty intention, Anderson also notes that in the poem "there is no suggestion of the standard nineteenth-century praise of material progress" (16). Betsy Erkkila further argues that "the arrival of the train in Amherst" provoked Dickinson's "antidemocratic fears": "Dickinson saw it as an intrusion from abroad of money, commerce, and the masses" (2004 142-43). Mitchell, alternatively, asserts convincingly that the poem expresses "a playful but very profound attempt at containing the energies of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism" and at "adjusting the balance of power between established and newer-manufacturing classes" (1998 20). I would add here that the poem places the train in a mediating position between the ancient and the modern, a position reflecting Dickinson's own perception of progress and modernity. As shown in "The Bible is an antique Volume -", Dickinson fuses the ancient and the modern through her mythic and biblical imagination. Similarly, the train as a symbol of industrialization becomes in her poem a mythic or biblical creature. It is not only "prompter than a Star", but it also neighs like "Boanerges", a fiery preacher in the bible, and is docile at its own stable door, a reference both to a horse's stable and, as O'Connell points out, to Jesus' birthplace (473).

Furthermore, the train in Dickinson's poem is no longer metallic but sensuous, animalistic and organic, a portrayal that, as Mitchell puts it, makes the train "familiar" and "controllable": "[t]he modern machine is made over into a nostalgic, agrarian vision of highly-strung animals and their bemused but tolerant masters" (1998 20). Here I would add that this attempt of Dickinson as a "tolerant" mistress to "control" the new industrial power might be related to her perception of the changing relationship between man and nature. By emphasizing its intimate relation with the landscape, the poem makes the train the connecting force that brings man and nature closer. This omnipotent train registers a new form of modernity by fusing social and natural forces to substitute for the pastoral past. This connecting force, however, also

suggests potential destruction. Her train is a misfit in the pastoral ideal and bypasses all the working class living in the shanties. It originates from the combination of human and natural labour, but renders both inadequate. As a demi-god, demi-beast creature, the train is an awkward combination. It is both confident and arrogant, being omnipotent but not too civilized, and both supernatural, and animalistic. It befriends the mountains, valleys and the stars, but it also surpasses them, making its presence more powerful and threatening.

This ambiguous depiction of the train might have reflected the unstable status of the Amherst and Belchertown line that, as Habegger points out, “went into financial collapse” in 1857 (346-47).<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the train is the product from the embryo of politicians and industrialists, taking the place of horses as the major transportation propelling modernization. However, it might seem more like an experiment than a staple of national economy at the time of its creation for Dickinson. Underneath its playfulness, as Patrick F. O'Connell points out, Dickinson's train is an “ecological monster”: with its destructive potential, the train is also treated as a biblical beast that designates an “apocalyptic vision” (474). For O'Connell, the poem is “a pointed commentary on the perennial human capacity to create idols, and an ironic warning of impending technological catastrophe” (474). I would add that Dickinson places the train at the centre of an interrelated system between man and nature, labour and machinery, to accentuate its crucial but also subversive position, both environmentally and financially. Although the mechanic precision and power of the train fulfil the human desire to overcome distance, its condescending attitude and omnipotence also present itself as an intimidating element in the social order and natural harmony.

To some extent, Dickinson's train poem could be seen as a subtle reply to Thoreau's concerns about the impact of technology upon humans and nature in *Walden*. Dickinson's biblical and mythological portrayal of the train, as Nathalia Wright

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<sup>43</sup> See also Domhnall Mitchell's “The Train, the Father, his Daughter, and her Poem: A Reading of Emily Dickinson's ‘I like to see it lap the Miles’” (1998 13-14).

states, reflects a close reading of, and potentially active response to Thoreau.<sup>44</sup> When Thoreau saw the Fitchburg Railroad passing by, he associated its power with mythic origins, wondering “what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they will put into the new Mythology” (113). Being sceptical at heart, perhaps more so than Dickinson, Thoreau showed his anxiety about the position of machines in relation to human society and nature:

If all were as it seems, and men made the elements their servants for noble ends! If the cloud that hangs over the engine were the perspiration of heroic deeds, or as beneficent as that which floats over the farmer's fields, then the elements and Nature herself would cheerfully accompany men on their errands and be their escort. (113)

Throughout his description of this encounter, Thoreau kept wondering “If the enterprise were as innocent as it is early!” (113) and “If the enterprise were as heroic and commanding as it is protracted and unwearied!” (114) The steam engine for him was overpowering man and nature, living its glory at the expense of human and natural labour. This vigilance is also visible in Dickinson's train image. She contrasts the prodigious steps and supercilious peer of the locomotive with the insignificant shanties and quarries along the road. Its “horrid” and “hooting” stanza is the very antithesis of pastoral harmony. If the train is in any way “heroic” and “commanding” for both writers, its unpleasant and demanding presence is also difficult for them to overlook.

As Walter Benjamin points out, the metaphoric dressing up of steam engines as living creatures “reflected the need to escape a threat”: “this threat was thought to lie in the 'rigid', 'mechanical' qualities associated with technical forms” (2008 161). Dickinson's pastoral and train poems show such a response to modernization with her hesitation either to forego pastoralism in its faded moment or to embrace industrialization into the natural landscape wholeheartedly. The image of the train as

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<sup>44</sup> In “Emily Dickinson's Boanerges and Thoreau's Atropos: Locomotives on the Same Line?” Nathalia Wright offers a detailed juxtaposition of and comparison between Dickinson's poem and Thoreau's mythological and astronomical depiction of the train to show their close correlation.

being potent and serpentine, embodies not only the movement of the train, but also symbolizes the attraction and threat of technology. Domhnall Mitchell remarks that the train is recruited in Dickinson's poem "as an agent of change but as a welcome confirmation of social stasis: the new machine may be powerful and strange, but it is also compliant and familiar" (2000 35). Indeed, Dickinson's train suggests familiarity despite its overpowering presence. However, this confirmation is not depicted without anxiety. As O'Connell remarks, in the poem "[t]he right relationship between man and machine has been distorted, even reversed" (471). Although the poem obviates social conflict and class tension to present a mythic and cosmic version of social transformation, it also makes the train stop at a stable door, symbolizing a process of regression and an implication of the Second Coming. As a symbol of modernity and civilization, her train is not particularly civil or modern. Despite its mediating position, it surpasses both nature and man. By portraying the train both as an alien other and a part of nature, Dickinson's poem discloses her own ambivalent attitude toward it. The tone of the poem is welcoming, but it also ends on an intimation of uncertainty. Her 1853 letter to Austin about the Palmer-Amherst railway reveals a more vigilant, rather than simply welcoming attitude: "Carriages flew like sparks, hither, and thither and yon, and they all said t'was fine. I spose it was - I sat in Prof Tylor's woods and saw the train move off, and then ran home again for fear someone would see me, or ask me how I did (L 127)". Dickinson's letter presents a picture of a fragile individual facing an omnipotent presence. Habegger remarks that her train poem "nicely represents the huge destabilizing forces of the industrial revolution, not omitting the shanties and blasted bedrock, yet the conclusion, with its safe return home, has a naïve and reassuring pastoralism" (292). Here I would argue that when juxtaposing her pastoral poem and her train poem, one sees this apparent naivety in fact to be a more complex response to industrialism. This emotional tension between confirmation and crisis, trust and doubt, dominates Dickinson's poems of social mapping. Her sparking train in her letter, her serpentine train, and her oblivious shepherd all project a modernized world in a less predictable fashion. The industrialized future is just an embryo of the statesman, and her train is about to derail at any time. In her letter, she felt the need to be reassured before she

could be supposed that “t’was fine”, since the steam engine of modernity had no human drivers to direct it.<sup>45</sup>

The train is more than a warning sign for Dickinson, a poet that Karl Keller describes as knowing “how to play with fire” (249). She develops in her poem a flirtatious relationship with the machine in her sensuous or even erotic depiction of the train. The speaker claims to enjoy watching the train “lap” the land and “lick” the valleys, presenting one of the most imaginative and daringly seductive literary scenes in this courtship between man, nature, and the machine. To some extent, her playful train co-acts with nature and “I” as a spectator in this highly eroticized and intimate triangle of human-nature-machine interactions. While fitting the locomotive into the pastoral paradigm, Dickinson also makes this serpentine playmate overpass nature and humanity to become a hardly containable otherness in a cosmic world. This sensual portrayal of the train anticipates Walter Benjamin's interpretation of technology not as a slave of man's dominance over nature, but the master in the man-nature relationship in his 1928 essay *One-Way Street*.<sup>46</sup>

[The] immense wooing of the cosmos was enacted for the first time on a planetary scale - that is, in the spirit of technology. But because the lust for profit of the ruling class sought satisfaction through it, technology betrayed man and turned the bridal bed into a bloodbath. The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between the generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery not of nature but of the relationship between nature and man. (qtd. in Cutler 161-62)

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Anderson points out that “[t]here are no passengers or freight on her train, and no meaningful route; it simply roars around its circuit and then comes docilely home” (16). Patrick O’Connell further comments that in the poem “the journey is described as though the beast were creating its own passageway” (472).

<sup>46</sup> Edward S. Cutler uses this quote from Benjamin to elucidate Walt Whitman's concept of “Messianic Time” that avoids the progressive concept of time, a quote I also find useful to illuminate Dickinson's cyclical view of history (161-62).

With a startlingly similar image of cosmic wooing, Benjamin expresses his understanding of technology as another organic cosmic force that is meant to wed the human and natural, instead of making “the bridal bed into a bloodbath.” Dickinson also recognizes the seductive and threatening power of technology. In a manner similar to Thoreau and preceding Benjamin, she positions the locomotive not as a harness of nature, but as an intermediary between man and nature, showing her acute awareness of this uneasy relationship between the three. By accentuating the both dangerous and playful liaison between the locomotive, the speaker and the land, Dickinson's train poem questions human confidence in technological advancement.

“I like to see it lap the Miles -” can be read as another renovation project for Dickinson to both dramatize and bridge the break between modernity and tradition. Like the previous poems, the train poem also portrays an awkward moment in history, the arrival of a new aristocracy in the process of modernization. Her understanding of historical development, as shown in these poems, is full of tensions and uncertainty. The pastoral past can be seen as both regressing into and regenerating from the embryo of a statesman in “A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes”. Similarly, the train in “I like to see it lap the Miles -” both departs from and returns to “it's own” stable door. In these poems, Dickinson registers the gap between the ancient and the modern, between the faded shepherd that symbolizes pastoral harmony, and the steam machine that designates technological progressivism. Nevertheless, she also emphasizes their continuity by mapping and dwelling emphatically upon the phase of transition.

This modern world Dickinson responded to is also a period that Thomas Carlyle diagnoses as the “Mechanical Age” in “Signs of the Times” (1829):

Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great

art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance. (59)

With Carlyle's portrait hung on her bedroom wall (Miller 1987 162), Dickinson might have had his clearly defined "Age of Machinery" in mind, when she attempted to account for the social transition her contemporary society was undergoing. However, her poetic conjecture vacillates between the Christian, the pastoral and the mythical past on the one hand, and the modernized and mechanized present on the other. She never seems to stop looking back without feeling hesitant, and never looks straight forward without feeling trepidation. Living in Carlyle's so-called "Mechanical Age", Dickinson transforms empirical mapping into the sensuous power of lingering. For Dickinson, neither religion nor science has the final truth of human faith. She sees the belief systems of both religion and science as based on the multifaceted, unpredictable and almost arbitrary operation of human nature, not on rationality, reason or common sense. Thus she explores this interface between the physical and the metaphysical, the scientific and the spiritual, the pastoral and the industrial, exposing the mutable conditions of modernity.

### **"Retrospection is Prospect's half,": A Cyclical View of History and Deep Time**

This decisive gesture to dwell upon transition informs Dickinson's perception of history and human progress. As shown in "A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes" and "I like to see it lap the Miles -", Dickinson presents a more lingering and cyclical picture of social transition. The memory of a pastoral ideal intermingles with the force of modernization. Social progression, for Dickinson, seems inseparable from a tendency toward regression. The journey of her omnipotent train ends at the stable door, suggesting both a biblical rebirth and its apocalyptic potential. This allusive ending corresponds with the puritan imagination of her contemporary writers. Both Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne compare the journey of the steam engine to a celestial one. In *Walden*, Thoreau depicts the moving train as both moving forward and upward:

I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular. Their train of clouds stretching far behind and rising higher and higher, going to heaven while the cars are going to Boston, conceals the sun for a minute and casts my distant field into the shade, a celestial train beside which the petty train of cars which bugs the earth is but the barb of the spear. (113)

Thoreau's celestial train intimates a spiritual journey beyond, outshining the secular one conducted by the machine. Although, as shown in the previous section, Thoreau seems sceptical towards the social and environmental impact of technology upon man and nature, he also expresses high reverence towards the potential future modernization might bring. In Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, the sagacious character Clifford Pyncheon also voices a similar analogy between religious pilgrimages and industrial progress. For a dark tale about a puritan town in Salem, Clifford's historical view is strikingly optimistic:

[A]ll human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined, and perfected to its ideal. The past is but a coarse and sensual prophecy of the present and the future. (186)

Although Hawthorne parodies the journey of Christian pilgrims in “The Celestial Railroad” (1846) in being as much apocalyptic as spiritual, his Clifford offers the contrary view, considering the train a modern symbol of spiritualism. According to Clifford, the invention of railroads foresees a speedy trip to heaven:

These railroads - could but the whistle be made musical, and the rumble and the jar got rid of - are positively the greatest blessing that the ages have wrought out for us. They give us wings; they annihilate the toil and dust of pilgrimage; they spiritualize travel! Transition being so facile, what can be any man's inducement to tarry in one spot? (187)

The train embodies progress in life and its potential outcome of ascension by means of an advanced and better world. As a symbol of modernization, it becomes a self-

fulfilling prophecy. By drastically improving the speed of travel, the train also, in Clifford's words, "spiritualize[s] travel" and becomes a sign of spiritual ascension. Dickinson seemed to inherit both enthusiasm for and anxiety about the technology discussed by her fellow writers. Like Thoreau and Hawthorne, she was profoundly influenced by this puritan notion of pilgrimage and ascension, and the train for her also served as a powerful image. Among her manuscripts, there is a collage made out of a locomotive stamp and two newspaper clippings. The stamp is arranged sideways with the head of the steam train facing upwards like a flying carriage, with its steam pouring down and two wings attached at the side.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to her collage, the vertical journey in Dickinson's poems is never conducted through modern technologies, and whether this human progress can lead to eventual ascension remains ambiguous. In particular, the movement of spiritual progression in Dickinson's poems does not seem to proceed anywhere further than the origin of departure. Unlike the celestial travel in Thoreau and Hawthorne, her train stops promptly at the stable door. Her spiritual pilgrimage, similarly, is never simply a direct flight to heaven, and every step forward threatens to fall back to the starting point. This lack of certainty is characterized in "Because I could not stop for Death -" (Fr479). In the poem, eternity is depicted as a condition of spatial stasis:

Because I could not stop for Death -  
 He kindly stopped for me -  
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves -  
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He knew no haste  
 And I had put away  
 My labor and my leisure too,  
 For His Civility -

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<sup>47</sup> The two wings are made of two 1870 newspaper clippings from *Harper's Magazine*, with "George Sand" on one and her 1837 novel "Mauprat" on the other attached to the stamp (Franklin 1016). These two wings might have alluded to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's celebration of the genius of George Sand in a sonnet "To George Sand: A Desire" (1844), in which the speaker offers to draw "two pinions, white as wings of swan,/ From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place/ With holier light!" (100). As Christopher Benfey remarks, the collage looks "as if she [Dickinson] were sending a letter to George Sand" (2009 245). Benfey further suggests that Dickinson's rocket-shaped collage might be a mimesis of Dickinson's railroad view outside her window (2009 247).

We passed the School, where Children strove  
 At recess - in the Ring -  
 We passed the Field of Gazing Grain -  
 We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed Us -  
 The Dews drew quivering and Chill -  
 For only Gossamer, my Gown -  
 My Tippet - only Tulle -

We paused before a House that seemed  
 A swelling of the Ground -  
 The Roof was scarcely visible -  
 The Cornice - in the Ground -

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet  
 Feels shorter than the Day  
 I first surmised the Horses' Heads  
 Were toward Eternity -

Critics such as Cynthia Griffin Wolff has pointed out the revision of “the bride-of-Christ tradition” in the poem,<sup>48</sup> reading is as an affirmation of “the poet's victory over time and mortality” (274-77). Inder Nath Kher similarly states that in the poem “Dickinson affirms life and its continuity ... Death is merely a pause” (213). Barton Levi St. Armand also reads the poem as her “surreal 'tribute' to her own special brand of spiritual materialism” (72). Judith Farr further remarks that the poem can be read as Dickinson's “supreme assertion of the continuance of the soul or self. It may be a tribute to herself as a poet” (1992 331). Indeed, the third, fourth and fifth stanzas in the poem seem to account for the notion of the whole, or a fulfilled spiritual life. Passing the cycle of life and day, from “the Ring” of “the School” for “Children,” to the field of “Gazing Grain,” from “the Setting Sun” to “The Cornice - in the Ground -”, the carriage ride embodies the circumference of life, the totality of life that a faithful Christian would smile upon and be certain of. However, as St. Armand notes, Death here is a sinister undertaker as well as a gentleman caller, a suitor and an usher

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<sup>48</sup> Cynthia Griffin Wolff points out that the poem deals with the “specter of genteel carnality” by fusing “the bride-of Christ tradition” with “the narrative of seduction” (274). Charles Anderson also notes that the speaker is “properly dressed for a celestial marriage” and ‘Death’ ... is not the true bridegroom but a surrogate ... the envoy taking her on this curiously premature wedding journey to the heavenly altar where she will be married to God ” (246).

(72); and “the notion of embracing 'Death' with pleasure,” Wolff remarks, “can be little more than a Gothic horror” (275). In particular, the reluctance of the speaker and her speculation at the end of the poem turn this meeting into a comic dramatization of excessive civility rather than a matter of mutual trust. Despite the triumph of the speaker over death, which Wolff believes to be achieved “by a masterful refusal to bring the poem to any climax at all” (275-76), the poem also discloses Dickinson's conception of immortality as a more static experience than ecstatic and revelatory. Cristanne Miller depicts the poem as “a satiric portrait of Victorian gentility and repression” in *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia* (14). Indeed, here Death seems to be the inevitability that dictates life, rather than a deliverance and relief. The chivalry of Death cannot eliminate the doubt of his passenger. If the speaker in the poem achieves victory, this victory seems to be won through another imprisonment rather than liberation. Without a final confirmation, the speaker stays still in the chilly carriage of the grave, wondering.

Critics have associated the carriage in the poem with the vehicle of love and life. Charles Anderson, for example, remarks that “the carriage drive was a standard mode of courtship a century ago” (246). Inder Nath Kher also points out that “The carriage symbolizes onward movement and continuity” (213). I would add that Dickinson's vehicle choice of the carriage ride and its agrarian setting, instead of a train journey, might also suggest her perception of human progress as distinctly separate from social and technological advancement. The spiritual progress of humanity seems stagnant, not like the prodigious steps of her sensuous train. If Dickinson is ambiguous about the benefit of technology, her attitude towards such a provincial and agricultural afterlife is equally equivocal. If the slowness and kindness of this immortal ride, in Alan Tate's reading of the poem, is characteristic of southern chivalry (Benfey 2002 38-39), they also dramatize the irony of obligation and confusion in such a pastoral experience. Another poem “My Wheel is in the dark!” (Fr61A), a version that Dickinson sent to Susan Dickinson in 1859, presents this posthumous confusion in a quaint and presumably darker fashion:

My Wheel is in the dark.  
 I cannot see a spoke -  
 Yet know it's dripping feet  
 Go round and round.

My foot is on the tide -  
 An unfrequented road  
 Yet have all roads  
 A "Clearing" at the end.

Some have resigned the Loom -  
 Some - in the busy tomb  
 Find quaint employ.  
 Some with new - stately feet -  
 Pass royal thro' the gate  
 Flinging the problem back, at you and I.

Lyndall Gordon reads the poem as a portrayal of Dickinson's writing process (as suggested by the imagery of the "dripping feet") (81). Robin Peel further associates Dickinson's interest in geography with her poetic career: "Several of her poems from 1858, the year in which she gradually established what was to become her unmistakably original style, are concerned with roads and mysterious journeys out" (207). Here I would add that the poem could also be read as Dickinson's poetic endeavour to tackle with the issues of location, mobility and progress in the process of modernization. The emphasis on suspension and speculation in her poem resonates with John Bunyan's depiction of one of the darkest moments in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In his allegorical journey, the pilgrim passes through the Valley of the Shadow of Death in extreme anxiety:

The path-way was here also exceeding narrow, and therefore good *Christian* was the more put to it; for when he sought in the dark to shun the ditch on the one hand, he was ready to tip over into the mire on the other; also when he sought to escape the mire, without great carefulness, he would be ready to fall into the ditch. Thus he went on, and I heard him sigh bitterly: for, besides the dangers mentioned above, the path way was here so dark, that oft times when he lift up his foot to set forward, he knew not where, or upon what he should set it next. (51-52)

Dickinson's poem captures the crucial moment in Bunyan's pilgrimage. By putting "Clearing" in quotation marks, however, the poem stresses the contrast between the certainty of the afterlife, and the suspension the speaker continuously experiences throughout the poem. Like the unknowing passenger of Death in "Because I could not stop for Death -", the speaker in the poem never reaches the "'Clearing' at the end", the promised destination of heaven. Towards the end, the wheel that goes round and round no longer moves the speaker's carriage forward, but transforms into her loom that weaves a destiny of anxious waiting.

Imagery of cyclical progression permeates Dickinson's poems, such as the cycle of social progress, the circumference of life, the turning wheels and the spinning of the loom. The afterlife is less a movement of transcendence or advancement than a tedious and quotidian experience of suspension, speculation and insecurity. However receptive Dickinson is to Thoreau's "celestial train" or Clifford's so-called "spiritualized travel", her spiritual journey seems to consciously obviate any technological assistance or spiritual confirmation. She does not seem to share the same confidence in the "ascending spiral curve" of human history, whether through propelling engines or a pastoral return. Suzanne Juhasz puts it succinctly that Dickinson "is trying to live, not to transcend life" (168). Indeed, Dickinson's celestial journey is also a journey of life struggle, in which her speaker is often thwarted or suspended in the process of advancement.

Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, one of the textbooks in Amherst College and a text Dickinson quoted several times in her letters,<sup>49</sup> serves here as a useful comparison. Despite the gravity of its subject matter, which, as Daneen Wardrop notes, contrasts Enlightenment sensibilities (1996 10), Young's poem in general explicates a Christian message of moral redemption by modelling human history upon nature. It combines moral reflection with an Enlightenment passion for reason and science to account for human progress and eventual ascension. The narrator in the poem instructs Lorenzo, "a man of pleasure and the world", possibly alluding to his own son, to learn from

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Daneen Wardrop's association of Young with Dickinson's interest in Gothicism in *Emily Dickinson's Gothic: Goblin with a Gauge* (1996 10).

revolution in nature:

Look nature through, 'tis revolution all;  
 All change; no death. Day follows night; and night  
 The dying day; stars rise, and set, and rise;  
 Earth takes th' example. See, the summer gay,  
 With her green chaplet, and ambrosial flowers,  
 Droops into pallid autumn: winter grey,  
 Horrid with frost, and turbulent with storm,  
 Blows autumn, and his golden fruits, away:  
 Then melts into the spring: soft spring, with breath  
 Favonian, from warm chambers of the south,  
 Recalls the first. All, to re-flourish, fades;  
 As in a wheel, all sinks, to re-ascend.  
 Emblems of man, who passes, not expires.  
 With this minute distinction, emblems just,  
 Nature revolves, but man advances; both  
 Eternal, that a circle, this a line.  
 That gravitates, this soars ... (Line 677-694 145)

In this frequently quoted passage, Young seems to evade the question of death by suggesting that nature as “Emblems of man” both exemplifies human progression and is subordinate to human transcendence. If Young's passage is slightly equivocal, compared with Young, Dickinson is even less certain about this social and historical confidence in the linear progression of humanity. Her social and spiritual mapping presents a lingering vacillation rather than ascension. Embodied in the serpentine movement of Dickinson's train, or the suspension of her posthumous carriage ride, is a symbolic overview of human progress as a return to the starting point.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between the past and the future is never clearly indicated for her.

For Dickinson, humanity does not seem to digress from or transcend the natural cycle. Michelle Kohler points out that Dickinson's poems show a cyclical change to overrule a linear view of history (2010 29). Indeed, her depiction of social and spiritual transition reveals such a historical view that resists Young's Enlightenment notion of human ascension. Her “This was in the White of the Year -” (Fr1014B)

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<sup>50</sup> Patrick O'Connell points out that the serpentine movement of the train in Dickinson's poem “resembles the accursed serpent in Genesis” (472).

emphatically presents the human cycle as no different from the natural one, a view that revises Young's forward/upward-looking theory:

This was in the White of the Year -  
 That - was in the Green -  
 Drifts were as difficult then to think  
 As Daisies now to be seen -

Looking back, is best that is left  
 Or if it be - before -  
 Retrospection is Prospect's half,  
 Sometimes, almost more -

The last two lines of the poem seem to suggest that looking back is the way to move forward, a statement that Richard Brantley sees as “Dickinson's signature lines or miniature poetic manifesto of experience” (2004 26). Dickinson's regressive-progressive stance could be further explored in the light of her scepticism towards Young's Christian notion of one's death in eternity. In an 1856 letter to her cousin John Graves (Sewall 404), she considers eternity and the promised resurrection “no school boy's theme”, possibly referring to Young's text that she encountered in school. Before she switches to a jollier view, calling immortality “a conceited theme”,<sup>51</sup> she indulges herself in the nostalgic lamentation upon the fading and the dying:

You remember the crumbling wall that divides us from Mr Sweetser - and the crumbling elms and evergreens - and *other* crumbling things - that spring, and fade, and cast their bloom within a simple twelvemonth - well - *they are here* ... Much that is gay - have I to show, if you were with me, John, upon this April grass - then there are sadder features - here and there, wings half gone to dust, that fluttered so, last year - a mouldering plume, an empty house, in which a bird resided. Where last year's flies, their errand ran, and last year's *crickets fell!* We, too, are flying - fading, John - and the song “here lies,” soon upon lips that love us now - will have hummed and ended. (L184)

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<sup>51</sup> Roseanne Hoefel suggests that this letter seems to show Dickinson's early signs of skepticism towards the deity (73-74). See also Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *Emily Dickinson* (154-55).

Like Young, Dickinson uses nature as an emblem for the human cycle in both her letter and her poem.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, this retrospection is a difficult act since it involves death. While Young assures his readers of man's ascension, Dickinson invests more of her poetic interest in the propelling power of retrospection and its gravitation towards the crumbling and the mouldering.

It is helpful here to compare Dickinson's ambivalent stance with another Enlightenment thinker and professor of Amherst Academy, who Dickinson admired and was profoundly influenced by. Edward Hitchcock offers a geological, and potentially Darwinian reading of theology, regarding nature as a manifestation of the divine. As Joan Kirkby points out, in his 1851 book *The Religion of Geology*, included in the Dickinsons' family library, Hitchcock anticipates Darwinian evolution by practising Herbert Schneider's so-called "evolution theology", which considers death "a forward-looking stance of 'prospective'" (2010 1 & 6-7). Dickinson's close observation of decaying and renewing nature seems to reflect her understanding of human history in similar terms of natural evolution. However, she more often stresses the process of struggle, rather than triumphant resurrection in nature. As she states in a letter to Elizabeth Holland, "The Snow is so white and sudden it seems almost like a Change of Heart - though I dont [sic] mean a 'Conversion' - I mean a Revolution" (L 678). Changing landscapes prefigure the revolutionary force of social transformation that is distinctively different from spiritual conversion and confirmation. Kirkby argues that "Dickinson's sensitivity towards suffering and loss" makes her "closer to Darwin than to his New England disciples" (1). Richard Brantley further suggests that the American Civil War and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) "explains much of Dickinson's pre-Modern mode and many of her Postmodern intimations, for the violence, trauma, and casualty of her present bode fragmented aesthetics" (2004 2). I would add that Dickinson seems to see in natural evolution the casualty of human revolution by looking back as forward. Like the oblivion of a pastoral past, which leads to the modernization of society, natural transition is indicative of social struggle and emotional survival that a modern

<sup>52</sup> Joan Kirkby uses this letter as an example to show Dickinson's preoccupation with the theme of transience in nature (2010 18-19).

individual would have to live through.

Like Young and Hitchcock, Dickinson's notion of history is profoundly embedded in her perception of nature. However, in her poems, she resists the notion of human exceptionalism, making both humans and machines an organic part of nature. As Mary Loeffelholz notes, in contrast to Emerson, whose seer's "transparent eyeball" is singular, Dickinson's landscape "is populated with two different seers of ... nature" (13). For Dickinson, her speaker is just one of the viewers. As will be explored further in the third and fourth chapters, I suggest that she obviates spectatorial mastery to accentuate the co-presence between man and nature. Nature for Dickinson is often a more effective seer than humans. Hitchcock states that "nature, through all time, is ever ready to bear testimony of what we have said and done" (410). Dickinson seems to have adopted this theory of Hitchcock in her social and natural mapping, making nature a lasting recorder of human changes. Her clover and daisies are imprinted with traces of social and natural migration, and her locomotive is licking and lapping the land like a sensual lover of nature. The memories of human and mechanical worlds are inscribed on the grasses, as much as the geological formation of time and place is contained in layers of stones. Her poems reveal what Christine Gerhardt calls her "proto-environmental consciousness" by heightening one's awareness of the co-existent relationship between man and nature (75). Furthermore, these poems of transition express a notion of deep time that Hitchcock had used with his geological reading of human history, a concept scholars such as Wai Chee Dimock later develops into the theory of "denationalized space" on a planetary scope (160). Thus Dickinson makes retrospection a more integrative and progressive gesture. As Greg Garrard points out, the ecocritical notion of dwelling "implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (108). Dickinson's juxtaposition of clovers with pastures of oblivion, daisies with memories of wintry drifts in her poems shows such an imbrication of humans within the landscape. By doing so, her poems fuse a revolutionized past in the memory of the land, and a recognizable future in human retrospection. The acts of revisiting and revising in her poems are not only deeply

engrained in her social concern for the local and the present, but they are also involved in her ecological thoughts about the global and the future, a topic I will explore further in the second and fourth chapters.

### **“My Business is Circumference”: Revolution in Locality**

Dickinson's perception of history could be read as her critical reception of the geopolitics of her time. Susan J. Adams' 1869 poem “Occident and Orient”, published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, offers an instructive example to elucidate the social confidence in American progress and civilization. Written after the Sino-American Burlingame Treaty of 1868, the poem could be seen as a promotion of the diplomatic partnership between China and America. In the poem, the speaker beckons China to join in western civilization with its explicit geographical metaphors. In particular, the poem expresses a progressive perception of history that has parallels with the earth's circular rotation (792). In the last stanza, the poem makes the analogy between the orbiting sunlight and American triumphalism clear:

When the light of Freedom, flashing from shore to shore,  
On thy soil shall burst,  
It may be the First shall become the Last once more,  
And the last be First.

China is one of the first and most ancient nations on earth, but it is also seen as the last to be brought to the light of civilization. America, on the other hand, is one of the youngest nations on earth and the first to be emancipated into the divine light of liberty. Dickinson's “Unfulfilled to Observation -” (Fr839) shows a direct contrast with Adam's version of history. The planetary rotation in the poem indicates a cyclical view of history that is full of conflict and tension:

Unfulfilled to Observation -  
Incomplete - to Eye -  
But to Faith - a Revolution  
In Locality -

Unto Us - the Suns extinguish -  
 To our Opposite -  
 New Horizons - they embellish -  
 Fronting Us - with Night.

Both Hiroko Uno and James R. Guthrie read the poem as the assurance of “New Horizons” to the speaker, despite the limitation of human vision (Uno 2002 56-57; Guthrie 1998 45-6). Sharon Cameron, alternatively, explores the poem in its fascicle context, noting that the poem as the last poem of fascicle 40 represents speakers that are unable to perceive immortality, in opposition to the first poem “The only news I know” (Fr820) in the same fascicle, in which the speaker “only” perceives immortality (1998 151). Michelle Kohler further discusses the poetics of revolution in the poem, arguing that it deflates the national myth of America by placing the “Us” at the opposite side – the dark side – of the earth (2010 32). Indeed, Adam's optimism in “the last be First” becomes Dickinson's “Fronting Us - with Night” in this daily global transaction. The circumnavigation of the suns takes a dark and downward turn for Dickinson. By doing so, her revolution in locality challenges the geo-politics of her time.

As Susan Manning remarks, the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 that asserted American self-reliance proclaimed the turning of the American gaze inward and westward. This gesture not to look back can be explained, as Manning points out, as double defensiveness towards Europe, shown in the writings of Emerson and the Transcendentalists (1990 62). Dickinson's poem, alternatively, reminds us of the inevitability of revisiting the past and seeing the dark in the present. In “My Heart Leaps Up”, Wordsworth emphasizes the significance of one's childhood: “The Child is the father of Man”. Dickinson adopts and revises this Romantic vision to renew perceptions with her retrospective stance and cyclical view of history. Like the continuation of the night after the day in “Unfulfilled to Observation -”, Dickinson's notion of human history registers both a break and a potential connection between the past and the modern. Her voice of vigilance and observance suggests a poetic endeavour to redefine one's position to a world that is constantly orbiting and

revolving. Her ambivalent response towards history and modernity can be seen as a revisionist approach. While undermining visual hierarchy, her poems also reiterate the necessity of looking back to rewrite the present.

Her spatial imagination thus is deeply associated with her cyclical view of history – her notion of “a Revolution/ In Locality -”. As mentioned in the introduction, she explains to Higginson in a letter that “My Business is Circumference” (L268). This concept of circumference seems to symbolize her perception of natural and human progression as a form of revolution. As Charles Anderson states, the Latin root of the word means “to carry or go around”. “The emphasis,” Anderson argues, “is on the motion of encompassing, suggesting an extension outward to include something larger than can be found at a particular static point” (55). I would add that this motion of “going around” also designates the underlying tone of uncertainty in her poems, in which the process of progression and extension is both going forward and downward. Her poems both dwell on the borders, on the wheel of history, and on the revolving surface of global transition. Her world is constantly revolving, and her speaker has to take every step at the risk of slipping downwards or falling backwards. Robin Peel points out the significance of “negotiating where to set the boundaries” for Dickinson (171). Indeed, her poems consistently grapple with this poetic groundwork of boundary-making and setting, especially when her poetic subject is a constantly revolving earth in its very physical sense. Although her speaker often reaches out for the “universal orb” in nature as the narrator encourages Lorenzo to do in Edward Young's *Night Thought*, she also tends to fall upon the surface of the earth like “A Speck upon a Ball” (Fr633). Her poems map the experience of both physical and social displacement to disclose “Man how purblind” (Young 250-51).

Emerson's conceptualization of life as an evolving circle is another useful comparison to see how Dickinson's spatial mapping reflects her revision of her literary precursors. Like Dickinson, Emerson is also interested in circles. However, instead of standing at the fringe of the circle, he focuses on the power of individuals as evolving and expanding in the centre. In “Circles”, he elucidates his analogy

between circles and life energy:

The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul. For it is the inert effort of each thought, having formed itself into a circular wave of circumstance, as for instance an empire, rules of an art, a local usage, a religious rite, to heap itself on that ridge and to solidify and hem in the life. But if the soul is quick and strong it bursts over that boundary on all sides and expands another orbit on the great deep, which also runs up into a high wave, with attempt again to stop and to bind. But the heart refuses to be imprisoned; in its first and narrowest pulses it already tends outward with a vast force and to immense and innumerable expansions. (2001 175)

This evolving and expanding circle of Emerson can be taken as a refined version of Young's wheel of nature. With geo-political imagery such as “empire” and “expansion”, Emerson further emphasizes how individual forces can be translated into the drive for national destiny. This “circular wave of circumstance” also resembles Clifford's “ascending spiral” of human progress in Hawthorne's *House of Seven Gables*. The “first and narrowest pulses” in life are liberatory forces in both private and public spheres.

As Mary Loeffelholz points out, for Dickinson, the power of the mind “is not immediately experienced in an Emersonian present tense of mastery” but “it falls instead in an interval between anticipated futurity and the traces of a past tense” (38). I would add that such a temporal experience in Dickinson is manifested in her spatial representation. Dickinson's speaker, in contrast to Emerson's, strives to survive the evolving, expanding and soaring circle of life. Eleanor Wilner notes that Dickinson's “circumference” differs from “the Transcendentalist's experience of merging with the Oversoul, for its very boundary denies this mystical loss of individual identity” (141). Indeed, Dickinson's speaker could only keep going by touching and sensing the ground in the dark as a modern individual. Young in *Night Thoughts* compares

religious conversion to “the revolution in our heart” (Line 297) that elevates man to heaven (45), a comparison Dickinson might have in mind when she differentiates “conversion” from “revolution” in her letter quoted earlier, showing her conceptual differences from Young, who regards religious conversion as human revolution (L678).<sup>53</sup> Unlike Young or Emerson, her circle of life foretells its own decay. The wheel of her artistic creation designates its own fall. Her notion of history and geography, embodied in her revolving “circumference”, shows her critical reception of her Enlightenment and Transcendental precursors. Jane Donahue Eberwein argues that Dickinson's literary responses are mostly limited to emotion, rather than thought: “we should ... search less for influences on her thinking than for triggers to her emotions - and especially for those literary resources that offered her the supreme elatedness of escape from limitation by awakening her to the tune within herself” (1987 76). Nevertheless, as shown in these poems about social, natural and spiritual mapping, Dickinson appears to have responded more actively to her Enlightenment forebears and to Transcendentalist writers, and in a very fundamental level. Her poems consistently address the paradise question, the conditions of modernization, and the revolution of human progress. In particular, her topographical imagination echoes, appropriates and revises various literary influences into her own revolutionary and topographic poetics.

As David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers point out, social and historical revolution is also place-orientated:

[W]hat economic and social historians term the “Industrial Revolution” was not just a matter of shifts in the technologies of production and in the social consequences for the workforces involved in new systems of organization and management. The Industrial Revolution was also, profoundly, a matter of geography: of systems of industrial production that relocated people and machines as never before, of delivery mechanisms that acted to diminish the costs of space – even to “collapse”

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<sup>53</sup> As Michelle Kohler points out, Dickinson's letter expresses a refusal to endorse teleological narratives and a desire to deflate American exceptionalism: “if a revolution is not a conversion, then it would seem to lack the divine imperative that justifies revolutionary action and assigns spiritual meaning to the resulting institutions (2010 24).

geography – and of independent innovations by others elsewhere and at other times. (2005 2)

Dickinson's poetic mapping reflects such an attention and response to geographical and spatial displacement and relocation. As will be discussed further in the third and fourth chapters, her poems exhibit a poetic vision of conflated and even collapsing geography. Her “compound vision”, in particular, reveals her incorporation of various modern forces in her poetic landscape. Furthermore, Dickinson's revolution in locality presents a complex world of “rotating” perspectives. In her discussion of Fascicle 16, Daneen Wardrop uses Dickinson's pronouns as an example to demonstrate the elasticity of perspectives in her poems:

The divergent usages of pronouns occur so often throughout Dickinson's work as to suggest that she used one voice against another voice in order to attain a multivocal effect ... the point of view oscillates between “I” and “we” and “you” many times, offering multivocal possibilities that comment on a radically unstable self. The speaker's original situation does not satisfy her so she changes not her situation but her way of thinking about it; she phases it, so that upside-down becomes inside-out, way becomes other. (2002 156)

The same discussion can be applied to her malleable spatial imagination. Her experimental poetics and her aesthetic commitment to the representation of various voices correspond with the vibrant social and cultural environment around her, which in turn is reflected in the revolving perspectives in her poems. As Domhnall Mitchell points out, Dickinson was writing “in an age of increased migration and spiraling immigration”, and her poems may as well reflect “wider historical struggles and processes of change” (2000 296-99). Her “revolution in locality” seems to materialize such a social and geographical mobility.

### **“Toward human nature's home”: Dickinson's Necrophilia and Topophilia**

One location that offers such an elastic perspective is the graveyard in Dickinson's poems. For an almost necrophiliac poet whose poems often centre on death, her depiction of graveyards is certainly thorough. Her speaker can be the dying or the

corpse itself, both inside and outside the grave. Her graveyard ranges from a single rural grave and a small town burial ground, to a necropolis and a metropolis of heavenly homes. Interestingly, these graveyard poems effectively display Dickinson's perception of modernization. She consistently maps the secular onto the spiritual, and her heaven and the afterlife become another locus of modernity, delineating the process of social transition. As shown in "What is - 'Paradise' -" in the introduction and "Because I could not stop for Death -" in this chapter, her agricultural or agrarian imagination about heaven does not eliminate doubt or alleviate human longing for intimacy. Humanity does not surpass or transcend death in immortality. In "What Inn is this" (Fr100), a sense of confusion and alienation is further evoked by making God an obscure landlord of the underworld, and the graveyard becomes an inhospitable country tavern:

What Inn is this  
 Where for the night  
 Peculiar traveller comes?  
 Who is the Landlord?  
 Where the maids?  
 Behold, what curious rooms!  
 No ruddy fires on the hearth -  
 No brimming tankards flow.  
 Necromancer! Landlord!  
 Who are these below?

Her portrayal of graveyards strips off the illusion of the afterlife and reflects the gritty fact of death. Another poem about the house of God portrays the afterlife in an equally grim fashion. In "A House upon the Hight -" (Fr 555), heaven is like another abandoned country cemetery, empty, barren and inaccessible:

A House upon the Hight -  
 That Wagon never reached -  
 No Dead, were ever carried down -  
 No Peddler's Cart - approached -  
  
 Whose Chimney never smoked -  
 Whose Windows - Night and Morn -  
 Caught Sunrise first - and Sunset - last -

Then - held and Empty Pane -

Whose fate - Conjecture knew -  
 No other neighbor - did -  
 And what it was - we never lisped -  
 Because He - never told -

Dickinson's less sentimental portrayal of the afterlife and her slightly sardonic voice may be related to her geographical closeness to death. She lived by the Amherst burial ground, a cemetery “described by a local minister as treeless, 'forbidding' and 'repulsive’” for the majority of her formative years (Habegger 129). It is therefore not surprising that her version of graveyards tends to be bleak and deserted.

However, as a poet fascinated with death, Dickinson was also impressed by Mount Auburn, a landscape garden cemetery, which she visited in 1846 when aged 16 (Bender 196). In sharp contrast to Amherst burial ground, Mount Auburn was a utopian city of the dead. Located in the vicinity of Boston and founded by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1831 (Reps 326), Mount Auburn was as much a tourist attraction as a municipal cemetery. Gideon Miner Davison recommended Mount Auburn in his 1833 tour book as “one of the most delightful spots ever selected for the repose of the dead” (Davison 374-75). The young Dickinson similarly expressed her admiration for the idyllic landscape of the cemetery. During her recuperative trip away from the stress of Amherst Academy, Dickinson wrote to Abiah Root from Boston:

Have you ever been to Mount Auburn? If not you can form but slight conception - of the “City of the dead.” It seems as if Nature had formed the spot with a distinct idea in view of its being a resting place for her children, where wearied & disappointed they might stretch themselves beneath the spreading cypress & close their eyes “calmly as to a nights repose or flowers at set of sun.” (L 13)

As Blanche M. G. Linden points out, the popularity of Mount Auburn can be explained “in the context of the period's sentimentalized romanticism and secularization of devotional values”, as well as the rise of neoclassicism that “fostered an appreciation of its pastoral landscape as a new Arcadia or Eden, an optimistic symbol of the

young nation” (237). Mount Auburn embodied both the cultural and civic ideal for the formation of American nationhood in its modern pursuit of pastoralism. This experience would have been distinctly different from the barrenness of the Amherst burial ground Dickinson had been accustomed to.

Indeed, by adopting a positive attitude toward death, rural landscape cemeteries like Mount Auburn became a social project, offering an exemplary model for civilians. Marthus A. Ward at the 1831 festival of the Horticultural Society evoked the recuperating and resurrecting power of Mount Auburn, calling it “the first abode of the living ... the last resting place of the dead. If the Tree of Life sprung from the soil of the one, Immortality shall rise from the dust of the other” (148). The society further declared its republican claim for egalitarianism, making the cemetery more accessible for Bostonians (164). The Society intended to use Mount Auburn as a social lubricant, in order to create a re-conciliating effect between classes. As one report in *The North American Review* commented in 1831, a burial ground “has a good effect upon the feelings; it makes the unfortunate more reconciled to this world, and the gay more thoughtful of another” (398). Rural landscape cemeteries such as Mount Auburn were expected to bridge social gaps and establish communal feelings. As Dorceta E. Taylor remarks, Mount Auburn as a prototypical pastoral cemetery was planned to “impose desired social order” (241-42). Mount Auburn symbolized a modernized version of the pastoral ideal by placating social discontent and restoring civic discipline.

Dickinson's contemporary, Lydia Sigourney, one of the most popular poets before the Civil War (St. Armand 44), offers an assuring and consolatory depiction of Greenwood, another garden cemetery in New York that followed the style of Mount Auburn. Her 1860 elegiac poem “Greenwood Cemetery” turns the cemetery into a republican vision of an all-encompassing cosmopolitan afterlife:<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Barton Levi St Armand uses one passage from this poem as an example of the “mortuary open-door policy” in Sigourney's graveyard poems (50-51).

City of marble! – whose lone structures rise,  
 In pomp of sculpture beautifully rare,  
 On thy lone brow a mournful mystery lies;  
 For to thy haunts no busy feet repair,  
 No curling smoke ascends from roof-tree fair,  
 No cry of warning time the clock repeats,  
 Nor voice of sabbath-bell convokes to prayer,  
 There are no children playing in thy streets,  
 Nor sounds of echoing toil invade thy green retreats.

.....

A ceaseless tide of immigration flows  
 Through thy still gate, for thou forbiddest none  
 On thy close-curtain'd couches to repose,  
 Or lease thy narrow tenements of stone;  
 It matters not, where first the sunbeam shone  
 Upon their cradle, – 'neath the foliage free  
 Where dark palmettos fleck the torrid zone,  
 Or 'mid the icebergs of the Arctic Sea,  
 Thou dost no passport claim, – all are at home with thee.

One pledge alone they give, before their name  
 Is with thy peaceful denizens enrolled, –  
 The vow of silence, thou from each dost claim,  
 More strict and stern than Sparta's rule of old,  
 Bidding no secrets of thy realm be told,  
 Nor lightest whisper from its precincts spread,  
 Sealing each whitened lip with signet cold,  
 To stamp the oath of fealty, 'ere they tread  
 Thy never-echoing halls, Oh city of the dead! (10-14)

Sigourney's speaker takes comfort in this peaceful “green retreat”, celebrating the democratic openness of the cemetery, to which “thou does not passport claim”. This utopian metropolis of Sigourney forms a contrast with Dickinson's city of the dead in her poems. In “Who occupies this House?” (Fr1069), the cemetery is another abandoned ghost town, a city “occupied” by the dead. This dark version of a growing necropolis thus rejects any pastoral comfort or possibility of spiritual redemption:

Who occupies this House?  
 A Stranger I must judge  
 Since No one know His Circumstance -

'Tis well the name and age

Are writ upon the Door  
 Or I should fear to pause  
 Where not so much as Honest Dog  
 Approach encourages -

It seems a curious Town -  
 Some Houses very old,  
 Some - newly raised this Afternoon,  
 Were I compelled to build

It should not be among  
 Inhabitants so still  
 But where the Birds assemble  
 And Boys were possible

Before Myself was born  
 'Twas settled, so they say,  
 A Territory for the Ghosts -  
 And Squirrels, formerly.

Until a Pioneer, as  
 Settlers often do  
 Liking the quiet of the Place  
 Attracted more unto -

And from a Settlement  
 A Capital has grown  
 Distinguished for the gravity  
 Of every Citizen -

The Owner of this House  
 A Stranger He must be -  
 Eternity's Acquaintances  
 Are mostly so - to me -

Dickinson uses frontier metaphors, such as “Pioneer”, “Settlers”, “Settlement”, and “Territory” to turn the poem into a Gothic version of Sigourney's cosmopolitan cemetery. While Sigourney instructs her Christian grievers to accept this sealing pledge of secrecy on the marble lips of the dead, Dickinson finds the secrecy and silence of death alienating and disappointing. As St Armand observes, “in spite of her early admiration for Mount Auburn ... Dickinson invariably set her graveyard poetry

not amid a landscaped garden cemetery but in neglected country burying grounds” (48). Instead of celebrating the republican vision of the modernized necropolis, her graveyard poems tend to accentuate the gravity, silence, and isolation of death.

Furthermore, the process of estrangement in “Who occupies this House?” parallels the process of urbanization in this necropolis. From “a Pioneer” to “a curious town” to “A Capital”, the poem models spiritual alienation upon social alienation in the process of urban expansion. The provincial voice in the third and fourth stanzas, who ponders that “Were I compelled to build”, shows a contrast between a rural ideal of home in nature, and an urban sense of estrangement. From wonderment and curiosity, to doubt and rejection, the poem delineates a decline of enthusiasm towards one's neighbours that characterizes the experience of urbanization. As Raymond Williams comments on urbanization, “any assumption of a knowable community – a whole community, wholly knowable – became harder and harder to sustain” (165). In the fiction of the city, Williams points out, “experience and community would be essentially opaque,” and in the fiction of the country, “essentially transparent” (165). Dickinson's poem shows such a contrast of perspectives between her rural speaker and the stranger of sheer anonymity, his lack of “Circumstance” and identity, except his name and age, in this necropolis. This cemetery is not just a ghost town but also a dystopia, the opacity of which resists the utopian vision of Mount Auburn and challenges a republican version of the afterlife. Far from being a pastoral ideal or a paradisaical vision, Dickinson's cemetery town refutes any sign of spiritual salvation or social reconciliation between the idyllic and the urban.

The prospect of ascension to a modernized heaven is equally depressing. In “Away from Home are some and I -” (Fr807), heaven is portrayed as a metropolis of homes, in contrast to the rural imagination in “What is - 'Paradise' -”, mentioned in the introduction. However, the sense of loneliness and anxiety recurs. Despite an urbanized, and presumably more egalitarian heaven, the speaker finds its society more totalitarian and alienating:

Away from Home are some and I -  
 An Emigrant to be  
 In a metropolis of Homes  
 Is easy possibly -

The Habit of a Foreign Sky  
 We - difficult acquire  
 As Children, who remain in Face  
 The more their Feet retire.

The image of heaven as an open urban space does not modernize faith. On the contrary, it becomes a symbol of modern separation that makes trust and faith less convenient and less accessible. In contrast to the plurality of “Homes”, the singularity of “The Habit of a Foreign Sky” designates both the authoritarian rule of God and its distance, which alienate the speaker further. This ascension to paradise signifies not glory and grace, but submergence and annihilation of oneself into the indistinguishable masses, under a monopolizing sky.

“Away from Home are some and I -” exploits the tension between an urban and presumably more liberal and sophisticated heaven, and a provincial and potentially more insular and conservative speaker, to reveal the irony of religious hegemony. The process of ascension, resembling the process of modernization, becomes a rootless strife for individuals to acquire “The Habit of a Foreign Sky”. With the imagery of poetic creation – “their Feet” – retiring, the speaker also loses a sense of self, potentially a creative self, into anonymity in the heavenly metropolis. By juxtaposing “Home” with “metropolis”, “Feet” with “Face”/faith, the poem parodies this advanced version of heaven to show it to be far from hospitable, democratic, or nourishing. This metropolis of the dead is simply too “advanced” for the provincial speaker, with her outdated habits. In contrast to Sigouney's Greenwood, Dickinson's heavenly metropolis smothers the hope for spiritual salvation and liberation under an urbanized sky with its assimilating, confirming and potentially coercive rule. Her afterlife seems less redemptive or liberating in either an agricultural or an urban setting.

Dickinson's foreign metropolis might also refer to the rural landscape cemeteries of her time that were filled with exotic sculptures and architecture. As Sigouney wrote in her poem, Greenwood was a "City of marble" lying "In pomp of sculpture beautifully rare". Rural garden cemeteries like Mount Auburn and Greenwood resembled statuary gardens, littered with Greek and Egyptian sculptures. Charles H. LeeDecker observes that the rural cemetery movement was greatly influenced by "the Romantic fascination with natural landscapes suffused with ancient and exotic elements" such as Egyptian obelisks or gates and other statues with symbols of death, which turned some rural cemeteries into gardens of sculptures (148-49). The fashion for European monuments and eastern obelisks reflects the classical Greek revivalism, which Stanley French suggests to have been in vogue; this architectural style was, according to French, "widely considered to be commensurate with republican principles" (50). Combining pastoralism and republican principles, Mount Auburn and Greenwood became what French calls "cultural institutions". As French explains, the creation of rural cemeteries in the nineteenth century was partly motivated by the European criticism of the lack of historical interiority in the American landscape:

The rural cemetery movement provided a partial answer to a frequent allegation by European visitors that the American landscape was, if not barbaric, at least amoral because it lacked the improving influence of a long, obvious heritage of historical associations supplied by ancient buildings, monuments, etc. The desirability of such a tangible heritage had been a felt need of a number of American intellectuals and artists at the time. After the inception of the rural cemetery movement the moral instructional purpose of the new institution was stressed by the conservative religious, educational and Whiggish elements of American society which sought to mitigate what they considered to be the unfortunate social effects of an emerging mass society and culture. (57)

The rural cemetery movement embodied the cultural and social missions that intellectuals such as Dickinson's father, a staunch Whig advocate, promoted.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Dickinson's father consistently promoted the necessity of public education after he was elected to the town's General School Committee in 1832. He not only served as trustee of Amherst Academy and treasurer of Amherst College in 1835, but also helped bring Massachusetts Agricultural

American intellectuals emphasized the significance of self-reliance as a major political policy and cultural assertion. The rural cemetery movement revealed another side of this American longing for cultural autonomy and national identity. If, as Leo Marx states, the American myth affirms that “Europeans experience regeneration in a New World” and “They become new, better, happier men - they are reborn” (228), the rural cemetery movement operates the other way around to claim its paradisaical roots in Europe. The pastoral landscape and classical sculptures in Mount Auburn and Greenwood were devised to galvanize visitors like the young Dickinson to identify with this national vision.

Underneath this self-assuring cultural institution lied the cultural anxiety about a lack of morality in American landscape. These marble monuments in the rural cemeteries attempted to fill in the gap between Europe and America, to compensate physically for the lack of historical heritage and morality in the American landscape with imported European aesthetics and sensibility. Like the railways, rural landscape cemeteries reflected the notions of modernity and civilization, which were based upon social improvement and human progression towards moral and spiritual perfection. Dickinson's classical references to Orpheus in “The Bible is an antique Volume -” and her mythologized version of the train in “I like to see it lap the Miles -” reveal this Romantic trend of neoclassical revivalism in the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast to the republican ideal of America as a new Arcadia or Eden, however, is Dickinson's depiction of the pastoral past and biblical tradition in decay. Even her mythic train, a demigod, demi-beast creature, threatens to derail or overpower human dominance. Her heaven seems as exotic and foreign as the sculptures in Mount Auburn.

For American settlers, one way to confront the cultural-geographical “blankness” was to colonize and civilize it, to inscribe it with human meaning. The rural landscape cemetery movement, like the train, embodied one of these instrumental attempts to conquer the blank landscape, to endow nature with the civic spirit of republican

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College to Amherst in the 1860s (Habegger 88, 97 & 505)

principles. Dickinson seems to find these attempts disingenuous. Emerson in “Self-Reliance” criticizes the American trend of imitating European taste and asserts that “Insist on yourself; never imitate” (2001 134). In a manner similar to Emerson, Dickinson's graveyard poems hold a contrary view against the cultural and educational intent of American intellectuals to claim land ownership by filling it up with European sculptures. As shown in “Could live - *did* live -” and “The Bible is an antique Volume -”, Dickinson's renovation of the biblical tales relies on the specificity of geography, on the experiential ability of the author to sail the bay of imagination. Her poetry focuses on sensual experiences, with the train's lapping and licking the landscape, with one's closeness to robins and human nature's home. In a way, it is the blankness of American landscape, instead of a new Arcadia or Eden, which Dickinson is portraying.

Dickinson's brother Austin, as mentioned in an earlier section, was interested in landscaping, helping push the First Church to be moved from “the old wooden meeting house near College Hill to a new, stylish, and expensive granite sanctuary on Main Street” across from the Evergreens, a gesture that Habbegger suggests to be an emplacement of the Dickinson social distinction (507). Domhnall Mitchell also argues that in Dickinson's poems, she uses stone imagery to symbolize permanence, elevation and tradition (2000 4 & 13). Indeed, Dickinson seems to have shared the enthusiasm of her contemporaries in the reinvigorating power of classical and biblical tradition, and the potential of immortality through the process of monumentalisation. However, her vision of the afterlife also reveals a weariness of the celebratory tone that dominated the public discourses of social and political progressivism of her time. Her poem “Not any sunny tone” (Fr1738) contrasts Sigourney's “artificial” vision of an afterlife utopia to highlight the “naturalness” of a simple grave:

Not any sunny tone  
 From any fervent zone  
 Find entrance there  
 Better a grave of Balm

Toward human nature's home  
 And Robins near  
 Than a stupendous Tomb  
 Proclaiming to the Gloom  
 How dead we are -

Inder Nath Kher uses the poem to explain that “Death is a stupendous tomb” for Dickinson, in the closed room of which she feels its “strangulation and suffocation” (194). I would suggest that what Dickinson objects here seems not to be death itself, but its location. Her “stupendous Tomb” is employed to contrast with “a grave of Balm” – a simple burial ground that is more human and private. Memorials and monuments preserve decayed bodies, instead of immortality. For Dickinson, “a stupendous Tomb” performs a ritual of entombment that only reminds the speaker of a dead past, not a living one.

Dickinson's emphasis in “Not any sunny tone” on the location of one's burial place might also be related to the attempt of American intellectuals of her time to claim their own cultural independence from Europe, especially Britain. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote about his trip to Stratford, the birthplace of William Shakespeare in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863, an article Páraic Finnerty suggests would be attracting American readers like Dickinson (2006 11). In the article, Hawthorne advises his readers that “a person of delicate individuality, curious about his burial-place, and desirous of six feet of earth for himself alone, could never endure to lie buried near Shakespeare, but would rise up at midnight and grope his way out of the church-door, rather than sleep in the shadow of so stupendous a memory” (50). For Hawthorne, Americans were “bred in English habits of thought” and had “not yet modified our instincts to the necessities of our new forms of life” (58). He thus reminds his readers that “[a] lodging in a wigwam or under a tent has really as many advantages ... as a home beneath the roof-tree of Charlecote Hall”, asking American philosophers and poets to “see what is best” and sing “what is beautifullest” instead of reading “the old English wisdom, and harp upon the ancient string” (58). Dickinson's poem seems to have agreed with Hawthorne's account about this “stupendous memory” of Shakespeare or “a stupendous Tomb” of literary fame,

which would only overshadow the living, or more specifically, the American writers.

However, as Páraic Finnerty comments on American cultural nationalism, Dickinson “did not suffer the same kind of anxiety about his [Shakespeare's] influence that her male contemporaries did” (94). Indeed, although Dickinson's brother Austin delivered an Amherst College commencement oration entitled “The Elements of our National Literature” in 1850 (Finnerty 2006 80), Dickinson might have been more inclined to share with Higginson the idea that art transcends national and geographical boundaries (Finnerty 2006 82). Finnerty states that “Shakespeare and Stratford may have been emblems appropriate to her own task as a writer: to achieve literary renown but also authorial disappearance” (14). In this light, Dickinson's “Not any sunny tone” might be read as implicitly criticizing those who seek literary fame through publicity. As quoted in the introduction, Robert Weisbush considers Dickinson “far less concerned than her fellows with the idea of America”; nevertheless, Weisbush also uses Dickinson's poems as “test cases to sound the far reverberation of the Anglo-American quarrel” (1986 34). Her graveyard poems indicate her subtle response to the American anxiety either to assert literary independence from Britain or to claim cultural heritage from Europe. Without specifying where the ideal grave would be except its nearness to “human nature's home”, Dickinson's “Not any sunny tone” could be read as a poetic declaration of literary independence from national boundaries.

Dickinson's “Not any sunny tone” could find resonance in the sentiment expressed by another American traveller to England – Washington Irving – in his visit to Westminster Abbey. In *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Irving observed that the memorials in Poet's Corner were much simpler and more intimate for the visitors than the tombs of heroes and royalties:

I passed some time in Poet's Corner ... The monuments are generally simple; for the lives of literary men afford no striking themes for the sculptor ... Notwithstanding the simplicity of these memorials, I have always observed that the visitors to the

abbey remained longest about them. A kinder and fonder feeling takes place of that cold curiosity or vague admiration with which they gaze on the splendid monuments of the great and the heroic. They linger about these as about the tombs of friends and companions ... (150)

Like Irving, Dickinson seems to find simplicity and intimacy more endearing than “the splendid monuments of the great and the heroic”. Dickinson would also agree with Hawthorne that “lodging in a wigwam or under a tent has really as many advantages ... as a home beneath the roof-tree of Charlecote Hall”. Compared with the inclusive and cosmopolitan necropolis in Sigourney's poem, Dickinson's vision of home, or in this case, the grave, seems to be more associated with an enclosed space of intimacy.

Dickinson states in an early letter that “Home is a holy thing - nothing of doubt or distrust can enter it's blessed portals. I feel it more and more as the great world goes on and one and another forsake, in whom you place your trust - here seems indeed to be a bit of Eden which not the sin of any can utterly destroy” (L59). Her notion of home as a divine locus with its “blessed portals” comes quite close to Gaston Bachelard's “felicitous space” in *The Poetics of Space*, and Dickinson can be considered as a poet of “topophilia” who seeks to “determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (xxxv). In “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church -” (Fr236), the speaker claims that she keeps the Sabbath by staying at home and setting up her own bond with God in nature. At the end of the poem, the speaker quips that “So instead of getting to Heaven, at last -/ I'm going, all along”. Dickinson's poetic journey, similarly, detours those public discourses of her time, symbolized by the progression of the train, the republicanism of rural landscape cemeteries, or the monumentalization of the afterlife, to place her version of heaven close to the heart of humanity.

Dickinson's poetics of topophilia, and her necrophilia help elucidate her spatial imagination. Her poems convey strong yearning for intimacy rather than

transcendence, and this yearning is fulfilled through her deft use of mapping as a poetic strategy. Her poetic mapping switches the focus from scientific advancement, religious ascension, or national superiority to spatial closeness and emotional connection with the land. Diana Fuss considers “Dickinson's eccentric relation to space” to be “not so much phobic as poetic”; as Fuss explains, “Dickinson lyricizes space, recreating in the domestic interior the very condition of poetic address and response” (2004 20). I would propose extending her poetic space from the domestic interior to the exterior – the social and physical landscape. As shown in this chapter and will be explored further in the fourth chapter, Dickinson's sense of place and notion of space could be characterized by profound topophilia that challenges one's perception of Dickinson as a domestic, private or even agoraphobic poet.

As Roland Hagenbüchle states, Dickinson's “poetic existence” as an “American existence” is characterized by “its radically experimental quality” (16). These graveyard poems show how Dickinson experiments with voices of a small town girl addressing not only God, Death and Immortality, but also a modern society in transition. Her declaration never to travel across her father's ground to other towns, and “seeing New Englandly” in one poem (Fr256), can be seen as her declaration to be a provincial poet; in 1862, she responded in a letter to Higginson's inquiry about her seclusion stating that “Of 'shunning men and women,' they talk of hallowed things, aloud, and embarrass my dog. He and I don't object to them, if they'll exist their side” (L271). This tendency to privatize experiences further defines Dickinson as a poet of interiority. However, her poems about social transitions and her graveyard poems all indicate her subtle participation in and fundamental response to modernity. Roland Hagenbüchle considers Dickinson as both “a deeply provincial writer” and “a transatlantic, even cosmopolitan, author ranking with the classics of Western tradition” (14). This comment encapsulates difficulties scholars have encountered in positioning Dickinson in a much-canonized literary tradition. As will be shown further in the third chapter, her poems straddle provincial and cosmopolitan voices, revealing a sense of worldliness that corresponds with the increasingly urbanized and commercialized New England.

Dickinson's notion of mapping is crucial in understanding her poetic position. She often places her speaker at the margins of an urbanized New England, an industrialized America, or a globalized world to convey a sense of confusion as well as wonderment. As James Guthrie points out, "Dickinson used her poems as vehicles to dramatize her ambivalence about living in the comparative isolation of western Massachusetts" (160). Her reworking of pastoral and urban imagery in her poems could be taken as her perceptive, although ambivalent response to the reconfiguration of social and geographical landscapes in her time. Her distance from the metropolitan cities in New England paradoxically endows her poems with more perceiving power. Karl Keller considers Dickinson, like Walt Whitman, as a skilled co-opter of America (286-92). Indeed, her appropriation of those experiences of modernization in her poetry reveals her profound engagement with modernity. The upheld ideal of a republican America as a pastoral as well as modernized city state is examined over and over again in her poems. She maps the transition from the earth to the heaven, from tradition to modernity, seeking spatial intimacy in her poetic landscape.

In this chapter, I have shown how Dickinson's social mapping accounts for the relationship between tradition and modernity, and how her cyclical view of history shapes her critical reception of the Enlightenment and Transcendental notions of progress or ascension. As exemplified in her biblical, pastoral, train and graveyard poems, her poetic mapping discloses her deeply ambivalent attitude towards industrialization and urbanization. While nineteenth-century American writers, as Robert Weisbuch suggests, suffered "the recognition of emptiness" (2007 103), Dickinson seems to refrain from the inscription of human projection in her poetic landscape. She makes this geographical emptiness a correspondence to her economic poetics of doing without. As will be explored further in the next chapter, Dickinson's poems focus on the blank, the invisible, and the mysterious within the landscape – what Jay Leyda would call poems of the "omitted center" (xxi) – rather than its density, morality, or civilizing potential. I have discussed in the introduction how Dickinson reconstructs the American prairie in "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee," (Fr1779) a poem that Jane Donahue Eberwein calls "a formula" for

producing the American landscape (1987 134):

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,  
One clover, and a bee,  
And revery.  
The revery alone will do,  
If bees are few.

Dickinson's poetic reverie forms an interesting comparison with Emerson's poetic vision of the American sublime. In "The Poet", Emerson remarks that "We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he [Dante] so much admires in Homer ..." (2001 196) In contrast to Emerson's quest for a poetic genius "with tyrannous eye", Dickinson does not seem to seek visual dominance. Instead, she is prepared to "make a prairie" with her own mind's eye while acknowledging the unaccountability of nature. She concludes in a recipe for coconut cakes that "This makes one half of the rule".<sup>56</sup> What is left unseen and unsaid indicates a real beginning. The other half is still to be made.

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<sup>56</sup> Her recipe is available at *npr*: <[http://www.groupon.co.uk/deals/national-deal/mcafee/4248689?nlp=&CID=UK\\_CRM\\_1\\_0\\_0\\_81&a=1664](http://www.groupon.co.uk/deals/national-deal/mcafee/4248689?nlp=&CID=UK_CRM_1_0_0_81&a=1664)>

## Chapter II

### “Finding is the first Act”: Dickinson's National Mapping and Expansionism

#### Introduction: Puritanism and Expansionism

Dickinson's poems show her deep interest in exploration. As mentioned in the introduction, like many other writers of her time, explorers and expeditions are constantly celebrated in her poems. However, in a manner similar to her mixed reception of modernization, her poems about journeys and exploration also convey an ambiguous response towards the exploratory narratives of her time. In particular, her spiritual quest often presents the tension between puritanism and expansionism. As Susan Manning points out, Christian pilgrims are trapped in a paradox by their “puritan-provincial mind,” that “it knows it cannot know the hidden truth of the 'centre', and yet must strive for knowledge” (1990 70). This puritan anxiety to strive for the centre of truth became one of the foundation stones upon which American nationhood was based, a topic Dickinson also explores emphatically in her poems. The puritan ambition to build a nation as the city upon the hill was especially pursued by American settlers through incessant westward expansion. Conversely, Dickinson's “How Human Nature dotes” (Fr1440) ponders upon the paradoxical human longing for the invisible, the unobtainable and the resistant:<sup>57</sup>

How Human Nature dotes  
 On what it can't detect -  
 The moment that a Plot is plumbed  
 Prospective is extinct -

Prospective is the friend  
 Reserved for us to know  
 When Constancy is clarified  
 Of Curiosity -

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<sup>57</sup> The poem was written on a discarded piece of stationery, on which Dickinson had written “Ice Cream -” and then cancelled it. Elizabeth A. Petrino points out that quite a few poems dating from 1877 in Franklin's edition are written on paper that made references to food (123).

Of subjects that resist  
 Redoubtablest is this  
 Where go we -  
 Go we anywhere  
 Creation after this?

Jane Donahue Eberwein uses the poem as an example to explain Dickinson's exceptional persistence in her spiritual quest for “the unanswerable question” (1987 228). Indeed, Dickinson's meditation in the last stanza foregrounds the problem of location, echoing her constant anxiety about the topology of heaven in other poems. However, I would suggest another reading by associating Dickinson's quest for “Where go we” with the national narrative of progress. Written in the postbellum years, this poem could also be read as a question about the future of America, particularly in an age of restless land annexation and westward expansionism – a Jacksonian policy that the Whig party, of which Dickinson's father was a staunch supporter, had opposed (2009 3). This chapter thus focuses on her quest poems that deal with the topics of displacement and relocation, topics that correspond with the national concerns about geographical expansion, imperial exploration and individual mobility in nineteenth century America.

Emerson's work provides an instructive contrast with Dickinson's ambivalent attitude towards quests, progress and expansionism. Whereas Dickinson focuses on the question of location, Emerson encourages the expansion of and reliance upon one's inner self to explore the world. Thus Emerson can serve as a starting point for understanding how Dickinson's work departed from that of her precursors and contemporaries. As David S. Reynold points out, Emerson “was both repelled and attracted by Jacksonian America”, and regarded the Jacksonian Democratic party “more truly American than the Whigs” (2009 249-50). Although Emerson called “Manifest Destiny, democracy, freedom” “fine names for ugly things” to criticize the controversy over slavery in one lecture, he seems to share the Jacksonian enthusiasm for geographical expansion of America (qtd. in Taylor 2010 56). In “Experience”, for example, Emerson describes the expansion of the mind in terms of frontier exploration:

When I converse with a profound mind, or ... I have good thoughts, I do not at once arrive at satisfactions ... but I am at first apprised of my vicinity to a new and excellent region of life. By persisting to read or to think, this region gives further sign of itself ... and showed the approaching traveller the inland mountains, with the tranquil eternal meadows spread at their base ... And what a future it opens! ... I am ready to die out of nature, and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West. (207-08)

Emerson believes in this born-again experience of human thought to confront, conquer, and eventually transform the Wild West into the new Garden of Eden. As mentioned in the introduction, Stephen Fender points out that “the proponents of a distinctly American literature” such as Emerson “sought to establish their national cultural projects in words and arguments drawn from the rhetoric of emigration” so that “The settler's material nature became the poets' native material” (300). The new west of America provided Emerson and his fellow patriotic writers with an important source to draw on.

Dickinson's “How Human Nature dotes” does not seem to share this Emersonian confidence in geographical and spiritual advancement. As Paul Giles points out, Emerson stated in his eulogy for Thoreau in 1862 that Thoreau “wished to go to Oregon, not to London”, indicating his own patriotic endorsement of westward expansionism: “Emerson chose to justify manifest destiny by explaining it to himself as an inevitable phenomenon, a force of nature ... and this movement west becomes, for the transcendentalists, the guarantee of a symbolic rejection of England, a reformist gesture that they take to be their mythic destiny” (2007 49). Dickinson's poem, alternatively, questions the mythic destiny of humanity. Written retrospectively, her poem seems to imply that human pursuit for the curious and unknown is its own justification, as much as manifest destiny is a self-fulfilling prophecy. To some extent, her poem about puritan anxiety informs her perception of a national moment when human confidence became unlimited.

By the time Dickinson wondered about where humanity could go in “How Human Nature dotes”, Dickinson had begun her correspondence with Helen Hunt Jackson for a few years.<sup>58</sup> As Kate Phillips points out, Jackson had been fascinated with the West in the 1850s (164). Daneen Wardrop further notes that Jackson's trip to California in 1872 was the beginning of her active involvement with minority rights, particularly concerning the Native Americans in the West (1999 78). As Wardrop states, Dickinson would have been aware of Jackson's political activism. She might have sent Jackson an oriole poem “One of the ones that Midas touched” (Fr1488) at the request of Jackson around 1879, presenting “indirectly the position of minorities from the standpoint of birds” (1999 78). Dated around 1877, Dickinson's “How Human Nature dotes” could also be read as a comment on the insatiable appetite of humanity for more land in the context of American expansionism. The question of “Where go we -” could refer to the “subjects” – the destination as well as destiny of the West as the new Eden of America. One could even suggest that by considering the other side of the story, in which “subjects” of the American west, mainly the Native Americans, “resist” the “Plot” and “Prospective” of manifest destiny, her poem comments on the irrational human hunger for land and power. Her “Redoubtablest” voice contrasts with Emerson's “undoubted” analogy between the exploration of the new land and the liberation of a new thought.

Although the prevalence of scepticism in Dickinson's work would not make her a political activist or advocate of minority rights like Jackson or Higginson, her poetic focus on the question of location suggests her awareness of the intricate relationship between mobility, land possession and the notions of freedom and progress. During Dickinson's formative years, nationalism and expansionism had become increasingly inseparable in the expanding boundaries of American. As mentioned in the introduction, Frederick Jackson Turner remarked that American development could be explained through “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession,

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<sup>58</sup> Dickinson and Jackson were childhood acquaintance. They reconnected through Higginson after he mentioned Jackson to Dickinson in 1869 and Jackson spent a while working in Bethlehem, New Hampshire in 1870 (Habegger 556). On Dickinson's correspondence with Jackson, see Habegger 556-59. See also Sewall 577-93.

and the advance of American settlement, westward” (25). This ceaselessly questing westward, along with Anglo-American Arctic expeditions northward, represented a seminal phase in the formation of American nationhood. Transcendentalist writings in Dickinson's time, such as Emerson's essays, were invested with projections towards this new west. As shown in his “Experience”, the west became a frontier metaphor that advanced Emerson's thinking. In “The Poet”, he also encouraged “our Negroes, and Indians” and “the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas”, among others, to be sung (196). Charles W. J. Withers comments on Enlightenment and geography that “national mapping was also natural mapping” (2007 103). Similarly, Emerson's conflation of the natural, national and poetic landscapes made direct equivalence between the west and the future of American empire. Myra Jehlen puts it succinctly: “Americans saw themselves as building their civilization out of nature itself ... Fusing the political with the natural, human violation with its object, and hope with destiny, they imagined an all-encompassing universe that in effect healed the lapsarian parting of man and his natural kingdom” (3).

While Dickinson's contemporary intellectuals sought convergence and transcendence in nature and God, Dickinson seems to be more puzzled than pleased by this association between mobility and liberty. In her discussion of antebellum women writers and mobility, Susan Roberson points out the geo-political association of mobility with liberation and freedom despite its close-knit relation with slavery and racial oppression:

The trafficking of enslaved men and women and the forced relocation of Native tribes from their homelands illustrate political and social control rather than freedom. These kinds of travel work against freedom and actually keep African and Native Americans 'in place' and marginalized, confined by and just outside of White, hegemonic society. Enforced by violence, this trafficking reveals the underside and the costs of American progress ... the truisms that connect travel to freedom and power are called into question by the experiences of travelers whose marginalization is actually enforced by travel. (5)

As will be discussed further in this and the next chapters, physical mobility for Dickinson would mean more like a threat than a form of liberation. Her poems about location seem to grapple with this healing power of the American myth and the national discourse of progress constantly. While many writers of her time readily embraced such an “all-encompassing universe”, Dickinson's poems continuously reveal an uneasiness to accept such an American version of rebirth in the wilderness.

Dickinson's quest poems and her adoption of frontier metaphors delineate such an anxiety. As she writes in a poem, “A *wounded* Deer - leaps highest -/ I've heard the Hunter tell -” (Fr181), her understanding of frontier experiences seems intricately linked with the wounding experience of expansionism in American history. In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin points out that the frontier myth in America “was continually reshaped and revalued by the ongoing process of adjustment to American conditions”. “Forced by their situation to deal with frontier realities”, Slotkin argues, Americans saw themselves “as exploring new moral grounds, returning to the primary sources of value for a new beginning, a new creation of the moral universe” (370). Dickinson's work also discloses such an attempt to return to the origin. She proclaimed in an 1869 letter to T. W. Higginson that “You noticed my dwelling alone - To an Emigrant, Country is idle except it be his own” (L330). As Susan Howe remarks, “Dickinson was born exactly two hundred years after the Great Migration led by John Winthrop brought her ancestors to America. Like Hawthorne, and unlike Emerson, her conscience still embraced the restless contradictions of this Puritan strain” (38). Indeed, like her puritan and frontier ancestors, Dickinson strives to own her poetic kingdom. However, as Slotkin's book title has suggested, this frontier experience of regeneration is also a violent process, and Dickinson's quest poems seem to convey such a paradox emphatically.

In fact, Dickinson's family and friends had encountered financial and physical problems in the course of westward development, which might help explain the consistent voice of doubt in Dickinson's quest poems. Quite a few close friends and

relatives around her had travelled westward, mainly for social-economic or health reasons. Samuel Fowler Dickinson, her grandfather, ruined himself financially after founding Amherst College, and died in exile in Ohio in 1838 (Habbegger 105). Before Dickinson's father offered to build them a house on the family lot, Austin and Susan, her brother and her best friend and later sister-in-law, had contemplated the possibility of moving westward after their marriage (Habegger 335 & 339). Samuel Bowles, a close friend of Dickinson and editor of the *Springfield Republican*, whose illness was a matter of great concern for Dickinson, took several trips to the west after the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1869 (Mamunes 62). Helen Hunt Jackson was also a frequent traveller, moving to Colorado Spring in the mid-1870s for a cure for tuberculosis (Philips 19 & 168). Dickinson's anxious emigrant-speaker might have embodied struggling individuals around her in such a society of extreme mobility and shaky finances and health. Dickinson's quest poems seem to convey her prompt response to an America of fluctuating boundaries, subject to loss and contingencies.

In the first chapter, I have discussed Dickinson's social mapping to show her ambivalence towards modernization. This chapter examines her notion of mapping more closely by looking at her poems of emigration and exploration. I show how her poetic quest is indicative of her critical reception of patriotic heroism and military expansionism. In particular, I look at how she rewrites the vision of America to offer an alternative account of American nationhood. The first section examines her depiction of heaven as formless and blank, which was distinctively different from the fulfilled vision of American futurity espoused by the Transcendentalists. Her heaven can morph from a holy-ground into a spiritual wasteland that resists any human or national projection. The second section then moves from her heavenly landscape to her natural mapping. I explore her depiction of natural "emptiness" to show how her version of nature serves as a recorder of human violence. Unlike Emerson, Dickinson is hesitant to inscribe national destiny onto nature. Like Hitchcock, Dickinson makes the unaccountable natural landscape a witness of human atrocity. The third section then examines her notion of nationhood more closely by looking at one early

valentine. I investigate how Dickinson's valentine poem both subscribes to and subverts an Enlightenment and transcendental vision of America. Her mock-epic style reveals her developing interest in colonial and frontier history that had shaped American identity as an individual, as well as her refusal to validate a unified national vision.

Dickinson's allusions to travellers and explorers, and to events such as the expeditions of Columbus and Hernando De Soto, and the Arctic expeditions in her later poems are inseparable from the notions of expansionism and American identity. Her ambiguous response to and subsequent revision of the expansionist outlook of her time is thus explored further in the fourth section. Compared with Emerson and Thoreau, Dickinson is more critical of the American confidence in the exploration of and reliance upon one's selfhood. Taking Washington Irving as a significant cultural reference, I then explore how Dickinson redresses colonial and mythical quest narratives. Like Edgar Allen Poe's poems, Dickinson's express distrust toward any type of confirmation. The fifth section looks further at her critical reception of a contemporary social and cultural phenomenon – the Arctic craze, or Lisa Bloom's so-called colonial “passion for blankness” (1-2). I examine how her poems revise this episode of northward expedition by obscuring the spectatorial mastery. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that her poems suggest an attempt to provide an alternative national vision. She appropriates frontier imagery and exploratory narratives to offer a re-examination of American nationhood.

### **“Vast Prairies of Air”: The Heavenly Emptiness**

In her work, Dickinson often identifies herself with emigrants or frontiersmen. In particular, she often adopts frontier metaphors to look into the narrow passages and crevices in literature, history and memory. A number of her poems about spiritual emigration, such as “My Wheel is in the dark!” discussed in the first chapter, emphasizes the physical hazard and emotional uncertainty resembling the description of John Bunyan's Valley of the Shadow of Death. Like the *gone-to-Kansas* feeling of

actual moving (L182), her depiction of the afterlife is filled with similar insecurity and suspension that is far from heroic or cosmic.<sup>59</sup> Shira Wolosky comments that Dickinson's "frontier-God or God as frontier" could be "bounding as a menace – inescapable, limiting, imprisoning" (2002 131).<sup>60</sup> Dickinson's frontier-speaker, conversely, is often depicted as a struggling emigrant in an ever-changing world. Although, as Robert Weisbuch observes, American settlers were allowed to "capitalise upon the barrenness of their present scene by considering this barrenness a clearing of the ground for an unprecedented emptiness" (1986 126), Dickinson seems to find this metaphoric clearing, this "unprecedented emptiness" less promising. In "My period had come for Prayer -" (Fr525), the speaker intrudes upon God's territory, but finds nothing but the air:

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

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

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

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

The Silence condescended -  
 Creation stopped - for Me -

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<sup>59</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, in an 1856 letter, she describes the moving of the Dickinson household back to the Homestead as akin to moving westward: "I supposed we were going to make a 'transit,' as heavenly bodies did - but we came budget by budget, as our fellows do, till we fulfilled the pantomime contained in the word 'moved.' It is a kind of gone-to-Kansas feeling, and if I sat in a long wagon, with my family tied behind, I suppose without doubt I was a party of emigrants!" (L182)

<sup>60</sup> Wolosky refers to God as "a frontier" in Dickinson's "I am afraid to own a Body -" (Fr1050).

But awed beyond my errand -  
I worshipped - did not "pray" -

This depiction of heaven reverses Emerson's projection of God's omnipresence. In his essay "Circles", Emerson states that "Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid" (2001 174). Dickinson's speaker, conversely, looks back at God and finds his house formless but opaque. God's house becomes "Vast prairies of Air", an almost supernatural essence that defies any human search.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff states that "My period had come for Prayer -" portrays the God of North as being "utterly sterile". Sharon Cameron, alternatively, reads the poem in its fascicle context, arguing that in contrast to the last poem in the same fascicle 28, "My period had come for Prayer -", placed as the first poem, "suggests that prayer is transcended by worship" (1998 151). This invisible God in Dickinson's prayer poem seems to be ambiguously placed in between. It evokes awe, but this invisibility also stifles the speaker with condescending silence and emptiness. The vast prairies of air contain a spiritual weight that eventually makes the speaker in the last poem of the fascicle, "I prayed, at first, a little Girl," (Fr546), refute praying. It is not incidental that in an 1886 letter, she compares heaven to a prison: "I think she [Helen Hunt Jackson] would rather have stayed with us, but perhaps she will learn the Customs of Heaven, as the Prisoner of Chillon of Captivity" (L 1042). Heaven turns Dickinson's prayer-intruder into a silenced captive of God's power. This notion of an invisible but hefty God is elaborated in "I never felt at Home - Below -" (Fr437B), in which the invisibility of God becomes his tool of perennial supervision:

I never felt at Home - Below -  
And in the Handsome skies  
I shall not feel at Home - I know -  
I don't like Paradise -

Because it's Sunday - all the time -  
And Recess - never comes -  
And Eden'll be so lonesome

Bright Wednesday Afternoons -

If God could make a visit -  
 Or ever took a Nap -  
 So not to see us - but they say  
 Himself - a Telescope

Perennial beholds us -  
 Myself would run away  
 From Him - and Holy Ghost - and All -  
 But there's the "Judgement Day"!

As Barton Levi St. Armand points out, in her poems of protesting hymns, Dickinson rejects "a Calvinist paradise" (156). I would suggest further that the "Perennial" supervision of God converts the earth into an inspection house that resembles the prison design of Jeremy Bentham published in 1791, to whom Dickinson compared her brother Austin, and with whom she might have identified herself in an 1853 letter (L 107).<sup>61</sup> Bentham suggests that an ideal prison "consists ... in the centrality of the inspector's situation, combined with the well-known and most effectual contrivances for seeing without being seen" (43). For a poet who frequently employed the imagery of imprisonment,<sup>62</sup> Dickinson would have been interested in the prison theory of Bentham. Dickinson's choice of words such as "ubiquity" and "clandestinity" in her letter also suggests that she might have been aware of this prison design of Bentham. Michel Foucault developed it into his theory of panopticism: "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (201-02). Dickinson's version of heaven in "I never felt at Home - Below -" also creates such a panoptic visual effect. God's invisibility enforces his visual

<sup>61</sup> As Johnson points out, in the 1853 letter to Susan Gilbert (Dickinson), Dickinson "alludes to the various envelopes addressed in her hand", and her brother Austin, whose envelope she calls "a ponderous tome from the learned Halls of Cambridge" in the letter, is identified with Bentham (228-30). I would suggest here that Dickinson might also have been familiar with Bentham's theory about the inspection house. She might have compared her own role as an "operator" of all the letters to Bentham's notion of an all-seeing inspector (or even an omnipresent God), alluding "my own ubiquity" and "depths of my clandestinity" in the letter to the operation of the inspection house that Bentham designed.

<sup>62</sup> More on Dickinson's prison imagery, see for example Jane Donahue Eberwein's *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* (86-88, 162-63 & 238-39). See also Paul Crumbley's "Art's Haunted House: Dickinson's Sense of Self" (79-82) and James T. Guthrie's "Exceeding Legal and Linguistic Limits: Dickinson as 'Involuntary Bankrupt'" (91-99).

dominance. Foucault elucidates this theory that “A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of the regulations” (202). Dickinson's telescopic and ubiquitous God in her poems presents such a totalitarian regime with His invisible but omnipresent power. The “unprecedented emptiness” of America is transformed in her poems into God's visual imposition rather than liberation.

As shown in the first chapter, Dickinson projects secular geography onto the spiritual one to revolutionize human perception. These two poems could be read as further challenging the notion of America's divine destiny by turning heaven into vast prairies of air and God into a panoptic telescope. If prairies symbolize the distinctiveness of American landscape, their emptiness makes doubt a prominent feature. No settler can break into the prairie of heaven and claim it as his or her own. Hence the Emersonian projection of the American sublime is both underscored and undermined with Dickinson's heavenly mapping. She appropriates Emerson's “transparent law” of God to test the validity of national destiny. This attempt to map divine presence is further thwarted in poems such as “How far is it to Heaven?” (Fr965), in which the speaker declares that both heaven and hell are as far as death that “Defies Topography”. In “We pray - to Heaven -” (Fr476), the location of Heaven is simply “no Geography”:

We pray - to Heaven -  
 We prate - of Heaven -  
 Relate - when Neighbors die -  
 At what o'clock to heaven - they fled -  
 Who saw them - Wherefore fly?

Is Heaven a Place - a Sky - a Tree?  
 Location's narrow way is for Ourselves -  
 Unto the Dead  
 There's no Geography -

But State - Endowal - Focus -  
Where - Omnipresence - fly?

The quest for heaven in the poem reminds one of what Emerson calls “the Unattainable” and “the flying Perfect”, the location of heaven in “Circles” (174). The unattainable, however, is also what Dickinson calls the “Redoubtablest” in “How Human Nature dotes”. Cynthia Griffin Wolff states that poems such as this one serves as “a timely corrective to the easy optimism of the popular press” that portrays heaven as “a superior sort of domestic arrangement” (327). For James R. Guthrie, the poem is also an accusation of permitting one's imagination “to be circumscribed by whatever is familiar and tangible” (108). Jane Donahue Eberwein further suggests that by asking “Where - Omnipresence - fly?” Dickinson in the poem “reminds us that God is everywhere” (2005 20-21). If, as Eberwein asserts, this deconstruction of geographic metaphors indicates the renewal of hope, the poem also reveals the constructedness of faith and the fictitious nature of paradise, a process already made implicit in “My period had come for Prayer -”. Centred around the theme of prayer, both poems expose the insufficiency of human language to connect the divine with the mortal. “Pray” and “prate” both suggest linguistic inability to relate to and locate Heaven. This “no Geography” further echoes the “Vast Prairies of Air” that evade any mapping.

Dickinson uses two “wheres” in “We pray - to Heaven -” to stress the problem of location. As Dickinson states in a letter to Susan, “There is no first, or last, in Forever -” since “It is Center, there, all the time -” (L288). The contradiction between the notion of focus and centre and God's omnipresence challenges the very act of mapping as both a metaphoric exercise and a cultural project. As shown in “How Human Nature dotes” (Fr1440), puritan faith in emigration, in progressing and going somewhere, is a contradictory product of creation. If, as “My period had come for Prayer -” shows, God's work stops when man is created, God's will then is already done before the fulfilment of man's pilgrimage. Man's destiny is a spiritual journey that leads literally to “nowhere”, certainly not to unify with nature and God. The lack of a specific location spurs the speaker on to break into heaven, demanding an

answer to “Wherefore - fly”. However, this “narrow” way of humanity is incapable of imagining God. This “intellectual provincialism”, as James R. Guthrie puts it (88), points toward the limitation of human perception in a national and cultural moment in America, when human desire soars as high as “Where - Omnipresence - fly”.

Quite a few of Dickinson's poems reveal a widening distance between the earthly and the heavenly. As discussed in the first chapter, her locus of heaven is often characterized with hostility rather than hospitality, blankness rather than presence. In “Away from Home are some and I -” (Fr807), the location of Heaven is “a metropolis of Homes” that is foreign and estranging. In another poem “Their Height in Heaven comforts not -” (Fr725), the residence of God is “The House of Supposition”, too perfect and distant to comfort the speaker. Heaven as the ultimate symbol of Home becomes an anticlimactic signifier, the opposite of Home. The wilderness and emptiness of the heavenly space in these poems are incompatible with a sentimental version of domestic comfort and acceptance, or a transcendental version of home, in which man is part of God in nature. In “Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle” (Fr1018), the ascension of a puritan pilgrimage loses its metaphoric and spiritual grip. The city upon the hill is no longer the ultimate destination, or the only way out:

Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle  
 If I prove it steep -  
 If a Discouragement withhold me -  
 If my newest step

Older feel than the Hope that prompted -  
 Spotless be from blame  
 Heart that proposed as Heart that accepted  
 Homelessness, for Home -

Jane Donahue Eberwein states that in the poem, the speaker “presents herself as the traditional pilgrim on life's journey, one who accepts homelessness in quest of a permanent home” (1987 58). Thomas Forster further associates the poem with the feminine space, commenting that “the poem ... suggests that it is not necessary to

transcend or devalue domesticity, only to redefine women's relationship to it from the inside" (38). I would propose extending the scope from the spiritual or domestic to the national space, upon the hill of which the vision of American future lies. For a poet who constantly fuses different scales of landscapes in her poems, from the earthly to the heavenly, from the domestic to the national, the poem could also be read as a comment not only on puritan restlessness or on the position of women in the nineteenth century, but also on the age of restless mobility itself. Susan Roberson observes that antebellum America as an age of reform "is marked by [Margaret] Fuller's famous declaration that linked geographic, physical mobility with the rights of women: 'let them be sea captains, if you will'" (6). Dickinson's "Homelessness" seems to offer an alternative version of mobility, perhaps more feminine and less nationalistic, replacing the focus of puritan pilgrimage and transcendental vision on progression, expansion, and ascension.

As shown in these poems, Dickinson's speaker often stands outside to be able to show the awkwardness of imagining America, Heaven, or God. When her speaker breaks into God's residence, what she sees is the vast prairies of air. As Bruce A. Harvey points out, antebellum American citizens were educated to see the young Republic in terms of its expanding geographical boundaries:

[T]he Republic lacked a shaping sense of a dense interior history, and this formlessness was intensified by the belief in Manifest Destiny, which compelled citizens to see the nation in terms of futurity, of the country's ever dissolving and reconstituting of its borders as it advanced westward. (28)

Dickinson explores and exploits the ever-receding boundaries of American landscapes in her poems, exposing the problematic nature of defining individual and national identity through geographical expansion and spiritual ascension. Transcendental intellectuals see future promises in the clearing of the landscape westward. Dickinson portrays heavenly locations such as prairies of air and homelessness, contrarily, to disclose the inefficacy of such human inscription.

**“That Massacre of Air -”: The Natural Emptiness**

If Dickinson's vision of heaven is formless, her natural landscape is equally unaccountable. Nina Baym observes that “the essential quality of America” lies in “its unsettled wilderness” and the opportunities it offers for the individual to “inscribe, unhindered, his own destiny and his own nature” (1992 11). Dickinson's mapping of nature, alternatively, turns such a claim to individual or national ownership into futile gestures. Her praying-questing poems seem to conscientiously resist to either endowing this geographical wilderness with divine meanings, or to filling in this emptiness with monuments of the past. “Four Trees - opon a solitary Acre -” (Fr778) presents another version of the wilderness that seems to similarly resist a triumphalist or teleological appropriation:

Four Trees - opon a solitary Acre -  
Without Design  
Or Order, or Apparent Action -  
Maintain -

The Sun - opon a Morning meets them -  
The Wind -  
No nearer Neighbor - have they -  
But God -

The Acre gives them - Place -  
They - Him - Attention of Passer by -  
Of Shadow, or of Squirrel, haply -  
Or Boy -

What Deed is Their's unto the General Nature -  
What Plan  
They severally - retard - or further -  
Unknown -

In the poem, God is only an aloof neighbour, and nature simply stands on its own. Michelle Kohler remarks on the resistance of the poem against transcendental vision that it “underscores the blankness of the speaker's vision and its inability (or her refusal) to produce insight or comprehension, reinforcing the inability for human

language to do much more than provide placeholders for meaning” (2004 38-9). I would add that the four trees echo the vast prairies of air in “My period had come for Prayer -” that evoke awe but refuse linguistic or moral imposition. The four trees also do not reflect social or spiritual order, but illustrate their naturalness of being. The attempt to map the wilderness in the poem becomes the testimony of its opacity. Instead of being bound by their legal “Deed” or obligation, the four trees and the lone acre evade human ownership as well as religious dictation.

Dickinson's seemingly agnostic inquiry in “Four Trees - upon a solitary Acre -” has been associated with her proto-ecological awareness. Christopher Benfey asserts that the poem is “one of Dickinson's fullest and happiest expressions of the relation between nature and the human knower”. For Benfey, the poem “is a statement of radical acceptance” (1984 113). Nancy Mayer also notes that the poem “admonishes us to a kind of reverence when we have no illusions left” toward nature (2008 275). Judith Farr further points out that as a good botanist, “Dickinson knew that trees support themselves by their roots and that they also maintain, or solidify, the soil”. For Farr, although the poem “records her suspicions of apparent designlessness, it makes, itself, a design” (1992 295). Christine Gerhardt similarly claims that by mapping New England cultural and natural geographies, the poem “undermines the initial claim that there is no 'design,' 'order,' or 'action'” (63-4). As Gerhardt notes, “the natural environment assumes a presence that goes beyond its role as a 'commodity' for the expanding nation or ... the observing mind” (65). In this way, Dickinson's approach towards nature differs drastically from Emerson's equation of nature with nation or God. Nature, for Emerson, could become an instrument for the redemption of the human seer. In “Prospects” of *Nature*, Emerson explains that human perception can be expanded through the visual unity between oneself and things:

The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty, is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and

so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist, until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit. Love is as much its demand, as perception. (54)

Emerson accentuates the accessibility of the material world by adjusting one's mind's eye. This optical adjustment is often thwarted in Dickinson's poems by the fact of death and becomes an optical deception. In "A Dying tiger - moaned for Drink -" (Fr529), for example, the reflection of hope on the dying tiger's retina turns out to be a sign of finality:

A Dying Tiger - moaned for Drink -  
 I hunted all the Sand -  
 I caught the Dripping of a Rock  
 And bore it in my Hand -

His Mighty Balls - in death were thick -  
 But searching - I could see  
 A Vision on the Retina  
 Of Water - and of me -

'Twas not my blame - who sped too slow -  
 'Twas not his blame - who died  
 While I was reaching him -  
 But 'twas - the fact that He was dead -

In contrast to Emerson's transparent eyeball that sees through nature, the tiger's "Mighty Balls" are thick and stagnant with death. Paradoxically, the vision of water and hope still lingers on the retina of the dead tiger, echoing the dying speaker who "could not see to see -" in another poem "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -" (Fr591). Instead of seeing through, the speaker only sees the opaque eyeballs of the tiger that symbolizes the ineluctability of death. The reflection suggests incapacity to think and see by oneself, to envision beyond mortal limitation. Dickinson's poem thus refuses to offer a visual solution to spiritual salvation. The opacity of death blocks the possibility of united perception. Only reflections and conjectures of the living remain.

Critics have observed the connection of the tiger poem with the Civil War. Elizabeth Phillips associates the poem with Dickinson's depiction of Frazer Stearns' death scene in one letter, considering the tiger poem as an indication of war trauma (52-53).<sup>63</sup> Daneen Wardrop, alternatively, reads the poem in its fascicle context, noting that it “expresses furtive Africanist concerns” (1999 82). I would add that Dickinson's emphasis on the vision in the tiger poem could be read as a revision of the Emersonian belief in visual correction and the unification of the soul. While Emerson asserts the possibility of restoring original and eternal beauty to the world, Dickinson's tiger poem seems to wonder if such a vision could still be realized when America was disunited and devastated by the Civil War. In another poem “It was a quiet seeming day” (Fr1442), a casual red cloud turns out to be a premonition of an earthquake which human nature cannot foresee:

It was a quiet seeming Day -  
 There was no harm in earth or sky -  
 Till with the closing sun  
 There strayed an accidental Red  
 A Strolling Hue, one would have said  
 To westward of the Town -

But when the Earth began to jar  
 And Houses vanished with a roar  
 And Human Nature hid  
 We comprehended by the Awe  
 As those that Dissolution saw  
 The Poppy in the Cloud -

As Joanne Feit Diehl notes, Dickinson “rejects an Emersonian nature which educates man”; she imagines the world “as a deceptive text” and “a deeply equivocal mystery” (10). Like her “Four Trees” and the tiger poem, this poem presents the process of envisioning through “Dissolution”. Nature is opaque rather than transparent. The Emersonian unification of vision and things can be just an optical illusion. One can

<sup>63</sup> In an 1862 letter to Louise and Frances Norcross, Emily Dickinson informed her little cousins of the death news of Frazer Stearns, a friend of her brother Austin, on the battlefield at Newbern with a detailed depiction of his death scene similar to the dying tiger in Dickinson's poem: “He fell by the side of Professor Clark, his superior officer - lived ten minutes in a soldier's arms, asked twice for water - murmured just, 'My God!' and passed! ... we will mind ourselves of this young crusader - too brave that he could fear to die” (L255).

only comprehend “The Poppy in the Cloud” as a sign of a destructive future after the Fall, not before it.

Emerson understands this visual difficulty. As Joanne Feit Diehl comments on the relation between “I” and the “Abyss” in Emerson's writing, “there are moments in Emerson when despair takes over, and it is during these that he sounds most like Dickinson” (171). Emerson proposes bridging this human flaw in perception through faith. In “Idealism” of *Nature*, he describes nature as being useful, venerable, permanent and ideal, despite the human inability to testify to the accuracy of one's senses. For Emerson, nature stands for truth, an anchorage as well as an instrument for humans, since “We are not built like a ship to be tossed, but like a house to stand”. However, Emerson also emphasizes the phenomenal aspect of nature, reminding his readers that nature is “an accident and an effect” (43-44). Emerson's paradoxical piety toward the permanence of nature and its accidental effect is a conundrum that Dickinson also explores in poems such as “It was a quiet seeming Day -”. The “accidental red” in the sky, a natural phenomenon, has no effect on the villager until the consequence of the earthquake. What Emerson believes to be “useful” and “venerable” in nature is elucidated as a widening gap, like the jarring earth. Human nature, like the houses in an earthquake, is shaken and uprooted. Nature's permanence is undermined by its indecipherable sign. What Emerson upholds as sacred in nature is unsteady and incidental for Dickinson's speaker who can only comprehend by awe.

As shown in “Four Trees”, “A Dying Tiger” and “The Poppy” poem, the natural landscape for Dickinson seems not to be inscribed with the wishful thinking of human ambitions. Joanne Feit Diehl argues that for Dickinson “nature becomes an antagonist” that “fails to protect, from which she must withdraw to ask other kinds of questions” (163). However, this seemingly antithetical relationship between nature and humans in Dickinson's poems might also indicate Dickinson's awareness of the implicit encroachment of human meanings upon nature. Mary Loeffelholz argues for Dickinson, “meaning is always already appropriated and inscribed within the natural

landscape”; to gain a poetic voice, one has to “transgress” in the landscape (20). I would suggest further here that in some poems Dickinson attempts to make nature its own agency, and in some, nature takes a more active role by being a witness of human dissolution. As shown in poems such as “A faded Boy - in sallow Clothes” in the first chapter and “It was a quiet seeming Day -” here, the clover and the red cloud are capable of recording traces of human decline. This concept of deep time is shown in another poem “Their Barricade against the Sky” (Fr1505B), in which the remembrance of the Mexican-American War still lingers in the air. Charcoaled and wounded, nature is both a battlefield and a truthful recorder of human violence:

Their Barricade against the Sky  
 The martial Trees withdraw,  
 And with a Flag at every turn  
 Their Armies are no more -

What Russet Halts in Nature's March  
 They indicate or cause,  
 An inference of Mexico  
 Effaces the Surmise -

Recurrent to the After Thought  
 That Massacre of Air -  
 The Wound that was not Wound nor Scar,  
 But Holidays of War -

The Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848 over the 1845 U.S. Annexation of Texas was a conflict driven by the popular notion of manifest destiny. In an 1861 essay “Barbarism and Civilization”, published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Higginson also uses natural imagery to criticize the injustice of the Mexican war. For Higginson, Americans were spreading civilization through its settlement and expansionism. As he claims, “To make room for civilization, that forest must go”; however, he also finds the Mexican war a form of Barbarism – “a forest of moral evil” that “lingers upon the continent”. As he concludes the article:

Is it a good thing to “extend the area of freedom” by pillaging some feeble Mexico? and does the phrase become a bad one only when it means the peaceful progress of constitutional liberty within our own borders? The phrases which oppression teaches become the watchwords of freedom at last, and the triumph of Civilization over Barbarism is the only Manifest Destiny of America. (61)

The imagery of withdrawing “martial Trees”, “An Inference of Mexico” and “Massacre of Air -” in Dickinson's poem seems to echo such an opinion. The event was briefly mentioned in Dickinson's letter home while still in Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (Habegger 192). In 1847, she wrote to her brother, complaining about the isolation of the school community: “I dont know anything more about affairs in the world, than if I was in a trance .... Has the Mexican war terminated yet & how? Are we beat?” (L16) Having a Whig father, Dickinson would have been aware of the political controversy over the Mexican War (Reynolds 2009 346-47), the protest against which put Thoreau, one of Dickinson's favourite writers, in jail briefly for his civil disobedience (Reynolds 2009 259). Betsy Erikka considers the letter to be mocking “the politics of manifest destiny and President Polk’s expansionist ambition to annex Mexico”. For Erikka, Dickinson's letter “registers a more local Whig fear” that New England was itself under siege “by the nationalist, imperialist, and proslavery forces of Polk and the Democrats” (2004 142). Although Dickinson's attitude towards the later civil war remains ambiguous, her satirical response in the letter predicts her gloomy reflection on the Mexican War years after in the poem, an attitude, as will be explored further in the chapter, not far from Higginson's condemnation of violence, or her own father's seeking compromise before the Civil war.<sup>64</sup> For her, the Mexican War seemed to be just the beginning of consequent conflicts over slavery and property ownership. The “Massacre of Air,” –

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<sup>64</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, the Whig party of Dickinson's father supported the Fugitive Slave Act as part of the Compromise Act of 1850 in order to “cool the sectional conflict” and recommend “harmony” between the North and the South (293 & 401). Christopher Benfey also notes that Edward was committed to the Whig values of compromise: “ he had campaigned before the Civil War for the Southern Whig presidential candidates Zachary Taylor and Henry Clay” and such a political stand “may well have tempered Dickinson’s own response to the war” (2002 47). However, as Shira Wolosky remarks, both Edward and Austin “were active recruiters and outfitters of Amherst soldiers, involved in raising both funds and morale” (2008 170).

“An inference of Mexico”, is contained in the air, predicting further violence to come.

As Shira Wolosky remarks, “The question of war penetrates Dickinson’s work”; Wolosky uses “Their Barricade against the Sky” as one of the examples that present nature in battle imagery (2008 174). I would add here that in Dickinson’s poetry, the air seems a proper medium to witness human tragedies. Her portrayal of the poppy cloud and the “Massacre of air” in these poems might have referred to Hitchcock’s lectures of geological theology, briefly mentioned in the first chapter. In *The Religion of Geology*, Hitchcock explains this ability of the air to record and contain human conducts:

Not a word has ever escaped from mortal lips, whether for the defence of virtue or the perversion of the truth, not a cry of agony has ever been uttered by the oppressed, not a mandate of cruelty by the oppressor, not a false and flattering word by the deceiver, but it is registered indelibly upon the atmosphere we breathe ... when man and all his race shall have disappeared from the face of our planet, ask every particle of air still floating over the unpeopled earth, and it will record the cruel mandate of the tyrant. (412-13)

As a student of the Amherst Academy, Dickinson would have been familiar with Hitchcock’s lectures.<sup>65</sup> Her “That Massacre of Air” applies Hitchcock’s geological sermon to her interpretation of human oppression. As will be examined further in the fourth chapter, Dickinson consistently maps the atmosphere and the skyscape, showing her awareness of both Hitchcock’s theology, and her own subtle response to the social conflict of her time. If the atmosphere, as Hitchcock suggests, preserves truth, Dickinson then uses the air as the suitable medium to convey her understanding of truth about human history, mainly its dark side.

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<sup>65</sup> Richard B. Sewall claims that Hitchcock’s *Religion of Geology* was almost certainly read by Dickinson (345).

Although Dickinson's war poetry, Christopher Benfey notes, is generally elegiac rather than accusatory (2002 48), her consistent poetic response to violence and conflicts also suggests her distrust of the notion of progress and expansion. As will be explored further in a later section, she juxtaposes death and ascension to dramatize not only doubt, but a sense of betrayal that makes her war poems more poignant than just elegiac. By detecting traces of war in the air, Dickinson's poem emphasizes the lingering pain of wars over territorial dominance that the notion of ascension does not comfort. Her "Vast Prairies of Air" and "Massacre of Air" both transform ascension and progression into the sterility or premonition of death. The lack of design and order in the four solitary trees further prefigures her dying tiger, the poppy cloud and these martial trees in their suggestiveness of survivorship and traumas. During the Civil War, when Higginson was in command of a black regiment in South Carolina, Dickinson wrote to him that "I trust the 'Procession of Flowers' was not a premonition" (L280), associating Higginson's 1862 article about natural progression, published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, with his military progress to the south. This military progression was sufficiently alarming for Dickinson who considered human advancement as a "premonition" of oblivion. Faith Barret points out that Dickinson might have been aware of the new design of spinning bullets for military use (116). In a way, her perception of the cyclical nature of humanity corresponds to this spinning image of advanced weapons, which could become emblematic of death. Dickinson's historical outlook is captured in her lingering and recording natural landscape.

Critics have pointed out the vacillating poetic style and tone in Dickinson's poems. Gary Lee Stonum comments that "the quintessential Dickinson sublime is a hesitant sublime, one that lingers upon the transaction from trauma to reaction or prolongs the moment at which one phase definitely passes into the other" (141). Susan Howe also describes this hesitation as a circular movement that manifest the spirit of her time: "Hesitation circled back and surrounded everyone in that confident age of aggressive industrial expansion and brutal Empire building. Hesitation and Separation. The Civil

War had split America in two ... Sexual, racial, and geographical separation are at the heart of Definition” (21). Here I would add that her spatial imagination also presents such a picture of the American landscape as vacillating, cyclical and lack of teleological confirmation. As she states in one poem, “The Martyr Poets - did not tell -/ But wrought their Pang in syllable -” (Fr665). The working of “Pang in syllable -”, like “That Massacre of Air”, conveys experiences of pain, trauma, and disorientation that cannot be told through coherent narratives or represented through a linear progression.

Furthermore, the circular and lingering poetic style of Dickinson might suggest her linguistic effort in these poems to make nature, instead of human inscription, the true agency of history. The fractures created by war, whether it is the Civil War or the Mexican-American War, sift through and permeate Dickinson's disjunctive syntactic and lexical structures. Her economy with words and her grammatical minimalism could be interpreted as her poetic tendency to minimize linguistic interference in her poetic representation of the world. As discussed in the introduction, Dickinson believes in the representativeness of the poet. However, her representative voice seems hesitant to take control and endorse human dominance over nature. As Cristanne Miller remarks, in contrast to Emerson, Dickinson's nature is not transparent and “language is not an organic adjunct (or reflected image) of its processes” (1987 152). By making her language disjunctive rather than coherent, her poems are ready to admit the possibility of other voices and give space for them to emerge through the grammatical fissure of her poetic language. David Porter describes Dickinson's poems of meditation as proceeding “from belief to questioning and disjunction” (1970 91). I would add here that Dickinson writes natural contingencies into her poems to map the ill-fitting costume of American identity. Paul Giles points out that American literary history develops out of “a more severe sense of disjunction and antagonism” than entailed by Emerson's seemingly effortless “equation of the circumference of the United States with the poetic imagination”. Using a Thoreauian pun, Giles argues that with “traces of innumerable

savage, intractable conflicts”, “The cradle of American literature” is “discord rather than Concord” (2007 47-48). Dickinson's poems also disclose such traces of discordance and conflict, and it is her mapping of such a version of America that I explore further in the next section.

### **“Sic transit gloria mundi”: Transgression and American Nationhood**

Dickinson would sometimes take the words of other writers literally and transform them into her own. As shown in the first chapter, Emerson in “The Poet” expects a “genius in America, with tyrannous eye” to come; who could see “in the barbarism and materialism of the times” a “carnival” similar to the ones in ancient epics” (2001 196) Dickinson might have had this carnivalesque landscape in mind in her poems about America. Her poetic space seems to register the emergence of conflicting voices within that corresponds to Emerson's “barbarism and materialism of the times”. However, Dickinson's version of America takes a darker and potentially more subversive turn. In “My friend attacks my friend!” (Fr103), discussed in the introduction, for example, Dickinson turns the battlefield into a tourist scene:

My friend attacks my friend!  
 Oh Battle picturesque!  
 Then I turn Soldier too,  
 And he turns Satirist!  
 How martial is this place!  
 Had I a mighty gun  
 I think I'd shoot the human race  
 And then to glory run!

Mixing the “picturesque” scenery with the grotesque reality of the genocide, the poem converts the seemingly humanitarian speaker in the beginning into a potential rampaging killer in the end. Through the speaker's self-parody, the poem creates a carnivalesque effect, subverting the solemnity of militarism. This transgressive act of “shooting the human race” seems to coincide with Dickinson's portrayal of senseless human suffering in her other natural poems, as discussed above. Although written in

the antebellum years, it could be read as the premonition of what may be seen as the ugly realities of modern warfare in the following Civil War. In another poem “Inconceivably Solemn!” (Fr414), written during the war, the solemnity of patriotism is further undermined by the pompous pageantry:

Inconceivably Solemn!  
 Things so gay  
 Pierce - by the very Press  
 Of Imagery -

Their far Parades - order on the eye  
 With a mute pomp -  
 A pleading Pageantry -

Flags, are a brave sight -  
 But no true Eye  
 Ever went by One -  
 Steadily -

Music's triumphant -  
 But the fine Ear  
 Winces with delight  
 Are Drums too near -

Inder Nath Kher reads the poem as a comment on the making of a poem. For Kher, the “sacred” use of metaphors and images functions “as the means of intuitive or spiritual awareness” (112). Renée Bergland further associates the poem with nationalism, asserting that in the poem Dickinson is not refusing “the power of patriotic vision” but “[r]efusing to have her own sight co-opted by the unified vision imposed by the parade” (138). I would add here that Dickinson's poem might also be read as proposing a carnivalesque version of the nation against a “picturesque” and presumably transcendental vision. For Dickinson, the vision of America seems to be characterized not by its abundance or its unification, but by its transgressive potential.

Dickinson's themes of exploration constantly shift from solemn elevations to ironic dissolution, from heroic expedition to grotesque carnivals. She experiments with

such a poetic paradigm at the very beginning of her poetic career. Her valentine poem “Sic transit gloria mundi” (Fr2B), a version printed in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, reveals such an attempt to depict jarring voices in America. As one of the few poems to be published during her lifetime,<sup>66</sup> the poem blends the genre between the epic and the lyrical in the first half of the poem:

“Sic transit gloria mundi”  
 “How doth the busy bee”  
 “Dum vivimus vivamus,”  
 I stay my enemy!

Oh “veni, vidi, vici!”  
 Oh caput cap-a-pie!  
 And oh “memento mori”  
 When I am *far* from thee!

Hurrah for Peter Parley!  
 Hurrah for Daniel Boon!  
 Three cheers sir, for the gentleman  
 Who first observed the moon!

Peter, put up the sunshine;  
 Pattie, arrange the stars;  
 Tell Luna, tea is waiting,  
 And call your brother Mars!

Put down the apple, Adam,  
 And come away with me,  
 So shalt thou have a *pippin*  
 From off my Father's tree!

I climb the “Hill of Science,”  
 I “view the Landscape o'er;”  
 Such transcendental prospect,  
 I ne'er beheld before!

Unto the Legislature  
 My country bids me go,  
 I'll take my *india rubbers*,  
 In case the *wind* should blow!

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<sup>66</sup> She wrote the poem in 1852 for her sister's beau William Howland, which was consequently published in the *Spring Republican* (Habegger 246).

In her elaborate mock-heroic style, literary, social and religious authorities are lampooned in the middle of the speaker's festival march toward the battlefield. In the first half of the poem, the epic themes in Latin mottoes intermingle with English nursery rhythms. Pioneers, explorers, biblical figures, and weary national fathers are evoked in the poem, only to fade away with childish songs and children's garden play into the background of this pageant display. Presentations of gallantry and domesticity are juxtaposed and intertwined in a carousal-like fashion, making sublimity another comic show of fantasy. By mixing classical motifs and modern references, mobility and mortality in a free spirit, the poem creates a carnivalesque effect in its dialogic form for hierarchy subversion and boundary transgression.

Dickinson's use of punctuation in this valentine also indicates the emergence of a modernized consumer society. By italicising nouns and phrases of various origins, such as Indian rubbers and pippins, the poem emphasises the quotidian aspect of the speaker's domestic life – consumerism. Mary Loeffelholz points out that nineteenth-century middle class American women like Dickinson “normatively 'used' the world only derivatively and secondarily, as consumers rather than producers of the fruits of the capitalist entrepreneurial mind” (9-10). In the case of the poem, the speaker is a consumer of both cultural and material goods. She is a literary reader of the Latin verses, the nursery rhymes, the biblical stories, the adventures and the school textbooks about science and geography. The speaker is also a consumer of modern comfort. The speaker sees “Such transcendental prospect/ I ne'er beheld before!” more like a tourist than an Emersonian seer. By taking Indian rubbers to the battlefield “in case the wind shall blow”, and stating that “an immortal hero” will “take his hat and run”, the speaker further undermines the masculine tradition of military patriotism. In addition, by having her own cosmic tea party, a possible allusion to the Boston tea party and its historic significance, the speaker revises the panoramic and the revolutionary moment in national history with a domesticated version of her own world view. With recurring quotation marks, italics and capitalizations, the poem draws our attention to the incongruity of placing phrases of

epic, biblical, historical and transcendental significance in domestic and pedagogical surroundings. Being “a precociously wise student” (*An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia* 265), the speaker learns about figures such as Peter Parley, Daniel Boone,<sup>67</sup> the gentlemen who observed the moon first, and Adam – fictional, colonial, scientific or biblical in the school curriculum.<sup>68</sup> Loeffelholz notes that “middle-class women were increasingly defined as purchasers and consumers rather than producers of goods” in Dickinson's society, and she would parody their “few legitimate spheres of public 'speech'” (20-21). In the poem, such a parodic effect is created when this consumer-speaker is also a soldier in a war and a producer of this valentine. As Peter Stoneley remarks, Dickinson would pretend in her poetry “to expect more from consumerism than it could ever deliver in order to subvert it” (587). Dickinson's valentine, in a similar way, prioritises the commercialized and presumably secularized America the speaker comes to know, a topic I will examine further in the third chapter, subverting both the public and the patriarchal, and the private and the domestic. Here I would suggest further that it presents a revised, perhaps more balanced national vision by fusing both the battlefield and the schoolroom, the garden of Eden and the orchard of the speaker's father, colonial adventures and tourist trips, and ancient and the modern through her juxtaposition and combination of traditionally gendered and divided spaces in the nineteenth century.

The valentine poem has another surprisingly gymnastic turn in the second half, showing the transition from tradition to modernity, from the classical, biblical and

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<sup>67</sup> Dickinson might have deliberately (mis)spelt “Daniel Boone” into “Daniel Boone” in the printed version to cohere visually with “moon” and “Doon” in the poem or to create a comic or parodic effect.

<sup>68</sup> The cultural allusion to colonial explorers in the poem is an interesting reference point to check. Peter Parley and Daniel Boon in the first half of the poem and Christopher Columbus in the second half were all adventurers who had captured the cultural imagination of Dickinson's time. Peter Parley was a fictional figure and an avuncular character of a popular children's magazine, created by Samuel Griswold Goodrich in the 1930s in Boston. Being a traveller and a fantastic story teller, Peter Parley introduced “the glory of the world”, the history, geography, culture and customs to mid-nineteenth-century children as a classroom pedagogy (Harvey 2001 46). Daniel Boone was a legendary frontiersman in the colonial history of America. He explored the interior territories of the continent, wandering and hunting all the way to “the New Eden of the West” of America, Kentucky (Draper 1998 3). Christopher Columbus, an ambitious mariner from Genoa, was credited for his colonial expedition to America. These adventurers were germane to the history of America.

historic past to the present. The eighth and ninth stanzas, the middle section of the poem, serve as a turning point of this transition in both its theme and form:

During my education,  
It was announced to me  
That *gravitation, stumbling*  
Fell from an apple tree!

The Earth upon an axis  
Was once supposed to turn,  
By way of a *gymnastic*  
In honor to the sun!

It *was* the brave Columbus,  
A sailing o'er the tide,  
Who notified the nations  
Of where I would reside!

Mortality is fatal –  
Gentility is fine,  
Rascality, heroic,  
*Insolvency, sublime!*

Our Fathers being weary,  
Laid down on Bunker Hill;  
And tho' full many a morning,  
Yet they are sleeping still, –

The trumpet, sir, shall wake them,  
In dreams I see them rise,  
Each with a solemn musket  
A marching to the skies!

A coward will remain, Sir,  
Until the fight is done;  
But an *immortal hero*  
Will take his hat, and run!

Good bye, Sir, I am going;  
My country calleth me;  
Allow me, Sir, at parting,  
To wipe me weeping e'e.

In token of our friendship  
Accept this "Bonnie Doon,"  
And when the hand that plucked it  
Hath passed beyond the moon,

The memory of my ashes  
Will consolation be;  
Then farewell, Tuscarora,  
And farewell, Sir, to thee!

This gymnastic rotation of the earth and the stumbling apple happen right at the middle of the poem, turning the poem literally into another gymnastic show. Furthermore, this transition also embodies the thematic shift of the poem from knowledge to action, from the classroom to a real battlefield. The celebratory tone of empiricism, transcendence and progress in the first half of the poem, however, is overshadowed by the implied violence and radical consequences of these intellectual ideologies that the speaker might encounter soon as a soldier. The national fathers on Bunker Hill and the Tuscarora, a Native American tribe that fought the European settlers in the early eighteenth century, suggest the revolutionary history not simply as a process of ascension, but also incessant conflict and struggle. The speaker's extolment of "Rascality" and "*Insolvency*" further reminds one of the transgressive nature of American nationhood, foreshadowing the speaker's own descent to death.

This celebration of social deviance in Dickinson's valentine was written at a time when the desperate and the bankrupt went westwards to start afresh. It is known that the Dickinson family had experienced financial hardship. As Alfred Habegger suggests, this poem might refer to the bankruptcy of her uncle Loring around the same time the poem was composed, a situation that the Norcross family from Dickinson's mother's side might have attempted to hide from the Dickinson sisters (264). Loring was not the only one. As mentioned earlier, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, Dickinson's grandfather, ruined himself financially and died in exile in Ohio in 1838, eight years after Emily was born (Habegger 105). Before moving to Ohio, her grandfather had been forced to sell the eastern half of the Dickinson Homestead

(Habegger 82). Edward Dickinson and his young family had to move to West Street in 1840, a home for the Dickinsons for fifteen years before they moved back to the Homestead (Habegger 129). The sense of uneasiness about property ownership and identity crisis is satirized in her valentine by honouring cowardice and insolvency, with its potential allusion to Dickinson's grandfather. Nevertheless, this satiric tone might also reflect Dickinson's perception of patriotic militarism and westward expansionism as being precarious rather than glorious.

This elation in insolvency, rascality and timidity in Dickinson's valentine dramatizes the contrast between personal concerns for leisure and national schemes for victory. Switching between perspectives, her poem allows transgression rather than transcendence, subversion instead of sublimity to emerge. Like a staged parade on Independence Day, Dickinson's valentine represents American nationhood as composed of myths, allusions, and oration. Far from love or romance, the poem experiments with public and private voices intermittently to explore the definitions of heroism, militarism and nationalism in an extravagant and grotesque manner. This "carnivalization of language", according to David S. Reynolds, contains a liberating force. In his discussion of antebellum American literature, Reynolds alludes to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, pointing out that through a democratic blend of language between the high and low, "inequality or distance between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect, whereby the sacred is united with the profane, the lofty with the lowly, the great with the insignificant" (1988 444). Dickinson's valentine medley exemplifies this democratic force by carnivalizing the poem into a theatrical representation of American history in motion. However, this democratizing force in Dickinson's poems is often understood in terms of incongruity and discordance. The imagery of patriotism in Dickinson's poem is charged with mundane experiences.

As Vivian Pollak comments, Dickinson's valentine contrasts "a private, internal structure against an aggressively public rhetoric" to parody "the tone of bombastic

oratory” (1974 73). Victoria N. Morgan further observes that the Latin verse at the beginning of the poem introduces a direct parody of the hymn tradition (181). This parodic tone, I would further suggest, might also show Dickinson's attempt to rewrite the vision of American nationhood as not unified, coherent or transcendental, but diversified, modernized and incoherent. In her discussion of Dickinson's “humorous grotesquerie”, Cristanne Miller remarks that these poems of excess humour “attempt not just to violate norms (or taste) but to open up possibilities” for new perceptions (1993 106). Paradoxically, this liberating force in Dickinson's carnivalesque poetic landscape is often operated upon violence and conflict. Her speaker in “My friend attacks my friend!” is prepared to “shoot the human race” for glory. Her speaker in her valentine poem is still singing nursery rhymes and worrying about the incremental weather in the battlefield. These poems capture one of the most gymnastic and vulnerable moments in American history, in which any civilization may rotate and crumble into chaos and dust. As Reynolds remarks, “Jacksonian America was a place of turbulence and excess. Its youthful vigor gave rise to brashness and a sense of experimentation” ... The period's favorite slang expression spoke volumes: *Go ahead!*” (2009 3) Dickinson's poems inherit such youthful vigour by experimenting with public rhetoric and individual desire, articulating both the energy and the anxiety of a modern individual in such a turbulent age. Her valentine, in particular, subverts public oration and undermines transcendental vision that inscribes America as a future empire. From the heavenly splendour of the stars and Garden of Eden, to the hill of science, the battle of Bunker Hill and the Tuscarora War, the speaker rolls out a panorama of American prospect that is both cheerful and bleak, sentimental and satirical at the same time. The “rascal” behaviour is glorified to foil the fragile construction of an advanced and civilized society. With the “Hill of Science” and “transcendental prospect,” the poem explores how this rascal heroism results in insolvency and “memory of my ashes.” The “fatal” “Mortality” and “sublime” “Insolvency” are destructions that feed upon fine “Gentility” and heroic “Rascality”, a cyclical progress of civilization in history that leads to, and potentially feed on, its own decay. The “consolation” of memorable “ashes” in the last stanza returns the poem back to its opening, the Latin mottoes about victory and mortality.

The weary fathers on Bunker Hill and the “memory of my ashes” set a limit to the aggrandized version of human achievement.

### **“No Settler had the Mind”: Exploration, Mismapping and Myth**

Dickinson's national mapping conveys both a nostalgia for boundless mobility, her famous “aptitude for Bird” (Fr1088), and a response to individual ambitions that result in illness, hardship and death. While her speaker in her valentine poem is drinking tea and flirting with Adam, the theme of military belligerence remains in the foreground that reminds readers of a war going on in the distance. This reflectiveness seems to become more prominent in her later poems about loss and death. On the one hand, her salute to popular explorers exemplifies the need of the young nation, represented by the young speaker in the poem, to create a newer version of America that is distinctively different from a dictated official version of a Transcendental America. On the other, this idealized version of America that her ancestors fought for was still in constant unrest with its fluctuating boundaries. In the nineteenth century, as David Harvey remarks, “The world's spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations, and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration” (264). It was a time of mapping, re-mapping and mismapping, when reterritorialized and hierarchized global outlooks, and the reorganizing of geographical, cultural and racial boundaries were propelled by scientific, political and financial aspirations. It was also in such a time of expansionism that Dickinson would rethink the definition of exploration in relation to individual identity and American nationhood.

Like Dickinson, the Transcendentalists were also keen on exploring one's interiority in relation to the world. Emerson and Thoreau both adopt exploratory metaphors frequently to emphasize the significance of self-discovery. Although Emerson espouses westward expansion, he also makes it explicit in “Self-Reliance” that “Travelling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of

places” (2001 134). This unsettling relationship between oneself and the external world is further explicated through his critique of social restlessness. In “Experience”, he remarks that “Every ship is a romantic object, except that we sail in. Embark, and the romance quits our vessel, and hangs on every other sail in the horizon. Our life looks trivial, and we shun to record it” (199). To accentuate the importance of living in the moment of the here and now, Emerson states in “Politics” that for a wise man there is “no road, for he is at home where he is” (2001 219). Thoreau also concludes *Walden* by asserting the significance of exploring one's own self, since “The other side of the globe is but the home of our correspondent”: “What does Africa - what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart?” Thoreau thus urges his readers to “be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought” (2001 310). He quotes William Habington's “To My Honoured Friend Sir Ed. P. Knight” in *Castara* (1634) to elucidate this expedition within oneself:

Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find  
 A thousand regions in your mind  
 Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be  
 Expert in home Cosmography.

Evoking the British poet, Thoreau advises his readers to “Explore thyself” as a braver act than going to war: “Only the defeated and deserters go to the wars, cowards that run away and enlist” (310 & 312). These critiques of the travel fashion came at a time when travel was believed to make the world a smaller place. Human confidence in technological advancement to bridge geographical distance was challenged by these Transcendentalists for its reduction of human existence into moving vessels. Through the emphasis on interiority, both Thoreau and Emerson encourage their readers to practise this home cosmography. Being at home with oneself is a symbol of independence. As one of Dickinson's favourite writers Donald Grant Mitchell states in his 1851 novel *Dream Life*, “There is no need of wandering widely to catch incident or adventure; they are everywhere about us; each day is a succession of escapes and joys, - not perhaps clear to the world, but brooding in our thought, and

living in our brain” (2). This endorsement of one's interior life can be seen as a continuity of the intellectual reaction of Dickinson's time against the rootlessness and extreme mobility experienced by modern individuals in American society.

Dickinson's poems share the Transcendentalist enthusiasm about self-exploration as a sign of self-reliance. As Joanne Feit Diehl notes, “Emerson and Dickinson both find the origin of power within the individual. They assume a vocabulary normally ascribed to external, natural phenomena, and apply it to the inner life” (176). In some poems, however, Dickinson's poetic interest in this inner exploration is also the point of departure from the Transcendentalists. For Dickinson, one's interiority is the most profound journey one can take, but it is also not possible to be mapped. While she echoes Thoreau's quote in “Soto! Explore thyself!” (Fr814C), she also reiterates the point that the human mind is more unaccountable than the unknown continent of the world:

Soto! Explore thyself!  
 Therein thyself shalt find  
 The “Undiscovered Continent” -  
 No Settler had the Mind.

The poem is often associated with Dickinson's notion of one's inner quest.<sup>69</sup> Pierre Nepveu remarks that like Thoreau, Dickinson in poem such as this one turns “the story of America's exploration” inside out (10). Robin Peel further reads the poem as Dickinson's rejection of the “exploration of the external world”; however, Peel also notes that the mind “allows no ownership” (222). As Paul Giles points out, Dickinson's “Undiscovered Continent” of the mind “involves a process of systematic inversion” which resists “mental subordination” (2011 15). On first reading, the poem resembles Thoreau's argument by prioritizing mental over military vigour. The poem challenges Hernando De Soto, a sixteenth-century Spanish explorer who travelled to modern-day Florida and the southern territories, to explore his own mind.

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<sup>69</sup> Juzanne Juhasz, for example, has written a book about Dickinson's interior journey, evoking the poem in the title of her book *The Undiscovered Continent: Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind*.

However, the poem shifts the focus from Transcendentalist repulsion toward meaningless and restless travel, to the impossibility of colonizing one's mind. By putting "Undiscovered Continent" in quotation marks,<sup>70</sup> the poem seems to switch its mode from contemplation to a sense of irony. Possibly referring to Thoreau's quotation of the British poet Habington, the poem might suggest that, contrary to Thoreau's appeal for one's inner exploration, even the mind cannot be explored or "settled". Hence Dickinson's poem might have intended to create a different effect from Thoreau's earnest urge to his readers to "Explore thyself". This Transcendental confidence in both discovering one's inner self and dominating the environment is a certitude that Dickinson does not seem to share.

"Soto! Explore thyself!" also draws our attention to the problematic use of frontier metaphors by Dickinson's contemporary fellow writers. Her sensitivity towards public oration indicates her understanding of exploration and expansionism as by nature a linguistic problem, a problem Emerson also recognizes. Cristanne Miller notes that like Dickinson, Emerson finds language inadequate, making numerous references "to the fallen state of humanity and language in the contemporary world" (1987 153). Andrew Taylor further points out that Emerson is deeply suspicious of language as an instrument of public discourses, speaking on affairs in Kansas in 1856 that "Language has lost its meaning in the universal cant" (2010 55). Miller argues that unlike Emerson, the "impermanence of meaning and language" liberates Dickinson "to speak as she might not otherwise dare" (1987 153); here I would suggest that Dickinson might at times find language too powerful that one cannot afford to abuse it. She thus would refuse to adopt the Transcendental terminology of expansionism, since metaphors of exploration re-enforce the mentality of subjugation and dominance. As John Carlos Rowe remarks, Transcendentalists internalize the notion of expansion and advance progressive ways of thinking:

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<sup>70</sup> Dickinson's use of quotation marks has been considered as allusive and sometimes ironic. David S. Reynolds suggests that Dickinson uses quotation marks strategically for her frequent references to popular culture (2002 174). Helen McNeil further points out that Dickinson uses inverted commas ironically to challenge the received meanings of framed words (106-07).

However critical Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, and other transcendentalists may have been of specific United States imperial projects, like the Mexican-American War and slavery, transcendentalism relied on a rhetoric of transcendental expansion, internalization (and thus appropriation), and psychic progress and development well suited to the politics of Jacksonian America. (38)

In this light, Dickinson's poem can be read as a subtle critique of the use of exploration metaphors prevalent in Enlightenment and Transcendentalist writings. This metaphoric flirtation with exploratory references and adventure narratives re-enacts the notions of expansion, progression and advancement in the historic development of westward settlement, notions that Dickinson seems to conscientiously resist endorsing.

By reinstating a settler mentality, Thoreau and Emerson express a faith in the individual's ability to discover, explore, and expand. Dickinson's poems, conversely, convey more doubt that upsets the complacency of self-reliance. Richard Slotkin states that "The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (5). Emerson skips violence to reach regeneration by submerging oneself in nature. Dickinson, contrarily, sticks to the experience of violence and pain. Her notion of settlement in her poems almost equals oppression and imposition. In poems such as "I noticed People disappeared" (Fr1154), she uses frontier imagery to portray one's encounter with the wild region of death:

I noticed People disappeared  
 When but a little child -  
 Supposed they visited remote  
 Or settled Regions wild -  
 Now know I - They both visited  
 And settled Regions wild -  
 But did because they died  
 A Fact withheld the little child -

The disappearance of people and the “Fact” of death speak powerfully to one's understanding of death as an encroachment upon and violation of life. In “Who occupies this House?” discussed in the first chapter, the development of the ghost town further suggests the passive aggressive invasion of death:

Before Myself was born  
 'Twas settled, so they say,  
 A Territory for the Ghosts -  
 And Squirrels, formerly.

Until a Pioneer, as  
 Settlers often do  
 Liking the quiet of the Place  
 Attracted more unto -

And from a Settlement  
 A Capital has grown  
 Distinguished for the gravity  
 Of every Citizen -

“'Twas settled, so they say” exposes the amused and implicitly accusatory tone towards the predetermination of death. This close relation between expansionism and its negative connotation of dominance, violation and death, is also implied in “Soto! Explore thyself!”, since the settlement of the “Undiscovered Continent” of the mind could mean not only mental complacency, but also death that ceases the existence of human consciousness. Dickinson's notion of expansion and settlement, in this way, is distinctively different from the born-again experience of Emerson. For Dickinson, American identity is not born out of the wilderness but dies in it.

With the imagery of settlement, Dickinson's poems convey a sense of dissolution through death. Such a metaphoric foray corresponds to the sentimental depiction in the exploratory stories of her time. The reputation of De Soto, for example, was heightened by the romanticized depiction of his death during his exploration. A book review of the 1851 *Conquest of Florida* in the *New Englander and Yale Review* calls his expedition a tragic adventure (470).<sup>71</sup> In an 1840 poem “The Death of Hernando

<sup>71</sup> See also “Notices of New Books” in *The United States Democratic Review* (478-479) on Theodore

De Soto”, published in *The United States Democratic Review*, J. B. P. portrays the last journey of De Soto underneath the waters of the Mississippi also in a compassionate tone. The author quotes George Bancroft, a historian and an expansionist,<sup>72</sup> from his *History of the United States* (1834-78) at the beginning of the poem to create a sympathetic atmosphere: “He had crossed a large part of the continent in search of gold, and found nothing so remarkable as his burial place” (174). The poem then proceeds to explore the hope and despair experienced by De Soto and his soldiers in the fourth stanza:

Where, where the golden sands? Oh, where  
The rich spontaneous ore,  
They fondly dream'd these dreadful wilds  
In such profusion bore?  
Delusion, worse than madness all!  
But now it had gone by,  
And they had found each hope nought else  
But very mockery. (175)

The author conjures up a tragic scenario by contrasting the profusion of tropical lushness with the delusive madness De Soto might have experienced, dramatizing his almost heroic death. Whereas J. B. P. laments this tragic loss of life, and sympathizes with De Soto for his romanticized failure, Dickinson plays devil's advocate in “Soto! Explore thyself!” to execute reflection and potentially mockery upon the insatiable and aspiring overreacher.

One of the reasons that the mind cannot be settled, for Dickinson, is because it is in the human nature to dote on the unattainable. Her poems steer through romanticized sentimentalism on the one hand, and idealized transcendentalism on the other, to explore the treacherous territory of the mind with perceptive directness. Through an exploration of earthly possession, spiritual dislocation is manifested. In “Trust in the Unexpected -” (Fr561), Dickinson uses biblical, mythological and colonial examples

<sup>71</sup> Irving's 1851 *The Conquest of Florida* (478-79).

<sup>72</sup> In *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, Frederick Merk points out that George Bancroft was a promoter of manifest destiny and “believed that democracy and republicanism are the will of God, and that the task of disseminating them had been assigned especially to the United States” (40, 61-2 & 195).

to examine the fallacy of various quest narratives:

Trust in the Unexpected -  
 By this - was William Kidd  
 Persuaded of the Buried Gold  
 As One had testified -

Through this - the old Philosopher -  
 His Talismanic Stone  
 Discerned - still withholden  
 To effort undivine -

'Twas this - allured Columbus -  
 When Genoa - withdrew  
 Before an Apparition  
 Baptized America -

The Same - afflicted Thomas -  
 When Deity assured  
 'Twas better - the perceiving not -  
 Provided it believed -

The poem illustrates how a quest is an emotional investment, a cooperation between the believer and the invisible but believed other. The “discerned” “Talismanic Stone” will withhold its power to “effort undivine”. Columbus is “allured” by his faith in God, and this trust in divinity is a cause, rather than a result of, the projection of America as a new Eden. The “Apparition”, or the Holy Ghost, baptises America out of an accident rather than destiny. The buried gold of William Kidd, a seventeenth-century British pirate, Columbus' America, and the old philosopher's talismanic stone, mythical, religious or superstitious, are the manifestations of deity only in the eyes of the beholders. In other words, divinity needs to be conjured up to fill in the gap of faith.

This process of imaginary investment in one's belief is also made explicit in Washington Irving's biography of Columbus. As Cynthia L. Hallen notes, Dickinson alludes to Irving's book in numerous poems and would have been aware of Irving's sentimental portrayal of Columbus' faith (1996 174). According to Irving, Columbus'

expedition to America is a happy coincidence and a result of false information. Nevertheless, Columbus' errors are also the basis and strength of his faith:

... It is singular how much the success of this great enterprise depended upon two happy errors, the imaginary extent of Asia to the east, and the supposed smallness of the earth; both errors of the most learned and profound philosophers, but without which Columbus would hardly have ventured into the western regions of the Atlantic, in whose unknown and perhaps immeasurable waste of waters he might perish before he could reach a shore.

When Columbus had once formed his theory, it became fixed in his mind with singular firmness. He never spoke in doubt or hesitation, but with as much certainty as if his eyes had beheld the Promised Land. A deep religious sentiment mingled with his thoughts, and gave them at times a tinge of superstition, but of a sublime and lofty kind. He looked upon himself as standing in the hand of heaven, chosen from among men for the accomplishment of its high purpose; he read, as he supposed. His contemplated discovery foretold in Holy Writ, and shadowed forth darkly in the prophecies. The ends of the earth were to be brought together, and all nations and tongues and languages united under the banners of the Redeemer. (1908 17-18)

Endowing himself with the holy purpose of a “Redeemer”, Columbus turns his projection of “Holy Writ” into a firm belief in his destiny. He gathers his erroneous speculations to form a conviction with “a deep religious sentiment” and “a tinge of superstition”. Echoing Irving's “Holy Writ”, the “Apparition” in Dickinson's poem embodies the apparitional or even superstitious quality of the American myth. “Happy errors” become prophecies and “the imaginary extent of Asia” is envisaged as the Promised Land. Doubt turns into faith and shadows of “Holy Writ” turn into national destiny.

“Trust in the Unexpected -” discloses the fictitious and constructed nature of material and spiritual quests. Sea legends, magic powers and national origins result from one's trust in “the Unexpected”. Calling Thomas' doubt an “affliction”, the poem further

underlines the blissful ignorance to trust in the “Unexpected”, a devotion and a divine effort that go beyond rational inference and empirical evidence. By demystifying the process of believing, the poem also debunks the national myth of America. Columbus' belief is a talismanic stone, a sham that allures explorers, philosophers, and saints alike onto their grand quests. Trust, not evidence, is the defining gesture of belief. Through examples of colonial expeditions, the poem reveals the faint traces instead of solid ground upon which explorers and believers construct their faith. As Dickinson concludes the poem, “’Twas better - the perceiving not -/ Provided it believed -”. The transatlantic expeditions of Columbus originate from a phantom-like vision and a mistaken theory. Thus Dickinson's mapping echoes Irving's description of the crucial moment in Columbus' exploration. The origin of the American nationhood, as both Dickinson and Irving recognize, is profoundly rooted in a history of mismapping.

Science was especially speculative in Columbus' time. Maps, emblematic of the Enlightenment, were often conjectural and faulty, and travellers could easily go astray with misjudgement. Explorers relied largely upon their own wits to orientate themselves in moments of crisis. False maps and their misreading, together with high mortality and hardship, rendered each expedition a risky investment. In Irving's biography of Columbus, this process of mismapping plays a central role. Columbus' first voyage in 1492 relied on a conjectural map as a guide sent by Paolo Toscanelli of Florence (Irving 1908 56). During the voyage, the compass was “to lose its mysterious virtues” of accuracy with the movement of the North Star, and the laws of nature as Columbus knew them were changing and “subject to unknown influences” (Irving 1908 60). Under such difficult circumstances, Columbus, as Irving imagines, experienced mixed feelings of expectation and anxiety the night before the eventual landing of the Bahamas:

... A thousand speculations of the kind must have swarmed upon him. As he watched for the night to pass away; wondering whether the morning light would reveal a savage wilderness, or dawn upon spicy groves and glittering fanes and gilded cities, and all the splendors of oriental civilization. (Irving 1908 70)

While Columbus supposed himself to have arrived at an island at the extremities of India, he had actually reached one of the Bahama Islands by mistake (Irving 1908 75). Irving's depiction of Columbus' expedition presents a picture far from valorous and self-assuring. Mingling doubt with hope, Columbus' enterprise discloses extreme physical peril and emotional turbulence. Charles W. J. Withers states that “a profoundly unsure 'Orientalist' gaze from the West was based on ambivalent 'imaginative geographies,' 'anticipatory geographies' even, which were distinguished not by fact but by notions of distrust, fear, and the exotic allure of the East” (2007 93). The transatlantic expedition of Columbus, as a landmark of European maritime advancement, also illustrates a history of misconception and doubt.

Columbus' exploration of the geographically unknown is fraught with danger, an uncertainty that Dickinson appropriates to explain the treacherous relationship between man and nature, the mind and the world. In “I never told the buried gold” (Fr38), the sunlight becomes a treasure that the sun and the speaker compete to win its possession:

I never told the buried gold  
 Upon the hill - that lies -  
 I saw the sun - his plunder done  
 Crouch low to guard his prize.

He stood as near  
 As stood you here -  
 A pace had been between -  
 Did but a snake bisect the brake  
 My life had forfeit been.

That was a wondrous booty -  
 I hope 'twas honest gained.  
 Those were the fairest ingots  
 That ever kissed the spade!

Whether to keep the secret -  
 Whether to reveal -  
 Whether as I ponder  
 “Kidd” will sudden sail -

Could a shrewd advise me  
 We might e'en divide -  
 Should a shrewd betray me -  
 Atropos decide!

Mary Loeffelholz considers poem to be about the myth of America as the Garden of Eden. However, as Loeffelholz points out, “[t]he speaker's spying position, the snake that might have (but did not) 'bisect the brake,' curiously recall both Satan's and Eve's actions in *Paradise Lost*”; the American garden here “is fallen and threatening, its glory stolen from elsewhere” (14). For Loeffelholz, the poem denies Emerson's claim as a seer of nature and an American Adam by recasting “Emerson's readerly entrepreneur, his Columbus always claiming the Indies for his own discovery” as “a pirate” (12). Indeed, with its sensationalistic depiction of the sunset, “a kind of yellow novel in verse”, as David S. Reynolds puts it (2002 177), the poem seems to dramatize the inaccessibility of an American vision “Opon the hill”. Appealing to Atropos, the Greek demi-goddess of fate, the poem further highlights the arbitrariness of destiny. “Trust in the Unexpected”, or faith in God and nature, is an effort divine, not human. These quest narratives, embedded in Columbus' mismapping and William Kidd's treasure hunting, testify to the unreliability of empirical evidence and the instability of the mind alike. Explorations for materialistic gain are traded in in her poems for emotional and spiritual uncertainty. Faith and trust as the bedrock of one's identity or national destiny are full of apparitions, crevices and myths. Thus Dickinson's quest poems capture the apparitional vision of America. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff comments, Dickinson lived in a time of social decline:

[S]he never knew the dawning or even the noon of America's heroic age, but only the long shadows of its twilight ... she knew the darkness of the merely commercial, instrumental society that was to follow hard upon heroism's end ... It was the end of our glory and the beginning of our sorrow that Emily Dickinson could see ... during those years surrounding our Civil War ... (9)

Through the long shadows of glory, Dickinson conjures up moments of mythic and epic encounters to delineate modern anxiety. The sunlight, like the buried gold upon the hill, does not guarantee the destiny of America as a future empire.

The metaphoric quest for light, symbolic of the Enlightenment thinking and transcendental philosophy, paradoxically shows its shadowy nature for Dickinson. It is not surprising that she compares a certain slant of light in a winter afternoon in “There's a certain Slant of light,” (Fr320) to “the look of Death”. The “wonderful booty” in Dickinson's “I never told the buried gold” embodies the human projection of a golden future lying “Upon the hill”, which in turn mirrors its implicit consequences of violence and fatality, as the Gold rush in the west, mainly California in the late 1840s, had shown. It is a dark tale that Edgar Allen Poe's poem “Eldorado” (1849) had also explored earlier:

Gaily bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had journeyed long,  
Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old –  
This knight so bold –  
And o'er his heart a shadow  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength  
Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow –  
“Shadow,” said he,  
“Where can it be –  
This land of Eldorado?”

“Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,”

The shade replied –  
 “If you seek for Eldorado!” (101)

Poe's poem, with its Gothic tone and its reference to John Bunyan's Valley of the Shadow of Death, serves not only as a footnote to the California Gold rush, but also as an allegorical premonition of human descent. Although Dickinson writes to Higginson in an 1879 letter that “Of Poe, I know too little to think” (L649), she and Poe share a relish for the spectral presence of history. Stripping heroism of its romantic aura, Dickinson revises gold quests into her own version of mythical expedition and its dissolution. In “Finding is the first Act” (Fr910), a poem that Helen McNeil considers to be a “negative parable” that deconstructs “the idea of myth-making” (19), Dickinson exemplifies the dissipation of human aspirations through Jason's Golden Fleece expedition:

Finding is the first Act  
 The second, loss,  
 Third, Expedition for the “Golden Fleece”

Fourth, no Discovery -  
 Fifth, no Crew -  
 Finally, no Golden Fleece -  
 Jason, sham, too -

As Robert Weisbuch comments on this poem, “Dickinson's quest fiction enacts a momentous change in the history of romance, a new emphasis on the hero's act of questing over against his successful completion of the quest” (1972 165-66). I would add that this revision of the tradition of myth and romance is also a reversal, a return from possession to loss. Weisbuch argues that both Poe and Dickinson “emphatically end their return-narratives before any wished-for All is attained because that All by definition cancels the grounds of consciousness and language as we know them” (1986 125). Dickinson's “Finding is the first Act” seems to further reverse the convention of quest narratives by beginning with the act of finding that is overshadowed with disillusion. While her early valentine poem, also a mock-heroic poem, still toys with these notions of myth, identity, and nation, her Jason poem,

written about the year when the Civil War ended, shows a maturing development in Dickinson's writing career by converging the individual and the national into a mythical resolution, or in the poem, dissolution. Expeditions of all kinds are the goals and the propagators of their own games, like the Greek emblem of the ouroboros eating its own tail as a symbol of eternal return, except that in Dickinson's Jason poem, this cycle reaffirms eternal loss.

**“Only, your *inference* therefrom!”: Deconstruction of the Arctic Craze**

Dickinson's “Finding is the first Act” might have been inspired by a contemporary episode of maritime exploration in the mid-nineteenth century, to which she alluded both in her poems and letters, namely the Anglo-American Arctic expeditions.<sup>73</sup> John Franklin, a British Royal Navy officer, disappeared after setting out on a polar mission to find the Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean in 1845. To search for her husband, Lady Franklin pleaded for British and American support to sponsor rescue teams. In the summer of 1850 alone, there were more than ten ships from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean searching for Franklin (Sawin 76). In 1851, at the peak of the Arctic fad, an article in the *New York Times* described this frantic Arctic phenomenon as a mythical and tourist event, but one devoid of rational and practical value:<sup>74</sup>

This great commercial *desideratum* since Columbus found the way to the East Indies, barred by the American continent – is, in all likelihood now abandoned for ever. Indeed, of these latter years, it had become rather the quest of curiosity, and a motive to naval knight-errantry, than a matter of serious import. The fleece of Colchis was never more eagerly sought – the location of El Dorado more profoundly speculated upon. Navigators of all nations and kindreds and tongues turned their prows towards

<sup>73</sup> Michael F. Robinson remarks that Arctic frontiers served as an inspiration for generations of American writers, including Dickinson (3). Timothy Morris also notes Dickinson's allusion to the Arctic race in several of her poems (1997 90). Paul Muldoon further suggests that Dickinson might have read an 1851 *Harper's* article “Voyage in Search of John Franklin” and followed the story with great interest (13-18).

<sup>74</sup> This article is available at : <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F0091FFC3855177493C1A9178BD95F458584F9>>.

the realms of perpetual ice; forced their way into situations of unimaginable peril; were astonished, delighted, and awe-stricken by the wonders of the clime; were frost-bitten and destroyed by the rigor of the temperature; and after achieving the “possible” of humanity, turned back to tell the tale of another failure. The only trophies of their adventures were such names as Baffin, Hudson, Davies, Mackenzie, attached to the lands and waters of the frigid circle. They were monuments of gallant endeavour, hardy endurance, and inevitable defeat ...

... after all, the problem is still unsettled, a Northwest Passage still a theory and not a fact; and England plods her old way around the Capes to get at her Indian Empire.

The enterprise, we say, is probably finally abandoned. The seeker after the philosopher's stone, or portable gold in these days of California and Australia, would probably be considered a shade deeper in lunacy than he was three centuries ago. The necessity of extraordinary paths about the world is disappearing before the energy and enlightenment of the age ...

Published around the same time as Poe's “Eldorado”, the *New York Times* article adopts a more cynical tone to criticize the futility of the national project of the British Empire. With its mythical allusions, such as “The fleece of Colchis” and “the philosopher's stone,” the article further echoes Dickinson's poems such as “Trust in the Unexpected -” and “Finding is the first Act”, contemplating upon the utility of heroic expeditions. Furthermore, it reflects an anti-British and anti-imperialistic mentality with its depiction of military competition for new lands and resources. It seems to criticize Lisa Bloom's so-called colonial “passion for blankness” as a tourist business (1-2). This Arctic parade of gallantry that “turned their prows towards the realms of perpetual ice” and “forced their way into situations of unimaginable peril” showcases both military and mercantile desire that proclaimed imperial dominance and, as Bloom remarks, turned polar explorations into “icons of the whole enterprise of colonialism”. The Arctic landscape was inscribed with company names such as “Baffin, Hudson, Davies, Mackenzie”. They became souvenirs from the Arctic, “trophies” and “monuments” to commemorate these transatlantic competitions for military superiority.

This frenzy to pry into the polar landscape, to have a commanding view over the Arctic, was also associated with the cultural fascination for the exotic and foreign. As Mark Metzler Sawin points out, the dedication of the American press to reporting Arctic explorations in the mid-nineteenth century “shows that it had captured the imagination of this era” – mainly the Romantic fascination with the sublime (94). This literary trend helped to extol Arctic explorers such as Elisha Kent Kane, a two-time Arctic explorer in the 1850s, as national heroes. After he returned from the first and second Grinnel Expeditions in search of Franklin, Kane established his status as a celebrity and a household name (87 & 191). As Sawin observes, Kane achieved fame through the manoeuvres of the press and travel literature, by producing lively pieces of writing, and was strategic enough to maintain his public image as a hero of “concise sham modesty” (242). Sensational reportage and a popular demand for the curious went in tandem to create an Arctic vogue.

To a certain extent, Dickinson's “Finding is the first Act” seems to be echoing the cynical commentary of the article upon the “British” Arctic quest. John Franklin's death was verified in 1858, almost ten years after Lady Franklin launched her campaign (Morris 1997 90). The bodies of John Franklin and 128 crew members could not be retrieved and the Northwest Passage, as the *New York Times* article remarks, was still a theory and not a fact. As Timothy Morris points out, the difficult technicalities of sailing through the north pole had drastically decreased the commercial value of this colonial project (1997 92). This Arctic exploration for commercial gain as well as military chivalry ended as a wild goose chase. Similarly, the public enthusiasm for Arctic expeditions, displayed in extravagant military pageantries, became a shamanistic drama that leads to self-defeating disillusion. Christopher Benfey and Lyndall Gordon both point out that “Finding is the first act” demolished heroic pomposity at a time of patriotic belligerence during the Civil War.<sup>75</sup> I would suggest that the poem might also convey a critical reception of

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<sup>75</sup> Christopher Benfey suggests that the political commitment of Dickinson's father to the Whig value of compromise before the Civil War might temper Dickinson's attitude towards war (2002 47). Lyndall Gordon, alternatively, considers the poem as an artistic attempt to be original and to distinguish herself from other poets of patriotism (150).

imperialism and expansionism as an empire-building enterprise. In poems such as “Through the Strait Pass of Suffering” (Fr187C),<sup>76</sup> the Northwest Passage is turned into a shadowy pathway to death, dramatizing the treacherous process of ascension:

Through the Strait Pass of Suffering  
 The Martyrs even trod -  
 Their feet upon Temptations -  
 Their faces - upon God -

A stately - Shriven Company -  
 Convulsion playing round -  
 Harmless as Streaks of Meteor -  
 Upon a Planet's Bond -

Their faith the Everlasting troth -  
 Their Expectation - fair -  
 The Needle to the North Degree -  
 Wades so - through Polar Air -

The poem is often regarded as Dickinson's assertion to pursue a poetic career by becoming a martyr, devoted to her “Snow” – one of the symbols for her poems (Wolff 395; Habegger 425). Paul Muldoon further suggests to read the poem in relation to “the fate of Sir John Franklin” that “was discovered and made public”, seeing the poem as a manifestation of “Dickinson's own faith in, and expectation of, her poems being discovered and made public” (13). If, as Muldoon argues, the poem shows Dickinson's longing to be “discovered”, it also exposes the bleak prospect of such an ascendancy. Echoing “That Massacre of Air” in “Their Barricade against the Sky”, the “polar Air” is replete with terror and brutality. It is a modern version of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. With the “accidental power” that also characterizes the frost in “Apparently with no surprise” (Fr1668), a later Dickinson poem about the austerity of God, the meteor-like play of convulsion in the poem presents an indifferent universe under an approving God. Dickinson's notion of ascension becomes a modern allegory about dissolution. It evolves from solemnity to frigidity,

<sup>76</sup> This is the fascicle version. Dickinson also sent the poem to Samuel Bowles and Susan Dickinson with slight variations (Franklin 1998 221-23). In an 1862 letter to Bowles (L 251), Dickinson wrote to him before enclosing her poem that “If you doubted my Snow – for a moment – you never will – again – I know – Because I could not say it – I fixed it in the Verse – for you to read – when your thought wavers, for such a foot as mine –”.

from the ceremonious march of the national fathers in her early valentine, to this pilgrimage of the martyrs in convulsion. Daneen Wardrop comments that the distinction between Dickinson and the Transcendentalists – her “contribution to American letters,” mainly lies in “her ability to 'transport' rather than 'transcend’” (1996 48). It seems that this emphasis of Dickinson on the horrid process of transportation also reflects her historic outlook. Her fascination with Gothic literature that evokes both awe and horror, an effect that Wardrop calls “gothic chill”, also indicates her understanding of the Arctic quest in terms of its uncertainty and, perhaps, its futility.

Dickinson rewrites heroic expeditions into a quest of loss and death. The British Arctic exploration, for Dickinson, seems to become emblems of doubt. In another poem “When the Astronomer stops seeking” (Fr957), the Arctic pilgrimage is evoked again to define the meaning of treason, underscoring the close relation between faith and death:

When the Astronomer stops seeking  
 For his Pleiad's Face -  
 When the lone British Lady  
 Forsakes the Arctic Race

When to his Covenant Needle  
 The Sailor doubting turns -  
 It will be amply early  
 To ask what treason means -

Timothy Morris considers the poem “a footnote to a great cultural phenomenon of the mid-nineteenth century, part of the vast cultural project of the rhetoric of imperialism” (1997 107). I would add the questioning tone of the poem makes it more disturbing and subversive as a footnote, and ambiguously so. “Forsakes”, “doubting turns” and “treason” all convey a sense of betrayal that turns the poem into almost a protest. “Pleiad's Face”, a symbol of direction and guidance, is actually part of the heavenly transit. The “Arctic Race” ends in abandonment. The “Covenant

Needle”, a sign of constancy, can be proven to be faulty. “Face” further rhymes with “Race” and faith in the poem, exposing the fluctuating contours of belief. It echoes “Success is counted sweetest”, a poem published in 1864 in newspapers aiding the war efforts, in which Dickinson argues for the definition of success not through victory, but through the reality of defeat and death (Habegger 402).

Dickinson subverts quest narratives not only by predicting their dissolution, but also by avoiding spectatorial mastery to highlight the speculative nature of progression. As shown in her early valentine, what Newton teaches her speaker is not just the gravity of the earth, but its gymnastic and reversible nature. Ascension for some could mean descent for others. Her “As if some little Arctic flower” (Fr177) uses the southward wandering of a little Arctic flower to reshape the process and definition of exploration:

As if some little Arctic flower  
 Opon the polar hem -  
 Went wandering down the Latitudes  
 Until it puzzled came  
 To continents of summer -  
 To firmaments of sun -  
 To strange, bright crowds of flowers -  
 And birds, of foreign tongue!  
 I say, As if this little flower  
 To Eden, wandered in -  
 What then? Why nothing,  
 Only, your *inference* therefrom!

The poem reminds one of Higginson's description of Arctic flowers in his 1862 article, “The Procession of Flowers”, mentioned briefly in an earlier section. In his article, Higginson points out the correlation between the climate and the altitude, and their impact upon herbal migration:

Nothing in the demonstrations of geology seems grander than the light thrown by Professor Gray, from the analogies between the flora of Japan and of north America, upon the successive epochs of heat which led the wandering flowers along the

Arctic lands, and of cold which isolated them once more. Yet doubtless these humble movements of our local plants may be laying up results as important, and may hereafter supply evidence of earth's changes upon some smaller scale. (652)

Higginson's depiction of such seemingly inconspicuous but ecologically significant migration in nature would have attracted Dickinson, who was deeply interested in the minute changes in the natural world. Like Higginson's Arctic flowers, Dickinson's little Arctic flower is also conducting its summer migration with its own "humble movements". Jane Donahue Eberwein argues that for Dickinson, "travel is always a metaphor for pilgrimage and that goal is forever beyond mortal circumference" (1987 110). The little flower, Eberwein states, "may perish in the biologically hostile tropic atmosphere" after being "[h]abituated to an austere environment (1987 110). I would suggest that here Dickinson's portrayal of the migrating Arctic flower might also refer to the floral migration resulting from climate change, which Higginson had enthusiastically introduced to his readers. As Robin Peel suggests, the public interest in the Arctic was fused with the Romantic craze for "the sense of wonder and awe at the wilderness and extravagance of nature" in Dickinson's time (196-97). Peel gives an article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* as an example, in which the polar search of Captain Hall for John Franklin in the 1850s led to his surprising encounter with Arctic flowers in a barren landscape:

In safety the ship at length was brought to anchor in a bay known to the captain, and very soon was Mr. Hall on shore to examine the locality. A wild region of mountain rocks and sterile plains at first meets his view. Then a walk reveals more pleasing features. Here and there a lakelet and cascades; ice caverns with spotless domes of crystal beauty within enchant his eye; and, as he wanders still up, higher on his tramp, the hand of nature is seen working through the mighty agency of frost, tumbling into ruins the vast rocks around him. Yet, beside all this, innumerable little flowers peep out of their snowy beds in all the luxuriousness of the short and swiftly-passing summer of the Arctic clime! (727)

The contrast between the wild mountain rocks and the little peeping flowers in Hall's account resembles one of a Dickinson poem about the dialogue between the

Himalayas and Daisy, a name the poet gave herself (Fr460). Hall's encounter with the flowers, "in all the luxuriousness of the short and swiftly-passing summer of the Arctic clime", also finds resonance in Dickinson's poem about the Arctic flower, which wanders down to "continents of summer" and "firmaments of sun". It seems that the portrayal of the Arctic landscape in Hall's Arctic encounter, prevailed in the cultural imagination of Dickinson's time, is transformed into the poet's quest for Eden.

However, Dickinson rewrites enchanted human eyes into the floral gaze in her Arctic flower poem. This Arctic adventure, imagined from the perspective of nature, presents a gymnastic reversal and inversion of human projection. By doing so, her poem exposes the speculative and potentially intrusive nature of human gazes, a topic I will pursue further in the third chapter. Her human element never seems to be dominant in her natural poems, and her quest poems constantly remind one of the limitation of human speculation. As I am attempting to show in the introduction and this chapter, Dickinson is reluctant to speak for nature. The paradisaical conjecture of an Arctic flower, like the human exploration of Eden, is eventually an "*inference*" rather than a reality. In this way, the Arctic poem, like "How Human Nature dotes" (Fr1440), both explores and challenges where one can go after creation. Lyndall Gordon points out that Dickinson might have learned the scientific process of "propositions," "definitions and proofs" and "inferences" from the geological classes of Professor Edward Hitchcock in her early years of schooling (40). Dickinson's Arctic flower poem shows such a scientific process of supposition and inference, while confronting its hypothetical nature. Robin Peel thus uses the poem as an example to discuss Dickinson's notion of dislocation that would "undercut[s] and upend[s] the certainties that geographical description, classification, and mapping seemed so successfully to have produced" (214). Indeed, the poem seems to suggest that the inference of human consciousness becomes in the end its own creation and its own proof "therefrom". No empirical evidence or linguistic definition can guarantee Eden.

Furthermore, the Arctic poem also delineates a process of writings as questing, suggesting a writer's dilemma to proceed from nothing. Although, as Paul Muldoon argues, the poem can be read as the covenant between the writer and the reader, the end of the poem also drastically questions the authority of both "I" as a writer and "you" as a reader. This trance-like wandering in the terrestrial paradise of "strange, bright crowds of flowers" and "birds, of foreign tongue" is soon dispelled into non-existence when the "as if" of the speaker reminds one of its illusionary and fictional nature. As Paul Crumbley points out, Dickinson's "dedication to unsettling the textual body, and by that means breaking down boundaries between self and other, makes her poetry a kind of self-destructing artifact that continually takes new form as it is consumed by her readers" (2010 212). This instability of boundaries turns Dickinson's speaker into the most critical reader of her own narrative. The Edenic vision sought by her speaker is contested by its lack of presence, and Dickinson writes the potential response of her reader-speaker into her quest narrative. Margaret Homans comments on the challenge of reading such Dickinson poems that "[j]ust as a word may be asked to bear antithetical meanings, thereby denying the reader's expectation of a stable or consistent reading, the self may split into antithetical parts; but this irony of the self is even less easily read than the rhetorical ironies of other poems" (209). Daneen Wardrop further remarks that "[a]t the most rudimentary level of language, Dickinson's poetic structures reflect images in the way of funhouse mirrors" (1996 115). This poetic deconstruction, I hope to have shown, closely parallels her perception of the Arctic expeditions and ecological observations of her time.

As shown in these quest poems, Dickinson tends to deconstruct quest narratives by reversing both their procedures and perspectives. However, as Patrick J. Keane observes, "Dickinson's quarrel was not with troubled hope but with complacent certitude" (2008 191). I would add here that her poems would rewrite the meaning of exploration, challenging the social confidence upon popular notions of exploration and expansionism. While myth vies with empiricism to account for national origins,

her quest poems reflect upon the unaccountability of the human mind and intimate the inevitable decline of exploratory ambitions. Journeys of epic ambition escalate into acts of “treason” and “sham”. In “Their Height in Heaven comforts not” (Fr725), Dickinson describes the location of heaven as “The House of Supposition”, “The Glimmering Frontier” and “the Acres of Perhaps”. Her frontier topographies correspond to the geographical speculation and military dissolution of her time. Richard Slotkin categorizes the frontier myth into two types, “the hopeful, outward-looking, woods-loving, realistic view” and “the pessimistic, inward-looking, fantasy-ridden view” (324). Dickinson mingles these two types freely to create her own transgressive American vision. From her early valentine to her later portrayals of Jason's Golden Fleece and the Arctic race, Dickinson presents a process of consistent response to, revision of or even demolition of quests embedded in both the national and international projects of her time.

#### **“With thoughts that make for Peace -”: Voices of War and Thought for Peace**

Helen McNeil points out that for Dickinson does not reject Greek mythology; instead, she dislikes “the goal-oriented optimism” of quest narratives (20). I would suggest further that Dickinson's “anti-quest” narrative is based not only upon myth or her reaction against the literary tradition, but also upon her acute awareness of the enactment of myth in reality. In Thomas Bulfinch's 1855 book *The Age of Fable*, an autographed copy of which is also in the Dickinson library (Lowenberg 35), the author asserts that Jason's Golden-Fleece expedition can be taken as the founding myth of any country's origin:

This is one of those mythological tales, says a late writer, in which there is reason to believe that a substratum of truth exists, though overlaid by a mass of fiction. It probably was the first important maritime expedition, and like the first attempts of the kind of all nations, as we know from history, was probably of a half-piratical character. If rich spoils were the result, it was enough to give rise to the idea of the golden fleece. (184)

Dickinson might have agreed with Bulfinch's observation. However, for Dickinson, facts might also be constructed by fiction. From Columbus to Peter Parley, from William Kidd to Jason, she tests the ground of truth through her renewal, reversal and revision of various maritime adventures. While Bulfinch finds “a substratum of truth” in Jason's tale, Dickinson works the other way round and reveals in her poems the treacherous or even fictitious nature of exploratory aspirations that had taken place during her lifetime.

This demolition of quest narratives also highlights Dickinson's perception of history, and her own writing essentially, as a process of confrontation and contestation. In particular, Dickinson often uses voices and imagery of war to argue for peace. In “One of the ones that Midas touched” (Fr1488D), a poem that portrays a fleeting oriole that “cheats as he enchants”,<sup>77</sup> Jason's Golden fleece is evoked again to contrast with the pacifist stance of the provincial speaker:

I never thought that Jason sought  
For any Golden Fleece  
But then I am a rural Man  
With thoughts that make for Peace -  
But if there were a Jason,  
Tradition bear with me  
Behold his lost Aggrandizement  
Upon the Apple Tree -

While the speaker in Dickinson's valentine flirts with Adam, preventing him from stealing her father's pippins, the speaker here simply beholds the thievery in the garden and is puzzled by the lost grandeur of the stealing golden bird. Cynthia Griffin Wolff reads the poem as “the only remnant of 'lost Aggrandizement', considering both Jason's Golden fleece and the oriole as symbols of the poet's creation (532-33). I would add that this fallen garden of Eden in the poem – made

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<sup>77</sup> As Franklin points out, Dickinson might have sent one version of the oriole poem to Helen Hunt Jackson (1302). Daneen Wardrop suggests the possibility that “both of these female poets presented indirectly the position of minorities from the standpoint of birds”, since “Nineteenth-century women poets were skilled at stating subversive themes through conventional imagery” (1999 78).

barren by the thievery – might also refer to Dickinson's perception of the schizophrenic symptom of a modern and presumably urbanized society – its mechanic obsession with the appearance of scientific optimism, moral regulation and military gallantry on the one hand, and deep suspicion of and anxiety about betrayal, infidelity, and risks in one's venture on the other. While her valentine, written around 1852, presents a carnivalesque fusion of modernized and traditional New England, this poem, dated around 1879, seems to reveal a reflection on a Jacksonian America of Gold rush and expansionism, and presumably the Gilded Age after the Civil War, when the nation underwent a process of restoration. Daneen Wardrop comments on the allusion of the poem to slavery, asserting that the poem suggests a post-war economy “in which the time has arrived for the United States to embrace and equalize economic and political relations with all members of its diverse family” (1999 78). I would add that the poem might also show a reflection on her father's ambivalent relation to slavery. Asserting herself as a “rural Man” whose thoughts “make for Peace”, the poem seems not only to argue for her provincial, and potentially more peace-loving view, but also to justify the political position of her father, who was committed to the Whig values of compromise even at the outbreak of the Civil War, despite his vigorous assistance to the northern war effort after the war broke out.<sup>78</sup>

Faith Barret asserts that Dickinson's poems reveal a deeply involved but still conflicting response to the Union ideology (128). Similarly, I would suggest that Dickinson's quest poems register her complex perception of expansionism. Her poetic mapping leads to its mismapping, remapping, and eventually demapping. Although her thoughts “make for Peace”, this peace Dickinson has in mind does not indicate a hegemonic or harmonious version of America. By accentuating peace-making, Dickinson's poems also highlight the turbulent social reality of her time. As Shira Wolosky remarks, “in Dickinson, impulse counters impulse, not in harmonious

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<sup>78</sup> As mentioned earlier, Shira Wolosky points out that both Dickinson's father and brother were actively involved in the recruitment of Amherst soldiers and raising “both funds and morale.” Several poems published during Dickinson's lifetime, Wolosky notes, “are those which appeared in publications that aided the war effort” (2008 170-71).

alignments but in stressful wrestling” (2000 140). Her poetic voices of tension and conflict correspond to the national and international convulsions surrounding her. Her thoughts for peace, oxymoronically, come from her dedication to jarring voices of conflict, war, and dissolution.

To some extent, Dickinson's notion to peace builds on a sense of disillusion. She deviates from her fellow writers in terms of her receptiveness of and reflectiveness upon personal hardship. Unlike her contemporary transcendentalists, she does not indulge herself in the possibility of being at home within one's own mind. In contrast to the sentimental writers of her time, she does not take as much delight in commiserating with human suffering. Edward Said alludes to Wallace Stevens's “a mind of winter” to depict exile as “never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure” (189). Dickinson's traveller persona, similarly, tends to map the state of “Homelessness for Home”, reaffirming the impossibility of reaching anywhere, whether near or far, inside or outside. Exploration and travel may momentarily bring one closer to the unknown, but they also remind one of the unbridgeable gap in between, a gap that Elizabeth Bishop's traveller would still lament in her famous 1956 poem “Questions of Travel”, a hundred years after the John Franklin Arctic expeditions:

“Is it lack of imagination that makes us come  
to imagined places, not just stay at home?  
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right  
about just sitting quietly in one's room?”

Continent, city, country, society:  
the choice is never wide and never free.  
And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,  
wherever that may be?” (94)

Bishop's staying home “wherever that may be” expresses both a modernist ennui and a post-modern conundrum that succeeds Dickinson's metaphysical contemplation in “How Human Nature dotes”. “Continent,” “city,” “country,” or “society” are just geographical dots when imagined places become tourist commodities. Ironically,

geographical mobility deepens the gap between here and there, home and other worlds.

Instead of the geographical transparency that Bishop ponders, what Dickinson faces is a geographical blankness that was aggravated by alienation in a highly mobilized society towards the mid-nineteenth century. The indeterminacy of the American landscape does not necessarily indicate an open and liberal society. Instead, this mobilized society is also an experimental and disorganized one, in which insecure individuals strive for communal identification, social achievement and material success. Dickinson's poems grapple with a strong sense of insecurity upon the slippery ground of modernity. Her dialectic voices demonstrate how the textual space becomes a contested space that accentuates her perception of nationalism, expansionism and civilization. Dickinson rewrites classical, biblical and colonial motifs into modern allegories of exploration in dissolution. This sense of dissolution is one of the main leitmotifs that Dickinson wrestles with throughout her poetic career and learns to come to terms with. It is a process of making peace not only with herself, but also with the world, a topic I will discuss further in the next chapter. By looking at her commercial mapping, I show how her notion of dissipation is closely linked with commerce and her poetics of consumption.

### Chapter III

## **“With Holy Ghosts in Cages!”: Dickinson's Cosmopolitan Mapping and Commodity Consumption**

### **Introduction: Travel, Curios and Commerce**

Dickinson's poems are deeply related to a cosmopolitan New England. As mentioned in the introduction and the second chapter, Dickinson frequently refers to travellers in her poems. According to Nigel Leask, European commercial and colonial expansionism contributed to a plethora of books about voyages and curiosities in the nineteenth century (2004 15). Dickinson writes this complexity of travel and trade into her poems. Her poems such as “You've seen Balloons set - Hav'nt You?” and “My friend attacks my friend!” discussed in the introduction treat balloons and battlefields equally as spectacles to be watched or commodities to be visually consumed. Her early Valentine “Sic transit gloria mundi” also reveals her awareness of an emerging consumer culture, in which military recruitment is transformed into pageantry, and the soldier-speaker prepares Indian rubber as if going on a picnic. Her references to travellers such as Peter Parley, Christopher Columbus and Daniel Boone in the poem further present her speaker as more like a travelogue reader than an enlisted soldier, fighting by reading travelogues and frontier tales (141). As Bruce A. Harvey observes, travel stories like Peter Parley's geographical pedagogy represent and reproduce the outside world within a regulated textual space:

What the Parley persona constituted ... was the opening up of an especially congenial textual space in which to speak ... about the multifarious world. Crucially, that world is reproduced within the normative context of the site of instruction. Parley is a globe-hopping traveler, but the primary locus remains the hearth or schoolroom where eagerly receptive, and pliant, children listen to his tales. (46)

Dickinson had been an avid reader of Parley's Magazine from a young age.<sup>79</sup> It is no wonder that her speakers often resemble these “eagerly receptive, and pliant” children, who read the outside world within such a pedagogical textual space. Like these children and Dickinson herself, her speakers are also armchair tourists, consuming the multifarious world either through writings or exhibitions.

Peter Stoneley states that Dickinson “adopted the persona she considered most worthy – that of an awkward customer” (591). Here I would add that Dickinson's poetic persona would also masquerade as an “awkward tourist”. This chapter thus looks at Dickinson as both an armchair traveller and a real tourist. Although Dickinson rarely travelled, she was acquainted with an increasingly commercialized and urbanized America. In “New England Culture and Emily Dickinson”, Allen Tate comments on the “gilded” condition of New England:

... by 1850 the great fortunes had been made (in the rum, slave, and milling industries), and New England became a museum. The whatnots groaned under the load of knickknacks, the fine china dogs and cats, the pieces of oriental jade, the chips off the leaning tower of Pisa. There were the rare books and the cosmopolitan learning. It was all equally displayed as the evidence of a superior culture. The Gilded Age had already begun. But culture, in the true sense, was disappearing. (155)

Dickinson's poems often depict such a cosmopolitan, museum-like New England. Like her contemporaries, Dickinson also showed great enthusiasm and curiosity for the exotic, referring to more than 160 places in her poems.<sup>80</sup> As shown in the introduction, Dickinson enjoyed several tourist experiences during her formative years, visiting quite a few metropolitan cities on the east coast, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington D. C. Her experiences at the Boston Chinese Museum

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Parley was an avuncular traveller in a popular children's magazine, created by Samuel Griswold Goodrich in the 1830s. Jack L. Capps points out that Dickinson's father sent Parley's Magazine home in 1838 and enclosed a note in his letter to his wife: “My Dear little Children – I send you some of Parley's Magazine – They have some interesting stories for you to read. I want you to remember some of them to tell me when I get home ...” (12)

<sup>80</sup> See Cynthia L. Hallen and Malina M. Nielson's “Emily Dickinson's Place Names” (*Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 54:1, March 2006). The data are available at *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*: <<http://edl.byu.edu/essay.php>>.

and Jenny Lind's concert, in particular, are the focus of this chapter. I examine how these tourist experiences might have influenced the development of her poetics. I also look at Dickinson's possible reading of travel writers such as Samuel Bowles and Helen Hunt Jackson, her close friends and popular newspaper editors of her time. Bowles' travelogue about his transcontinental trips *Our New West* (1869), for example, offered insight about Chinese immigrants and their opium-smoking habit. His description of the Chinese would have interested Dickinson who was impressed by the Chinese Museum and wrote the Asiatic world into her poems. Jackson's domestic travelogue *Bits of Travel at Home* (1878), an autographed copy of which is in the Dickinson library, would have also inspired Dickinson to see America differently. Dickinson's correspondence with them presented her windows to the multifarious world outside New England.

Dickinson's fascination with exotic places corresponded to the travel fashion of her time. The nascent railway system and the introduction of steamships in the mid-nineteenth century shortened distance, drastically transforming human perception of the world and cultural imagination towards the formerly unknown. As Barbara Korte observes, the nineteenth century was “a period of intensification of travel which could be seen to emerge at the end of the previous century in the increased popularity of travel on the Continent and the fashion of scenic tourism” (84). This craze for travel was also associated with the possession of culture and sophisticated sensibility. In 1856, James Bryce commented in *The North American Review* that “A foreign tour is the dream and purpose of every educated man and woman on this side the Atlantic” (33). Herman Melville, a promoter of travelling, also stated in an 1859 lecture that “the sight of novel objects, the acquirement of novel ideas, the breaking up of old prejudices, the enlargement of heart and mind – are the proper fruit of rightly undertaken travel”.<sup>81</sup> This “sight of novel objects”, as John Urry explains in *The Tourist Gaze*, gradually became the focus of travel between 1600 and 1800; Urry observes that “treaties on travel shifted from a scholastic emphasis on touring as an opportunity for disclosure, to travel as eyewitness observation”. It is a process that

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<sup>81</sup> This quote is taken from his lecture “Travelling: Its Pleasures, Pains, and Profits” (423).

Urry calls “a visualisation of the travel experience” – “the development of the 'gaze', aided and assisted by the growth of guidebooks which promoted new ways of seeing” (4). This “visualisation of the travel experience” was manifested in the American appetite for the exotic and the novel through numerous curious inventions and panoramas of foreign landscapes displayed in Boston, Philadelphia and New York. Since the eighteenth century, Leask also notes, curiosity had become almost “coterminous with the practices and representations of travel” (23 & 44). Curiosity, under the appropriation of colonial powers, created a kaleidoscopic vision of a new world in the making. Museums and expositions became an extension of travel practice, charting new territories of human knowledge.

Dickinson responds to this fashion for travel by incorporating the curious and exotic into her work. In an 1878 letter to Higginson, Dickinson congratulates her mentor for his engagement to his second wife, Mary Potter Thatcher: “Dear Friend, I heard you had found the Lane to the Indies, Columbus was looking for –” (L575). In one short sentence, Dickinson manages to combine sexual, geographical and commercial metaphors, showing the complex relationship between erotic consummation, exotic consumption and gender politics. This compound vision also reflects the inseparable forces of commercialization and travel, and she appropriates these forces for her intellectual consumption.<sup>82</sup> David Harvey argues that the world space had been drastically rearranged since the mid-nineteenth century:

The vast expansion of foreign trade and investment after 1850  
put the major capitalist powers on the path of globalism, but did

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<sup>82</sup> Most scholars have discussed how Dickinson uses exotic names and races for poetic effect or political possibilities. Joan Kirkby points out that that “Dickinson's awareness of the mind's inventiveness, which she extols in poem after poem, led her to remain extraordinarily open to the idea that the world might be other than we had supposed” (1991 53). In “The Negro never knew’: Emily Dickinson and Racial Typology in the Nineteenth Century,” Paula Bernat Bennett also remarks that “Dickinson consistently uses exotic place names as signifiers of luxury in her poetry... (2002b 61) Vivian Pollak further comments on Dickinson's use of race to open up sexual and political possibilities: “her speaker draws strength from other cultures, which she represents as less strict in their imposition of barriers between what a man may and what a woman might”. In several poems, Pollak remarks, Dickinson uses race “as a politically subversive form of self-definition” (2000 86). Páraic Finnerty elaborates this view in his discussion of Dickinson's identification with Othello, in which Dickinson uses “an extreme symbol of 'otherness'” to represent what “her culture thought should not be found in herself” (2002 87).

so through imperial conquest and inter-imperialist rivalry ... The world's spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations, and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration ... the organization of a series of World Exhibitions, beginning with the Crystal Palace in 1851 and passing through several French efforts to the grand Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, celebrated the fact of globalism while providing a framework within which what Benjamin calls 'the phantasmagoria' of the world of commodities and competition between nation states and territorial production systems might be understood. (264-65)

As will be shown in the chapter, Dickinson responds to this geo-political appropriation through her poetic mapping. By tracing experiences of geographical displacement and spatial transition, her poetic landscape responds to a deterritorialized and reterritorialized era at its most turbulent moment.

As shown in the first and second chapters, Dickinson's poems of transition and exploration challenge the reliability of public rhetoric in assisting social, cultural and national projects. In this chapter, I look more closely at her poems about travel and dislocation by examining her metaphors of consumerism. I explore how a rising commercial culture in her time is appropriated in her poems. This commodification of spectacles and curiosity informs her critical reception of consumerism. Many of her traveller personae are tourists, taking part in the process of capitalism. In the first section, I examine her treatment of spiritual pilgrimage as a commercial process, which involves journalism, publication and business transaction. In particular, I explore how she adopts tourist metaphors to account for the visual liberation and physical violence of these commercial forces. The second section looks more closely at her engagement with New England cosmopolitanism in the context of transpacific and transatlantic interchange. For Dickinson, as for her contemporaries, the eastern culture stood for the mysterious and incomprehensible, the opposite of civilization; however, a further investigation of her tourist experience in the Boston Chinese Museum, and her later employment of Asiatic imagery in her poems, shows her sharp awareness and subtle critique of this process of exoticization and orientalizing.

Dickinson's commercial imagery is indicative of her ambivalent attitude towards viewing as both a force of destruction and creation. The third section thus looks at how her ambivalence is elucidated through her notion of viewing as consumption. Taking her response to Jenny Lind's concert in the mid-nineteenth century as a model for reading Dickinson, I examine her appropriation of the multiple meanings of consumption to create her own visual poetics. Resembling Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, the notion of spectatorship in Dickinson's poems is also based upon a mercantile model, which complicates one's understanding of her attitude towards publicity and publication. The fourth section examines this visual poetics further by discussing the notion of spectatorship in her poems. I compare Dickinson with Emerson and Walt Whitman to see how her poems both register and deviate from the Transcendentalist notion of viewing as owning. Like her contemporary writers, she believes in the power of seeing, but she obviates visual dominance in her poems. This tendency to erase visual ownership in her poems is explored more closely in the fifth section to show how her natural mapping reveals a critical reception of the travel writing of her time. Compared with her fellow travel writer Helen Hunt Jackson, Dickinson seems to focus more on the unknown, inscrutable and formless aspects of natural phenomena. The last section returns to the notion of consumption by investigating Dickinson's volcanic and narcotic imagery. I conclude by suggesting that consumption serves as one of the core concepts for understanding Dickinson's poetics. Her adept use of commercial metaphors, in particular, speaks powerfully of her receptive while critical response to these cosmopolitan and commercial forces of her time.

### **“A transport one cannot contain” : Pilgrimage and Tourism**

Dickinson's spiritual journey often indicates a process of estrangement. As shown in the first and second chapters, the height and frigidity of ascension alienate her speakers from pursuing heavenly visions. The residence of God is the house of supposition, too perfect and distant for her speaker's emotional emergency. Her emigrant persona thus is compelled to translate spiritual aspirations into emotional

detachment. The longing for redemption is constantly thwarted by the overwhelming experience of uncertainty. In some poems, this disappointment simply results in mental alienation. In “Unit, like Death, for Whom?” (Fr543), for example, the speaker finds no promise “But Gravity - and Expectation - and Fear -” in the grave, with “A tremor just, that all's not sure”. This chilling fact of death is most vividly portrayed in “Safe in the Alabaster Chambers -” (Fr124), in which the “meek members of the Resurrection” eventually drop “Soundless as Dots,/ On a Disc of Snow.” This numbing effect creates a sense of emotional disconnectedness that estranges the living from the dead.

Conversely, this sense of alienation can also turn the afterlife into a tourist attraction, a process that Dean MacCannell calls “Sight Sacralization” (17-18). For MacCannell, modern travellers are “condemned” to look for “authenticity” in places that are set apart from their own everyday experiences (15). Similarly, Dickinson's tourist persona could turn paradise into a public secret, a forbidden city that maintains its authority through invisibility and distance. Death would become a journey on a sight-seeing bus. In “Just lost, when I was saved!” (Fr132B), for example, the speaker proposes revisiting immortality:

Just lost, when I was saved!  
 Just felt the world go by!  
 Just girt me for the onset with Eternity,  
 When breath blew back,  
 And on the other side  
 I heard recede the disappointed tide!

Therefore, as One returned, I feel,  
 Odd secrets of the line to tell!  
 Some sailor, skirting foreign shores -  
 Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors  
 Before the Seal!

Next time, to stay!  
 Next time, the things to see  
 By ear unheard -

Unscrutinized by eye -

Next time, to tarry,  
While the Ages steal -  
Slow tramp the Centuries,  
And the Cycles wheel!

Inder Nath Kher regards the poem as “a dramatization of the moment of perception in which one perceives the secrets of life and death” (8). Jane Donahue Eberwein further suggests that the poem might have voiced “its author's own eagerness for new vision” of immortality (1987 203-4).<sup>83</sup> Such emphasis on the phase of transformation is achieved through Dickinson's appropriation of the literary conventions of travel writing. Pale reporters and sailors both suggest sensational literature full of breathtaking escapades. Images such as “the awful doors”, “the Seal”, “Odd secrets of the line to tell”, and things “unheard” and “unscrutinized” also remind one of travel reportage that whets the appetite of its readers. Excitement takes the place of reverence and solemnity in the face of death. Unlike the tone of reluctance in “Because I could not stop for Death -” or a sense of exasperation conveyed in “My period had come for Prayer -”, the poem discloses excitement of dying, since death is a gateway to an exotic holiday.

Tourism, to some extent, brings a sense of empowerment. As William Stowe remarks, travel “provides its votaries with an exhilarating sense of freedom and power”, since “[t]raveling is as close as most people come to truly independent action” (2007 305). Dickinson cracks the sealed door of heaven open with the liberating power of travel. The location of heaven, through endless projection and speculation, undergoes a process of both sacralization and exoticization. As MacCannell points out, “the mechanical reproduction of the sacred object” – “the creation of prints, photographs, models or effigies of the object” – “is most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object”

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<sup>83</sup> As Jane Donahue Eberwein explains, Susan Dickinson gave the poem a title “Called Back” when submitting it to the *Independent* for its 1891 publication; by doing so, “Sue linked the poem to her sister-in-law's deathbed letter to the Norcross cousins with its suggestion of return to a home outside” the circumference of mortality (1987 203-4).

(18). This mechanical process that turns the curious heavenly other into a tourist attraction is also present in Dickinson's poems. As shown in the first and the second chapters, she would call God a curious friend (Fr525), and the graves, curious rooms and towns (Fr100 & Fr1069). Through her metaphors of curiosity, her heaven becomes both sacred and saleable. This fascination with the unknown is publicized in "Ended, ere it begun -" (Fr1048), in which the speaker desires to "print" the book of the afterlife:

Ended, ere it begun -  
 The Title was scarcely told  
 When the Preface perished from Consciousness  
 The story, unrevealed -

Had it been mine, to print!  
 Had it been your's, to read!  
 That it was not our privilege  
 The interdict of God -

As Shira Wolosky comments on the poem, "God's decree forbids the completion of the human text. Divine language counters human language" (1984 xix). The poem almost wages a war with God and fights for spiritual copyright. In a manner similar to "Just lost, when I was saved!", the poem dramatizes the human desire for the unreadable with the vigour of sensationalist reportage. In "Endanger it, and the Demand" (Fr1688), populist demand for the publicity of the afterlife contrasts with God's modesty, turning death into either a lucrative dare-devil business or a macabre festival:

Endanger it, and the Demand  
 Of tickets for a sigh  
 Amazes the Humility  
 Of Credibility -

Recover it to nature  
 And that dejected Fleet  
 Find Consertnation's carnival  
 Divested of it's meat

Christopher Benfey considers the poem a celebration of the sublime (1984 42). I would suggest here that Dickinson's deployment of the tropes of journalism and commerce, empiricism and sensationalism also suggests a confrontation against God's "humility" and "interdict". Similar to science, commerce is used as another denominator of democracy, levelling religious hierarchy and counterbalancing God's snobbery. In his discussion of British travel, Paul Fussell comments that the emergence of tourism in the nineteenth century exemplifies the force of egalitarianism: "Tourism is egalitarian or it is nothing ... it is difficult to be a snob and a tourist at the same time" (38). What Fussell says about the rise of British tourism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is also helpful in understanding Dickinson's spiritual tourism. Her poems present this modern force of commercialization against God's despotism and hierarchy. In "Color - Caste - Denomination -" (Fr836), Dickinson claims death to be a diviner arbiter that transcends race, class and religion in history. For Dickinson, commerce could serve as an equally powerful metaphor to subvert spiritual certitude and its unquestioned tyranny.

This egalitarian force of tourism, however, does not bring a peaceful process of spiritual protest. The forbidden truth behind the sealed door of heaven needs to be broken into, or to be forced open, as shown in "My Period had come for Prayer -" discussed in the second chapter. This transport to the afterlife can easily be deprived of its sacredness and be reduced into marketable commodities when death becomes a public spectacle and faith is turned into a myth-making business, as shown in "Trust in the Unexpected -" (Fr561). In "A transport one cannot contain" (Fr212), the Holy Ghost becomes imprisoned, and the speaker acts as a manager of a freak show:

A transport one cannot contain  
 May yet, a transport be -  
 Though God forbid it lift the lid,  
 Unto it's Extasy!

A Diagram - of Rapture!  
 A sixpence at a show -

With Holy Ghosts in Cages!  
The *Universe* would go!

The poem transforms pilgrimages into a phantasmogoric spectacle with its booming business. Death is not tragic, final or catastrophic. Readers can almost expect a corpse climbing out of the coffin from its fake death at the end, bowing for a sixpence charge each. As shown in the second chapter, such “carnavalesque” imagery, as Mikhail Bakhtin explores in European novels, is applied by David S. Reynolds to his analysis of American literature in the mid-nineteenth century. For Reynolds, the satirical power of carnival culture, of blending the spiritual and the profane, represents a liberating force in language (444). This linguistic force of democratization is also embodied in Dickinson's metaphor of consumerism in poems such as this one. Victoria N. Morgan further argues that the poem suspends the definition of the divine, opening up a “heterologous space,” a concept Michel de Certeau uses to account for a liberating space for the individual's diversity within a community (76, 130 & 148-49). Indeed, the solemnity of a funeral scene is radically morphed into a liberating space that suspends the normal operation of power structures in a Calvinistic New England. Science and commerce, represented by “A Diagram - of Rapture” and “A sixpence at a show -”, turn the afterlife into a commodity, a slave for public exploitation. Coffins that cage holy spirits are broken into by this democratic force of commerce.

Paradoxically, this liberating force in “A transport one cannot contain” also becomes another form of enslavement, caging the Holy Spirit for entertainment. By doing so, the poem dramatizes the tension between egalitarianism and liberty on the one hand, and commodification and slavery on the other. William Stowe points out that tourists are empowered “by exercising the economic power of the consumer” and “treating their activities as ways of coming to know and hence to dominate the world” (307). However, this process of empowerment is characterized by the subjugation of the other. Through vehement power struggle, the master becomes the enslaved, and the royal becomes the freak. This carnivalized power of subversion is conducted through action and reaction. This revolutionary force still does not promise any form of

spiritual liberation. On the contrary, it is exercised and conducted through mercantile modes of suppression and slavery. Sometimes, even tourism can be a form of economic oppression. In “There is no Frigate like a Book” (Fr1286B), Dickinson argues that the most democratic way of travel is through reading:

There is no Frigate like a Book  
 To take us Lands away  
 Nor any Coursers - like a Page  
 Of prancing Poetry -  
 This Traverse may the poorest take  
 Without offence of Toll -  
 How frugal is the Chariot  
 That bears the Human Soul -

As Jed Deppman states, for Dickinson, “books both announce and achieve high expectations” (153). Compared with normal forms of travel, reading is more economical and more democratic. “Without offence of Toll -”, books as the “Chariot” of the “Human Soul” are frugal but most powerful. Commerce, the liberating forces in previous poems, becomes a source of oppression in this one.

The transporting power of reading in “There is no Frigate like a Book”, however, is understood again in terms of military contestation. Imagery of “Frigate,” “Coursers” and “the Chariot” all suggest poetic dictions for transportations in war. According to Noah Webster's 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*,<sup>84</sup> all three vehicles are associated with warfare. A frigate, as its Greek origin shows, was initially a kind of vessel used in the Mediterranean. It was also common in European expeditions and military missions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “Courser” is chiefly a poetic diction, meaning swift horses or hunting hounds, and therefore is often connected with races and hunting games. Chariots were a typical carriage for battle and ceremonial purposes in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. These three modes of transports are all connected with heroic expeditions, warfare and conquest in an epic tradition. Helen McNeil links the poem with Dickinson's

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<sup>84</sup> All entries of Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* are accessible at *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*: <<http://edl.byu.edu/webster>>.

perception of reading as escapism into fanciful adventures (98). I would further suggest that by associating reading epic poems with power, Dickinson's poem might also be read as subverting the conventional dichotomy between the domestic and the heroic, the socially deprived and economically privileged. Reading is both a spiritual travel and a struggle against the oppression of material possession and, implicitly, capitalistic subjugation.

Dickinson adopts imagery of commerce, an economic symbol of both liberation and oppression, to stress the business of belief as by nature a process of power struggle. In this way, one's estrangement from and exoticization of heaven also becomes a process of militant combat. In "The nearest Dream recedes - unrealized -" (Fr304B), a version that Dickinson sent to Higginson in 1862, the heavenly bee is depicted as part of a malicious troop, both enticing and repudiating human yearning:

The nearest Dream - recedes - unrealized -  
 The Heaven we chase -  
 Like the June Bee - before the Schoolboy -  
 Invites the Race -  
 Stoops - to an easy Clover -  
 Dips - evades - teases - deploys -  
 Then - to the Royal Clouds  
 Lifts his light Pinnacle -  
 Heedless of the Boy -  
 Staring - bewildered - at the mocking sky -  
 Homesick for steadfast Honey -  
 Ah - the Bee flies not  
 That brews that rare variety!

Cynthia Griffin Wolff reads the poem as the re-enactment of God's derisive joke in the natural world (350). Richard Brantley, alternatively, associates the poem with the mystery of nature's God that "schoolgirl Dickinson and the mature poet", like the boy in the poem, chases on (Brantley 2004 76). Here I would draw further attention to the use of military imagery. In the poem, competition parallels flirtation in this "Race" for the "steadfast Honey" of Heaven. Ironically, the heaven is not steadfast but

enticing and then rejecting, and the dream is receding and eventually unfulfilled. The bee enchants and distances the viewer at the same time. In this way, the poem delineates a mesmeric experience and its violent disillusion. As Alicia Ostriker remarks, Dickinson's "poetic language and structures systematically register and resist the dominance of masculinity and rationality in culture ... which makes possible the secret transmission of opposed messages within a single poem" (43). For a poem written during the Civil War, the evocation of a language of dominance and militarism and its dismissal at the end of the poem as a schoolboy's theme seems to highlight both the fickle nature of the heavenly bee and the irrationality of human desire.

These poems subscribe to the compelling force of consumerism through the exoticization of heaven, revealing Dickinson's perception of a commercialized society built upon an unreliable process of violent displacement and military conflict. As John Kuo Wei Tchen points out, curiosities indicate acquisition and possession, rather than the celebration of diversity:

Curiosities defined objects that should be owned, collected, and taken away from their original environment. It was an acquisitive and possessive word that, not coincidentally, grew in usage in proportion to the global expansion of the British Empire. Transglobal trade made possible the transglobal process of collecting from "remote" cultures. Curiosities, then, were often objects or subjects brought back from colonial hinterlands to the metropolises for possession, collection, and display. (116)

Dickinson's portrayal of an exoticized heaven corresponds with this process of military expansion, commercial exploitation and imperial dominance. The growing power of cultural enterprise through capitalism is appropriated in her poems to dramatize the implicit violence, conflict, and oppression of these forces. However, her poems also remind readers that this attempt to control and dominate is also a force that "one cannot contain", a force that explodes like the imperial veins of the balloons in "You've seen Balloons set – Haven't You?", as mentioned in the introduction. Commerce becomes another emblem of humanity, symptomatic of a

contested world of cosmopolitan New England.

### **“The Tapestries of Paradise”: Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism**

Dickinson maps geographical displacement not only through her exoticization, but also through her orientalizing of God. In “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” (Fr1471), God's mind becomes an eastern marketplace. With such an analogy, the poem stresses the anxiety of this spiritual transaction, rather than its credibility:

His Mind like Fabrics of the East -  
 Displayed to the despair  
 Of everyone but here and there  
 An humble Purchaser -  
 For though his price was not of Gold -  
 More arduous there is -  
 That one should comprehend the worth,  
 Was all the price there was -

John Bunyan's *Vanity Fair* is transformed into Dickinson's *Fair of Despair* in the poem, and believing becomes another type of consumerism, the connoisseurship of exotic art. As Hiroko Uno remarks, the eastern tapestry in the poem is compared to the incomprehensible mind of God (2008 62). By mapping oriental fabrics onto God's mind, the poem shows a reversal of Edward Said's orientalism by making God the oriental other, confounding as well as dazzling to its western viewers. The east, China in particular, John Rogers Haddad comments, existed in the western mind in the nineteenth century “in a state of tension caused by the presence of two contrary impulses: the imagination’s need to create fictional lands and the rational mind’s inexorable quest to demystify the real world”.<sup>85</sup> Dickinson's spiritual buyer, alternatively, finds it impossible either to romanticize God's mind or to demystify it. Through charting oriental fantasy, her empirical mapping highlights spiritual wilderness.

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<sup>85</sup> See John Rogers Haddad's “Introduction” of *The Romance of China*, made available at: <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/haj01/frames/fhaj01.html>.

Furthermore, “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” reflects a sense of modern anxiety, where urban viewers cannot evaluate or appreciate the value of art that is taken out of its original context. Shira Wolosky points out that “[r]epresenting divine things in economic terms” has its origin in puritan rhetoric. However, this rhetoric threatens to subordinate sacred ones to material things. “Economic gain”, Wolosky notes, “becomes spiritual betrayal” (2002 137). I would add here that this puritan anxiety is translated by Dickinson into a modern one, where faith only stays at its face value. John Urry points out that the tourist gaze “is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs” (3). Puritans are very much like modern tourists, or semioticians, who look for the signs of the divine in the material. Referring to Dean MacCannell's notion of “Sight Sacralization”, Urry remarks that the tourist is “a kind of contemporary pilgrim” (9). Indeed, Dickinson transcribes in her poems tourist experience into spiritual puzzlement. The exoticness of God only dazzles, confounds and then silences believers into despair.

John Urry remarks that towards the late eighteenth century, travel was “justified not through science but through the idea of connoisseurship; such connoisseurship, Urry asserts, “came to involve new ways of seeing: a 'prolonged, contemplative [look] regarding the field of vision with a certain aloofness and disengagement, across a tranquil interval” (147) Dickinson's viewer in despair in “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” depicts a spiritual connoisseurship going awry. Percy Bysshe Shelley's “Ozymandias” is an instructive example in comparison with Dickinson's orientalized God's mind. In the poem, the engravings on the pedestal of Ozymandias, a shattered visage of the third king of the nineteenth dynasty of Egypt, are equally disturbing and disorienting:

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (Line 10-11 11)

Shelley's historical tourism and Dickinson's spiritual auction in their poems both display such an emphasis on “connoisseurship” – the ability of the viewer to “comprehend the worth”. Ironically, their visual consumption is turned into

recognition of dissolution. By appropriating eastern imagery to account for historical decline or spiritual alienation, modern viewers contemplate their own mortality and limitation. The Romantic traveller “from an antique land” in Shelley's poem morphs into an urban consumer in Dickinson's “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” who attempts to tag spiritual meanings with a market price to no avail.

Dickinson seems to find similarities between believing and purchasing. Both transact values to cater to fundamental human needs. Dickinson experiments with this mercantile mode of human faith by pushing the boundary between materiality and spirituality to its extreme. In “The Auctioneer of Parting” (Fr1646), for example, death, embodied by the crucified body of Jesus, becomes commodity on sale. The worker on the cross serves as an auctioneer, selling the death of Jesus, the symbol of Christian faith:

The Auctioneer of Parting  
His “Going, going, gone”  
Shouts even from the Crucifix,  
And brings his Hammer down -  
He only sells the Wilderness,  
The prices of Despair  
Range from a single human Heart  
To Two - not any more -

Sharon Cameron argues that the auctioneer is “the strict God who exacts the sacrifice of presence, even the sacrifice of His son” (1979 148-49). Jane Donahue Eberwein, alternatively, considers Jesus the auctioneer who sells despair from the cross (1987 250). Here I would read the poem as a reflection on consumerism as the paradoxical force that drives both faith and death forward. However, in contrast to Walt Whitman's militant “Beat! Beat! Drum!”, an 1861 poem written to aid the war effort, the thrust of the living as well as commercial force “Going, going, gone” in Dickinson's poem, written two decades later, parallels the death drive to dramatize the bleak prospect of faith. The vigour of life is sinisterly cut short by the verdict of death. With the hammer down, the bidder Death breaks “a single human Heart”, one's faith in unity with God, open into two. Death is the final destination. Life

cannot go anywhere, “not any more”. It is an auction of no gain but all the pain and suffering in a spiritual desert.

These dramatic representations of spiritual transportation in Dickinson's poems turn funerals and crucifixions into a spiritual marketplace that is carnivalesque and surrealistic, radically out of place. The comic auction scene is mapped onto spiritual wilderness to underscore the vehemence of human desperation. Her comic and somehow absurd sketches show her adoption and revision of commercial violence to depict her intellectual understanding of faith and belief as a trade of uncertainty and suffering. In comparison, Whitman, a poet Dickinson heard to be “disgraceful”,<sup>86</sup> is much more mesmerized by the visual representation of religious suffering and one's hope for spiritual redemption. In “Song of Myself”, Whitman's speaker resembles Dickinson's school boy that chases after the heavenly vision in “The nearest Dream recedes - unrealized -”. His mesmerism is only interrupted by a momentary disillusion:

I rise extatic through all, and sweep with the true gravitation,  
The whirling and whirling is elemental within me.

Somehow I have been stunned. Stand back!  
Give me a little time beyond my cuffed head and slumbers and dreams and  
gaping,  
I discover myself on a verge of the usual mistake.

That I could forget the mockers and insults!  
That I could forget the trickling tears and the blows of the bludgeons and  
hammers!  
That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody  
crowning!

I remember . . . . I resume the overstaid fraction,  
The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it . . . . or to any  
graves,  
The corpses rise . . . . the gashes heal . . . . the fastenings roll away. (54)

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<sup>86</sup> In an 1862 letter to Higginson, Dickinson states that “You speak of Mr. Whitman – I never read his Book – but was told that he was disgraceful –” (L 261).

Without paying six pence, the dreaming speaker has had his ecstatic moment by viewing the crucifixion. His realization of the separation from Jesus's suffering, "the usual mistake", although portrayed in a slightly cynical manner, is counterbalanced by the overall earnest tone of the speaker. The "separate look" remains temporary and relatively less disturbing. Edward S. Cutler identifies this section as a rare moment in the poem "where the otherwise cocksure singer is haunted by the spectre of alienation". Associating Whitman's moment of doubt with the 1853 Crystal Palace exhibition in New York, Cutler explains that "the exhibition ... offers up a spectacular, metonymic world to the gaze, but a world whose significance and promise, the poet admits, might not properly be seen" (156). Indeed, Whitman's phantasmagoric experience is transformed into his mesmeric moment of unification with Jesus, except for a momentary mental slippage. Dickinson, however, would threaten to cut this mental wound open over and over again in her macabre poems. As Karl Keller remarks, "What might surprise one about Emily Dickinson declaiming Whitman's disgracefulness is her own" (266). As a "disgraceful" match of Whitman's, Dickinson's burlesque of Christ's crucifixion in "The Auctioneer of Parting" is equally subversive.

Like Whitman, Dickinson's commercial imagery of auctions, eastern art and the marketplace might also have its influence from her museum experiences. She had been to a few exhibitions during her trips to Boston, Washington D. C. and Philadelphia. Her 1846 visit to John Peters' Chinese Museum (1845-1849) in particular, serves as an example of "a spectacular, metonymic world" that had mesmerized Whitman. Peters' Chinese museum was one of the very first exhibitions about China to be held in America after the first Sino-Anglo Opium War. By surrounding the visitors with overwhelming artifacts, wax figures and pictures of human activities, the museum intended to both instruct and entertain people with its "eye education".<sup>87</sup> One reporter from *The Boston Daily Advertiser* declared after his

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<sup>87</sup> According to Haddad in "The Cultural Fruits of Diplomacy: A Chinese Museum and Panorama," *The Romance of China*, a reporter of *Boston Daily Advertiser* (13 October 1845) praised Peters' effort on the visual accuracy of the exhibition, referring to Peters' philosophy to educate people with the visual perception.

visit: “Yes, I have been in China”.<sup>88</sup> Another reporter from *The Mercantile Journal* claimed that the Marlboro Chapel, the site of the exhibition, “seemed to have been metamorphosed by some of the genii of the lamp, who existed in Aladdin’s time”.<sup>89</sup> By showing the panoramic overview of China, the museum transformed the site into another phantasmogoric space that impressed its viewers. As Dickinson depicted in her letter, “The Chinese Museum is a great curiosity. There are an endless variety of Wax figures made to resemble the Chinese & dressed in their costume. Also articles of Chinese manufacture of an innumerable variety deck the rooms” (L13). Viewers were overwhelmingly surrounded by replicas of shops and statues, big red lanterns and a hovering dragon, and dioramas of Chinese people from all walks of life.

If eastern art, in such heterogeneous presentation, had not puzzled Dickinson then, it certainly had done so to Helen Hunt Jackson, who visited the San Francisco Chinatown thirty years after Dickinson's Chinese museum visit. Jackson recorded in her domestic travelogue *Bits of Travel at Home* the following transporting experience: “As I looked up, and saw that the street was suddenly becoming like a street of Pekin ... We turn back in bewilderment, and retrace our steps a little way into the Empire again, to make sure that it was not a dream!” (63) This surrealistic experience dazzled but also confounded western viewers. In another instance, Jackson portrayed the incomprehensible sound of Chinese opera as “the common caterwaul of the midnight cat” (71). As Raymond Schwab observes, “China's linguistic instrument appeared in a formidable solitude, bewildering the mental habits of the West, rendering the problem of equivalences among languages almost absurd, and refusing to allow its closed system to be drawn into the comparative school” (6). Indeed, Dickinson expressed a similar response in her letter about Chinese music. While listening to a music performance in the museum, she felt obliged to show herself “highly edified”, suppressing her “risible faculty” in order to “keep sober as

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<sup>88</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser* (11 September 1845). See Haddad's “The Cultural Fruits of Diplomacy: A Chinese Museum and Panorama,” *The Romance of China* Note 66.

<sup>89</sup> Haddad analyses the individual responses of the press towards Peters' museum and mentions the reporter's article from the *Mercantile Journal*, which were reprinted in the *Farmers Cabinet* (18 September 1845) in “The Cultural Fruits of Diplomacy: A Chinese Museum and Panorama,” *The Romance of China* Note 65.

their amateur was performing” (L 13). Dickinson might have been sympathetic to Jackson's bewilderment towards Chinese art.

Dickinson adopts images of such a phantasmagoric site into her mapping of the modern world. Her “A Shady friend - for Torrid days -” (Fr306), like “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -”, presents a conflicting world view that challenges a coherent perception of God's creation of the world:

A Shady friend - for Torrid days -  
Is easier to find -  
Than one of higher temperature  
For Frigid - hour of Mind -

The Vane a little to the East -  
Scares Muslin souls - away -  
If Broadcloth Hearts are firmer  
Than those of Organdy -

Who is to blame? The Weaver?  
Ah, the bewildering thread!  
The Tapestries of Paradise  
So notelessly - are made!

Hiroko Uno suggests that Dickinson's reference to various fabrics in the poem might be related to those she had seen in her uncle's store in Boston (2008 46). I would add that Dickinson might have appropriated the imagery of these fabrics to express her perception of New England, or America as a cosmopolitan world. This tapestry-like synthetic existence of America is celebrated by Emerson in “The Poet”: “How great the perspective! Nations, times, systems, enter and disappear, like threads in tapestry of large figure and many colors” (2001 194). This multicoloured tapestry of Emerson is contrasted with the sectarian world of differences and frictions, discordance and contention in Dickinson's poem. As a product of paradise, the vision of America is like God's mind, equally bewildering. Contested voices, represented by various fabrics and weathers, correspond to social and individual differences. Playing with images of various temperatures and temperaments, the poem reveals a vision of the nation with conflicting choices and tastes, clashing and crashing into a synthetic co-

existence.

“A Shady friend - for Torrid days -” raises more questions than it answers. “The bewildering thread” of God is both promising and problematic. Emerson's visual conjecture offers a temporary solution to corrugate diverse voices into a more containable framework, but it also discloses the underlining tension of this irresolvable situation which Dickinson highlights in the poem. As John Barrell points out, the overwhelming varieties of eastern artefacts created a blinding effect, an effect that paradoxically gave license to westerners to compose their own oriental discourses:

So crowded, to western eyes, were the surfaces of oriental objects, covered with decoration and imagery not understood and not thought worth understanding, that they could become the very opposite of what they appeared to be – blank screens on which could be projected whatever it was that the inhabitants of Europe, individually or collectively, wanted to displace, and to represent as other to themselves. (8)

In both “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” and “A shady friend - for Torrid days -”, Dickinson reverses the process of oriental or exotic projection by converting God and paradise into an alternative other. Images of satin, tapestries and eastern fabrics fill in the blank canvas of spiritual wilderness, which in turn reflects a modernistic sense of dizziness and disorientation. By reversing the imposing gaze of western eyes, her poems disclose a New England society of spiritual and social fracture.

Dickinson's eastern fabrics and tapestries, “So notelessly - are made”, seem to parody an Emersonian representation of America in unison by turning her tapestry into an embodiment of God's mystery and a world of irresolvable tension. In “Civilization - spurns - the Leopard!” (Fr276), a similar sense of bitterness lingers in the confrontation between the east and the west. In the poem, an Asiatic leopard longs for its original habitat, unable to assimilate into western customs:

Civilization - spurns - the Leopard!

Was the Leopard - bold?  
 Deserts - never rebuked her Satin -  
 Ethiop - her Gold -  
 Tawny - her Customs -  
 She was Conscious -  
 Spotted - her Dun Gown -  
 This was the Leopard's nature - Signor -  
 Need - a keeper - frown?

Pity - the Pard - that left her Asia!  
 Memories - of Palm -  
 Cannot be stifled - with Narcotic -  
 Nor suppressed - with Balm -

Scholars have considered the leopard poem as a representation of Dickinson's perception of herself. By associating its eastern imagery with Dickinson's reading of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, critics suggest that the poet might have identified with the tawny leopard, which embodies her own physical appearance, her mental state – her “Ethiop within” (Fr415), or her social situation as a woman. Rebecca Patterson, for example, argues that Dickinson uses spotted imagery such as that of the leopard as “an indirect bid for sympathetic acceptance” of a “very plain, overintellectual, overwitty girl” like herself (151). Patterson notes that her Ethiopia is “dark or spotted, tropical, and fervid, and no farther removed than Amherst” (152). Helen McNeil also remarks that “the freckled, auburn-haired Emily Dickinson” is “[w]ittily correcting the assumptions of a patriarchal 'Signor'” in the poem through her portrayal of the spotted and tawny leopard” (43). Paula Bennet further asserts that the Asiatic leopard is also a “spotted Egyptian Queen” that stands for “the sensual, the female, or the poetic” other – the antithesis of “the patriarchal, moralizing civilization” in the West (1990 115). Dickinson seems to find her poetic strength in her masquerade as the oriental other, whether her Orient is in Ethiop, Egypt, Asia, or Africa. As Páraic Finnerty observes, Dickinson employs the “extreme symbol of otherness to speak of that which should not be found in herself and that may hint at aspects of herself she regarded as unorthodox” (174). Dickinson, Finnerty argues, “evoked the African-American slave” to address “issues of individualism and identity from her position as a woman” (170).

Indeed, the Asiatic leopard is often identified by critics with African Americans. Daneen Wardrop argues that “the experience of the leopard who is forced to leave her homeland” in the poem is “not unlike the African forced to leave her homeland because she was captured and forced into servitude” (1999 80-81). Christopher Nield also comments that by referring to American slavery, the poem is “turning our understanding of what constitutes civilization and savagery inside out”.<sup>90</sup> Here I would suggest to explore the imagery of the Asiatic leopard and its Oriental, particularly Chinese connection. The poem reflects Dickinson's oriental fantasy, which had been prevalent in the public consciousness of her time. According to Samuel Griswold Goodrich's *The tales of Peter Parley about America*, Peter Parley taught his young readers that Asia is “a country where Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, lived, and from which the tiger is brought” (66). The East seems to be ambiguously located somewhere either in Asia or Africa for the avid armchair travellers in antebellum Americans such as Dickinson. Rebecca Patterson describes Dickinson's Asiatic imagery as coming from miscellaneous sources: “the Bible land, India and the Indies, and an intermediate region consisting of Arabia, Turkey, Persia, and the Caspian Sea” (156).<sup>91</sup> By confusingly setting Asia in a tropical setting, the poem combines the wilderness of safaris and the lushness of palm trees, the luxury of satin silk and the consumption of opium. The Asiatic leopard is from somewhere in the East, possibly Africa or south Asia. Locations such as Ethiopia and deserts designate the Saharan areas and the near east. Images such as the palm trees and balm suggest tropical or Mediterranean climates and the Middle East, where the biblical Balm of Gilead is from. Satin is an intricate fabric of silk weave that has a Chinese origin. The use of the narcotic further stretches from Africa and Europe to Asia and later to America (Hayter 19).

As Robin Peel remarks on the poem, “the words Deserts, Satin, Ethiop, Gold, Asia, and Palm all suggest the language of geography textbooks” (194). Helen McNeil

<sup>90</sup> Christopher Nield's “A Reading of “Civilization Spurns the Leopard” by Emily Dickinson” is available at *The Epoch Times*: <<http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/content/view/18768/>>

<sup>91</sup> Patterson suggests that the poem alludes to the Song of Solomon (152). Alfred Habegger also points to the biblical allusion to Jeremiah 13:23 in the poem (412). Robin Peel remarks that the poem might be related to the many circuses that visited Amherst (224).

further notes that “[t]here is a kind of object display of individual words in her work. This trait is most evident in her use of geographical place-names as metonyms” (28). I would suggest here that this linguistic tendency of Dickinson in poems such as “Civilization - spurns - the Leopard!” might have been influenced by her cosmopolitan experience in New England, when the exotic old worlds were turned into an inventory or an object in a museum display. Dickinson's poem collects mixed images of the far, middle and near east in biblical tradition and oriental imagination to present a hodgepodge representation of Asiatic landscapes. This kind of museum-like collage of Asiatic imagery, John Barrell argues, indicates the cultural history of imperialism:

[I]t is the beginnings of the large-scale, scientific collecting of the nineteenth-century museum age, with its aspiration to represent everything – 'all creatures ... all trees and plants – in its galleries and in its botanical and its zoological gardens' ... this oriental imagery is the imagery of an early but well-established imperialist culture, an imagery which had been collected and become familiar to the British imagination ... only in the very last years of the eighteenth-century and the opening decades of the nineteenth. (6-7)

John Barrell's discussion of oriental imagery in Thomas De Quincey's opium dream is also useful here, since the Boston Chinese museum Dickinson visited seems to produce a similar effect on her oriental imagination through its comprehensive representation of China. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, Dickinson had sought a copy of De Quincey's *The Confessions of the English Opium Eater* in 1858, and might have been familiar with De Quincey's oriental depiction of Asia in his confessions. In the delirium of his opium dreams, De Quincey claims that “[u]nder the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sunlights, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances, that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Indostan” (2009 125). Dickinson's poems reveal her appropriation of oriental imagery in a manner resembling to this western interest in oriental objects and curiosities.

By doing so, however, what Dickinson expostulates is not a world of cultural uniformity, but the discrepancy of perspectives and the imposition of ideologies. Her Asiatic leopard is not just bold, but also very self-conscious: “She was Conscious -/ Spotted - her Dun Gown -”. Her poem seems to suggest that the pressure of assimilation and oppression eventually comes from within. As Debbie Bark points out, “slaveholders' mastery had long been predicted on a notion of racial otherness, naturalized through observations of bodily difference.” The bodily difference of Dickinson's leopard, from her gold and stain to her tawny and dun gown, is carefully contrasted to accentuate the constructive process of “naturalization.” Dickinson might have read De Quincey's portrayal of a mysterious Malay visitor coming to his cottage in his confessions. Dubbed as a “tiger-cat” by De Quincey, the Malay has a “sallow and bilious skin, enameled or veneered with mahogany by marine air,” and “small, fierce, restless eyes, thin lips, slavish gestures, and adorations” (2009 107). While De Quincey focuses on the bodily difference that insinuates for him the inferiority as well as the treacherous nature of the Malay, Dickinson's leopard poem shifts the focus from the gaze of the “master” to the inner gaze of the leopard upon her own bodily difference.

Dickinson's adoption and appreciation of oriental imagery, especially the image of the narcotic, might also be relevant to her Chinese museum visit. The association of the Chinese with the issues of opium and slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, which featured prominently in the Boston Chinese Museum she visited in 1846, is also a plausible source to account for the ambiguous portrayal of her leopard. When Dickinson visited the museum, certain political and cultural messages would not have been lost on Dickinson. The promotion of the Chinese civilization in the museum, for example, drastically departed from the negative images writers like De Quincey portrayed in his oriental dreams. In his confessions, De Quincey turns China into his own psychological inferno. This nightmare-like depiction of De Quincey would anticipate his later evaluation of the British war against China: “I have often thought that if I were compelled to forgo England, and to live in China, and among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad ... I could sooner

live with lunatics or brute animals” (124-25).<sup>92</sup> The Boston Chinese museum, contrarily, cites a native voice in its catalogue to counterbalance such kind of attacks on the Chinese backwardness: “I felicitate myself that I was born in China; it constantly occurs to me, what if I had been born beyond the sea, in some remote part of the earth, where the cold freezes, or the heat scorches ... where the people are ... far removed from the converting maxims of the ancient Kings, and are ignorant of the domestic relations. Though born as one of the generation of men, I should not have been different from a beast” (42).<sup>93</sup> Although the catalogue quotes De Quincey as one of the authorities on opium, it seems also determined to defend against pre-existing ideas against the Chinese civilization popularized by writers like De Quincey.

Stuart Creighton Miller observes that after the first Anglo-Sino war – the Opium War (1839-1842), the American interest in China was crystallized “on a popular level” (83). Works such as American missionary Samuel Wells Williams' *The Middle Kingdom* (1848) and Bayard Taylor's *A Visit to India, China, and Japan* (1853) offered readers great chances to grasp a glimpse of a veiled China. The plethora of nineteenth-century reports on China also provided readers inspirations to work out their own version of the Orient. Malini Johar Schueller suggests that U.S. interest in the Far East is a continuation of Raymond Schwab's so-called “Oriental Renaissance” in Europe (143), which Schwab explains to be “the revival of an atmosphere in the nineteenth century brought about by the arrival of Sanskrit texts in Europe, which produced an effect equal to that produced in the fifteenth-century by the arrival of Greek manuscripts and Byzantine commentators after the fall of Constantinople” (11). As Schueller remarks, “the New England intelligentsia,” such as Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,

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<sup>92</sup> This irrational and inhuman state of China would be reiterated in his later comment on the Opium War. In his 1840 essay “The Opium and the China Question,” for example, De Quincey compared the attack of the English navy against China to “throw[ing] bomb-shells into the crater of Vesuvius.” The Chinese empire, De Quincey believed, was “defended by its essential non-irritability”; it was “at present an inorganic mass – something to be kicked, but which cannot kick again” (2009 342).

<sup>93</sup> As Zboray and Zboray point out, the native voice was cited via travel writer John Francis Davis (279).

James Russel Lowell, and Bret Harte, all showed a continuous interest in the Orient. Culminating in the 1850s and 1860s, this Far Eastern literary Orientalism in America, Schueller notes, “like European Orientalism, was likewise intimately connected with the economic, political, religious and racial discourses on the Far East, all of which found expression in celebrations of the westerly vision of empire” (143).

Like her contemporary “New England intelligentsia”, Dickinson would also have been aware of the Anglo-Sino clashes that took place in the mid-nineteenth century. The Boston Chinese Museum was opened in 1845, three years after the first Anglo-Sino Opium War (1839-1842), a war that John Adam Quincey, the former president of the U.S., considered to be the Chinese equivalent of the Boston Tea Party (Bakalar 90). John Rogers Haddad calls the exhibition “the Cultural Fruit of Diplomacy” in *The Romance of China*, since it resulted from the diplomatic mission of the American ambassador Caleb Cushing, who signed the Sino-American Treaty of Wangsia in 1844, in order to insure American commercial privilege in China that the British had acquired through war. As Hiroko Uno points out, both Dickinson's father and Caleb Cushing belonged to the Whig Party during the same period and would have known each other “at least as good colleagues, even if not as good friends” (2008 49). Cushing gave a speech at a dinner held at Faneuil Hall in Boston in 1843 before his diplomatic mission to “secure through negotiation a treaty comparable to what England had won through war” (Haddad “The Cultural Fruits” 1), a dinner speech Uno suggests that Dickinson's father would have also attended. Cushing's diplomatic mission is also a civilizing mission, since, as Cushing stated in the speech, “although civilization had originally flowed from the East to the West, the recent advances of the West had effected a reversal in the course, such that 'knowledge is being rolled back from the West to the East” (“The Cultural Fruit” 1). Edward Dickinson, Uno states, “would have been familiar with Cushing’s missions and the treaty with China as both were measures of diplomatic importance for the United States, particularly for Massachusetts, which was the center of trade with the East during those years” (2008 48-50). Elizabeth Willis notes that Emily Dickinson would have been aware of

“the local and international implications” of the Opium War, and “the ironies of its peace treaty” (2009 29). Indeed, Dickinson seemed very impressed with the Boston Chinese Museum, showing great enthusiasm rather than aversion towards a kaleidoscopic display of Chinese artifices. She might also have been receptive of the favourable opinion of the museum towards China.

One of the highlights in the Chinese museum was its placement of two Chinese men in the exhibition, one of which was a former opium addict, a music teacher from China. By doing so, the exhibition, as a by-product of the Sino-American peace treaty, foregrounded its anti-European and anti-opium messages. It is not a coincidence that in the letter about her museum visit, Dickinson showed a particular interest in these two Chinese scholars who came to America to overcome their opium addiction:

One of them is a Professor of music in China & the other is teacher of a writing school at home. They were both wealthy & not obliged to labor but they were also Opium Eaters & fearing to continue the practice lest it destroyed their lives yet unable to break the “rigid chain of habit” in their own land They left their family’s [sic] & came to this country. They have now entirely overcome the practice. There is something peculiarly interesting to me in their self *denial*. (L13)

The Chinese scholars became part of the anti-opium agenda in the museum catalogue, the presence of which, Roland and Mary Zboray remark, showed “the dire effects of British trade and, by contrast, of the enlightened disposition of Americans like the proprietors, who opposed the drug traffic” (2004 284).<sup>94</sup> The anti-imperialism and anti-slavery sentiments surfaced in the anti-opium campaign of the exhibition. They were particularly materialized in the two Chinese men, who chose to come to America to quit opium. As quoted in the first chapter, the American myth affirmed

<sup>94</sup> The catalogue concluded on a note that placed America on a moral high-ground: “Is it strange then when they see the greatest European nation seize upon the neighboring country of India and clandestinely flood their shores with a drug which destroys thousands, and is known to be prohibited by their laws, that they should look upon them as barbarians” (186). As Zboray and Mary Zboray state, the museum catalogue boldly compared opium addiction to the condition of slavery, criticizing the injustice of British imperialistic expansion: “the 1842 Nanking Treaty between Great Britain and China, the by-product of the Opium War ... was interpreted, with no merit accorded to the British cause, as simply a demonstration of the emperor's powerlessness in stopping the English from dumping Indian opium on Chinese soil” (2004 280).

that “Europeans experience regeneration in a New World”; “They become new, better, happier men - they are reborn” (Marx 228). Such an ideology was transplanted subtly into the regenerative experience of the Chinese men through their emigration to America.<sup>95</sup> Judging from Dickinson's account in her letter, she might have read the depiction of the music master in the catalogue,<sup>96</sup> and would have been aware of the favourable opinion of the museum towards the Chinese,<sup>97</sup> and its anti-European, anti-opium and anti-slavery sentiments.

Furthermore, the Marlboro chapel, the museum venue, seemed to serve as an ideal venue for the promotion of the peaceful Sino-American exchange – in Zboray and Zboray's words, “treaty making without conquest” (2004 276). As Zboray and Mary Zboray state, the museum catalogue boldly compared opium addiction to the condition of slavery. Incidentally, the museum venue had been associated with radicalism, since it had been “a meeting place for Garrisonian abolitionists” (Zboray and Zboray 2004 275).<sup>98</sup> Hiroko Uno also identifies an antislavery “declaration and pledge” adopted at a religious convention that took place at the Marlboro chapel just half a year before Dickinson's visit (2008 52). Dickinson wrote the leopard poem during the American Civil War. With its combined imagery of slavery, opium and oriental luxury, her leopard poem sheds some light on her potential understanding of the issues of opium and its enslaving effect upon the addict. Dickinson's reference in the poem to the leopard's narcotic use implicitly associates the opium trade with slavery, the rhetoric of which had been a prominent feature in the Chinese museum. Dickinson's attention to the “self *denial*” of these Chinese men, and her explicit

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<sup>95</sup> According to the museum catalogue, one of the Chinese men was “a teacher of music in his native land, but having acquired the habit of smoking opium and not being able to give it up while there, left his country for that purpose and has succeeded in his undertaking” in Boston (7).

<sup>96</sup> As Uno points out, “Although Dickinson took both the Chinese men to be “opium eaters,” it seems that only one of them had a history of the habit” (2008 footnote 16).

<sup>97</sup> Zboray and Zboray observe that the Chinese Museum attempted to present China as a nation of great civilization, making it “a desirable trading partner” and selling the victory of “the government's hard-won Wanghsia Treaty” to the populace (276). Haddad also points out how the collection reflected the interest of both the Chinese and American missionaries (“The Cultural Fruit” 7).

<sup>98</sup> However, as Zboray and Zboray explain, initially the proprietors of the museum was intending to select a venue in association with “conservatism, elitism, and gentility” rather than radicalism that Marlboro chapel stood for (275).

identification of the keeper in her leopard poem as “Signor”, a name of European origin, express her familiarity with, if not implicit recognition of, the museum's dichotomously pro-Sino-abolitionist and anti-European-Imperialistic political stand.<sup>99</sup> The American condemnation of British imperialism was complicated by the heated debate about the practice of slavery in the American South. An 1852 article in *The Living Age* explicitly associated the opium trade with American slavery, considering the British government to be committing a greater evil. The author remarked that the bricks of “the immensely lofty warehouses of Liverpool” “were cemented by the blood of the African slave”; “the colossal institutions of British India”, in a similar way, were “partly maintained by the life-blood of the Chinese” because of the profitable opium trade (546). As the article argued:

The opium question, as one of right or wrong, expedient or inexpedient, is beset with no difficulty ... Slavery, which is the only monster evil that can be compared with it, had many specious arguments at its command ... The advocate of the opium trade can, it seems to us, advance nothing. His best argument is silence. His greatest safety is retreat. (547)

The article went further than the Boston Chinese Museum to condemn the opium trade and British despotism. Narcotic consumption served as one of the driving forces behind this east-west power struggle, an issue that Dickinson might incorporate in her poems to explore the boundaries of enslavement and liberty. Both Uno and Zboray and Zboray have pointed out the “boldness” – the radicalism of the Chinese Museum in evoking abolitionist rhetoric to defend China, an act considered unusual even after the guarantee of free migration by the Sino-American Burlingame

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<sup>99</sup> A similar dichotomy is visible in Herman Melville's novella *Benito Cereno*, which Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price recommend on their website “Dickinson, Slavery, and the San Domingo Moment” as a potential source for Dickinson's understanding of the slave rebellion in San Domingo in the early nineteenth century. In “That Minute Domingo!: Dickinson's Cooptation of Abolitionist Diction and Franklin's Variorum Edition”, Daneen Wardrop offers detailed reading of Dickinson's “San Domingo Moment” in several poems, including two of her leopard/tiger poems, based on the website of Folsom and Price (1999 72-86). First serialized in *Putnam's Monthly* in 1855 before its publication in his collection of short stories *Piazza Tales* in 1856, *Benito Cereno* depicts an African slave revolt on a Spanish merchant ship the *San Dominick*, which is eventually rescued by the New England sea captain with his crew on *Bachelor's Delight*. The names of the ships suggest a sexual and geo-political division between the battered, treacherous and feminized old world of slavery and emaciation, and the masculine, civilized and progressive New world of justice and liberty. The website is not accessible at this moment.

Treaty of 1868.<sup>100</sup> As Uno notes, the Chinese museum was “a suitable place” for Dickinson to encounter Chinese culture for its political radicalism and the owners’ “unconventional ideal of a cultural exchange between the United States and China” (2008 52).

During the nineteenth century, opium was a significant instrument for racial, political and social control, which is also implied in Dickinson's leopard poem, in which the Asiatic leopard consumes narcotics in an attempt to stifle its memory of home. In his confessions, De Quincey also offers opium to placate his Malay visitor, who, according to De Quincey, is both “fierce” and “slavish” (2009 107). As Charles Rzepka comments, the Malay is De Quincey's most dangerous reader, the only one that could test the authenticity and authority of De Quincey's orientalist reputation; therefore, De Quincey has to placate the Malay with the narcotic, and then “exorcise” him from the narrative (1993 184). This power struggle between De Quincey and the Malay was literally acted out in the contact between the European plantation owners and their Asian labours. As Evelyn Hu-DeHart observes, in the mid-nineteenth century, opium was encouraged, and even imported by some European planters in Peru and Cuba for their Chinese “coolies” (175-181).<sup>101</sup> Opium as a commodity contributed to political and racial conflicts and eventually individual oppression and slavery. Josephine McDonagh sums up the paradoxical existence of opium that it “is both a crucial commodity for export in the British economy and a means of the

<sup>100</sup> In an 1868 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, written a few months after the treaty, for example, William Speer still complained about the misrepresentation of China and demanded a better understanding of Chinese democracy, a view that subverted the stereotypical association of the Orient with despotism: “the sentiments of Americans in respect to China have been principally obtained from writers under monarchical influence – from those of England, which has brutally drugged her that she might rob her, or from French and Italian priests, who flattered and lauded her rulers that they might aggrandize themselves and their work” (839).

<sup>101</sup> Dickinson would have been aware of the colonial history associated with South America. Patterson states that “Peru is wealth”, pointing out that the two-volume edition of *History of the Conquest of Peru* (Boston, 1859), along with his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* by William H. Prescott were owned by the Dickinsons (219). Pierre Nepveu also observes that Peru and Brazil are “distant Eldorados” for Dickinson (5). Daneen Wardrop further asserts that Dickinson's poems provide “ironic twists on the type of wealth obtained from 'Buenos Ayre,' 'Peru,' and 'India,' and 'Golconda'”(1999 75). As Wardrop argues, Dickinson's reference to Domingo, Burmah, Buenos Aires, Peru, India, and Golconda exhibits not only “a global consciousness not usually attributed to her”, but also “her awareness to the interactions of economic networks and oppressive systems that tie the globe together” (1999 footnote 5).

impoverishment and subjugation of the Chinese people, but it is also an agent of extraordinary pleasures and devastating pains in his own fragile body” (154-155). Although Dickinson's leopard poem highlights the consciousness of the leopard, rather than the narcotic, to be the main source of oppression, the themes of European despotism and narcotic repression in the poem correspond to the vehement public debates surrounding the issue of opium throughout the nineteenth century.

Hiroko Uno associates Dickinson's interest in the self-denial of the Chinese men with the Buddhist concepts of “nothing”, “annihilation” and world renouncement introduced in the museum (57-61). I would add that the museum representation of opium enjoyment might also enhance Dickinson's appreciation of the negative ways of living. In comparison with the bodily enslavement of the African-Americans in the American South, opium did not just cause the enslavement of the body, but also the enslavement of the mind. The “rigid chain of habit” that these two opium-smokers were trying to break was an addiction that tested the mental power as much as the physical one. The Chinese museum had one case of wax figures displaying a upper-middle class gentleman with his wife smoking opium in his comfortable home, visually contradicting the museum statement about the devastating effect opium was supposed to have on its user (61-63). Furthermore, the catalogue claimed that the narcotic effect was accompanied by the “most delightful dreams” at the early phase of addiction (67-71). Unable to break their addiction, these Chinese men resorted to another more drastic form of self-denial by leaving their “home”, an act that would certainly have impressed the home-loving Dickinson.<sup>102</sup> The self-denial of the

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<sup>102</sup> In her 1851 attendance to Jenny Lind's concert, as will be discussed in the next section, Dickinson was similarly impressed by Lind's performance of “Home, Sweet Home,” a song that was both known and banned during the Civil War for its evocative power (L46). The popular story *The Man Without a Country* (1863) by Edward Everett Hale, who Dickinson briefly corresponded between 1854-57, further equated home with nation to encourage patriotism and aid war effort. As Hsuan L. Hsu notes, “[w]riting in response to the national crisis of the Civil War, Hale fashions a scenario in which religious, familial, and moral identity all seem coterminous with the fate of the nation-state” (6). Dickinson would have been familiar with such a sentimental connection between home, self and nation popular in her time. For more on Hale and Dickinson, see Diana Wagner and Marcy Tanter's “New Dickinson Letter Clarifies Hale Correspondence,” *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 7.1 (1998): 110-117. See also Diana Wagner's “Pardon the Liberty: Emily Dickinson's Correspondence with Edward Everett Hale, 3 Letters,” *Dickinson's Electronic Archives*, available at: <<http://www.emilydickinson.org/hale.html>>.

Chinese men could be thus explained by both their denial of narcotic enjoyment, and their physical and mental detachment from home. For a reluctant traveller like Dickinson, staying at home, rather than travelling, seemed to be a real self-indulgence.

Hence, Dickinson's Asiatic leopard is also practising self-denial by suppressing her longing for home with narcotics. Her leopard might partly originate from the re-imagining of the situation of these Chinese men who “left their family's & came to this country” (L13). The opium eaters in the Chinese museum, according to Dickinson, were “wealthy & not obliged to labor”, who forsook their homeland to quit addiction. The wax figures displayed in Case 5 of the Chinese museum reinforced such an impression of oriental luxury. Although the museum catalogue seemed to persistently condemn opium by pointing out the smoker's advancement in his “slavish habit”, it also depicted the opium-smoking scene as being decorated in a fashionable manner, with furniture of delicate bamboo work and “door screen embroidered with gold”, to show “the ingenuity and taste” of the Chinese manufacture. The male figure was placed in the luxurious room, smoking opium “in easy circumstances” with his family and servant, a wax presentation not far different from its real life counterpart – the two wealthy Chinese men Dickinson encountered in her letter (60). Dickinson's leopard seems to also come from an opulent country of “Gold” and “Satin”. While the Chinese men were “purified” through their America experiences, the Asiatic leopard in her poem becomes stained, “Spotted” and dull under the western gaze.

Dickinson blends two opposite types of oriental imagery – “fabulous wealth and luxury” on the one hand (Patterson 157), and enslavement and poverty on the other in her leopard poem. She might have been aware of the harsh condition of the Chinese labours who emigrated to America out of necessity. The nineteenth-century American policy towards China demonstrated an unresolvable tension that Dickinson's leopard poem seems to embody. As Gunther Barth notes, the surging tide of Chinese labourers into California under labour contracts in the 1850s and 1860s

shaped the Sino-American relationship for decades (1). The reviewer of the book *China and the Chinese* by Rev. John L. Nesius commented in 1869 that “[t]he Chinese are daily occupying a more and more important position in the affairs of this country ... it becomes a matter of importance that our citizens should be very fully posted in regard to all the facts relating to China and the Chinese”.<sup>103</sup> This increasing public attention of America towards China was made explicit in Susan J. Adams' politically-charged 1869 poem “Occident and Orient” in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, written after the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. In the poem, Adams summoned China to open up and come forward to the greetings of the western world in the name of sisterhood:

Open the gate, O Land of Ancient Story,  
To thy Sisters' greeting;  
They have waited long to look at thine inner glory:  
Come forth to the meeting (792).<sup>104</sup>

The attitude of Samuel Bowles towards the Chinese immigration seemed more sceptical. In his 1869 collection of essays, *The Pacific Railroad Open, How to Go, What to See*, published earlier in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Samuel Bowles criticized the importation of the Chinese labour by comparing it to slavery; He observed that they were “imported here like merchandise” in “a system only half removed from slavery itself” (72). This controversy over the issue of Chinese immigration was deepened by the fact that the Chinese immigrants preferred to maintain their own customs rather than assimilating into the western culture. In his 1869 travelogue *Our New West*, Bowles noted:

They look down even with contempt upon our newer and rougher civilization, regarding us barbaric in fact ... And our conduct towards them has inevitably intensified these feelings.

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<sup>103</sup> See the literary section of *Manufacturer and builder* 1.11 (1869): 339. In *China and Chinese* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1869), Rev. John L. Nesius gave a general description of Chinese inhabitants, religious and social institutions, and its political situations with other countries during his ten years of Missionary work in China.

<sup>104</sup> On the scrutiny of American magazines about Chinese life, see Stuart Creighton Miller's *The Unwelcome Immigrant* 145-166.

– it has driven them back upon their naturally self-contained natures and habits. So they bring here and retain all their home ways of living and dressing, their old associations and religion. (405-06)

Bowles considered the Chinese importation a convenient solution to the American demand for labour; however, it also caused political dilemmas that were similar to the situation of the African-Americans after the Civil War: “What we shall do with them is not quite clear yet; how they are to rank – socially, civilly, and politically – among us, is one of the nuts for our social science students to crack, – if they can ...” (*The Pacific Railroad Open* 74). His observation of the unassimilating Chinese corresponds to Dickinson's depiction of the rebellious leopard, in which this uneasy relation between the east and the west is foregrounded in the very first line of the poem. The passive aggressive rebellion of her leopard resembles Samuel Bowles' depictions of the Chinese immigrants, who were both submissive and suppressed, passive and rebellious.

Although Dickinson's leopard poem is dated by Franklin around 1862, prior to Bowles' publication of his travelogue, her poem seems to have anticipated the increasing harsh situation faced by these unwelcome immigrants towards the end of the nineteenth century. From the Cable Cushing Mission in the 1844 treaty for open trade, to the guarantee of free migration by the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, to the passing of Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Sino-American relations experienced a dramatic change that complicated the cultural, commercial, political and racial tensions of Dickinson's time.<sup>105</sup> The shifting status of the Chinese immigrants in America towards the end of the nineteenth century, in particular, seems not far from the transition the Asiatic leopard experiences in Dickinson's poem. Like the increasingly marginalized Chinese immigrants in America, Dickinson's leopard, and potentially herself as a female poet, are both bold and repressed, submissive and aggressive at the same time. Dickinson's portrayal of the Asiatic leopard comes close

<sup>105</sup> On the 1844 treaty, see William J. Donahue's “The Caleb Cushing Mission,” *Modern Asian Studies* 16.2 (1982): 193-216. On the Burlingame Treaty and the Chinese Exclusion Act, see Shih-shan Henry Tsai's *China and the Overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868-1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983): 24-42 & 60-80.

to the sympathetic depiction of the Chinese by Frank H. Norton. In his 1871 article “Our Labor-System and the Chinese” in the *Scribner's Monthly*, Norton, in favour of the importation of the Chinese labours over the European and African counterparts, considered the Chinese a highly civilized people and refugees of the “coolie” systems in South America: “The first Chinese who came to San Francisco were fugitives from their masters in Peru, who took passage at Callao on the pretense that their term of service had expired” (67). Dickinson might have been aware of this association of Peru with the exploitation of labour. As Daneen Wardrop argues, “the interactions of economic networks and oppressive systems that tie the globe together” are visible in Dickinson's “ironic twists on the type of wealth obtained from” South America and India in her poems (1999 75). In a manner similar to Dickinson's appeal for pity on the Asiatic pard in her poem, Norton explained the emigration of the Chinese from their home country in a more understanding tone: “The causes of Chinese emigration are to be found mainly in an oppressive government, over-crowded settlements, and the difficulties of living at home ... Yet the Chinese love their country, believe it to be the greatest on the face of the earth, and leave it only to obtain means to return in better condition. (65) While Norton supported the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, believing that the Chinese immigration would benefit the agricultural, cultural and industrial development of America, in the 1880s the Chinese would be excluded for exactly the same reason that brought them to America in the 1840s. As Moon-Ho Jung remarks, the exclusion act of 1882 treated the Chinese immigrants as a formidable element to the construction of a modern America as a democratic country by associating the Chinese labours with slaves. This exclusion act outlawed “coolies” under the anti-slavery campaign, racializing immigrants “as decidedly white and European in American culture”. The Chinese immigrants, as Jung points out, were negated the legal space even if they were “free and voluntary” (698).

In this way, Dickinson's leopard poem reflects her awareness of the complexity behind these social and political issues surrounding Chinese immigration. Her poem depicts a more sympathetic representation of Asia that coincides with the favourable

opinion of the Boston Chinese Museum towards China. Furthermore, the public representation of the Chinese as a home-loving and un-assimilating people seems not so different from Dickinson as a homebound poet who was financially secured and socially privileged, but spiritually doubting and artistically striving. She constantly identifies herself with outsiders, emigrants and exiles in her poetic quest. Her leopard poem might not be speaking directly for the plight of the African Americans, or for the dire situation of the Chinese workers of her time. However, her Asiatic representation shows how she might feel personally related to these political, social and racial outsiders through her own isolated and repressed situation as a woman poet.

John Peters, Samuel Bowles and their contemporary writers employ the abolitionist rhetoric either to criticize the opium trade, or to depict the condition of the imported Chinese workers. Their representation of the Chinese would have influenced Dickinson's understanding of individual struggle or resistance against social oppressions, as manifested in the opium question, and her potential association of the narcotic enslavement of the body and the mind with the notion of slavery that would lead to the Civil War. As shown in the second chapter, Dickinson does not seem to share the social confidence of her time in this American triumphalism and this cleansing power of America as a New Eden. Dickinson's Asiatic leopard remains suppressed and discontent in her contact with western civilization. Her leopard poem discloses her acute awareness of the political and social tension between Europe and America, between the east and the west. By evoking and appropriating the abolitionist rhetoric that had permeated the public discourses of her time, her leopard poem implicitly comments on the international conflicts of her time.

As Stuart Creighton Miller states, American interest in China after the Opium War was intensified in the "mass media era" of the 1850s and 1860s (113), vacillating between "hope" and "despair" (204). Harold R. Issacs describes this ambiguous attitude of America towards China as in "jostling pairs": "The Chinese are seen as a superior people and an inferior people, devilishly exasperating heathens and

wonderfully attractive humanists; wise *sages* and sadistic executioners; thrifty and honorable men and sly and devious villains; comic opera soldiers and dangerous fighters. These and many other pairs occur and recur, with stresses and source varying in time and place” (70-71). In his scrutiny of nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals, mainly the *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, William E. Huntzicker also observes that “a reader can easily see over time wild swings in images of China from near worship of the Celestial Empire to racist vilification of its subjects” (111). The ambivalence of the mass media reveals the American uncertainty and anxiety towards the “otherness” of China. As Gregory Blue points out, “for most nineteenth-century Western thinkers, China served as a symbol of reaction and historical stasis” (132). Asia was a crucial element in the western definition of civilization and modernity.

Dickinson's adoption of exotic names in her poems also reflects her reception and appropriation of popular racial stereotypes. In her later poem “No Autumn's intercepting Chill” (Fr 1563), for example, Dickinson uses both Asia and Africa as metaphors to demonstrate antithetical modes. She contrasts the “Asiatic rest” with the “African Exuberance” in the poem, echoing the stereotypical perception of Asia as lethargic and Africa as passionate. As Páraic Finnerty remarks, Dickinson identifies herself with Othello for his insane jealousy in several letters and would have been aware of the representation of Africans on stage, and their latent association with rage and strong sexual desire (2002 87). Asia, alternatively, is more passive, suppressive, or reactive. In Samuel Griswold Goodrich's 1845 geography book *Manners and Customs of the Principal Nations of the Globe*, Peter Parley tells his readers that “the manners and customs of Asia are transmitted from one age to another with little change” (312). De Quincey also writes in his confessions that a young Chinese is “an antediluvian man renewed” (2009 124). Despite its anti-opium and anti-imperialistic campaign, the Boston Chinese exhibition similarly re-enforces such a stereotype by categorizing Chinese to the past and Americans to the future (185). With a strong sense of nationalistic and racial superiority, Bowles further constructs a racial view of history, as also quoted in the second chapter: “it is this

power as well as disposition for illimitable growth, that distinguishes the European races in contrast with the Asiatic, who seem to have been cast in an iron mould ages old” (1869 399-400). Dickinson's leopard poem teases out the ambiguous representations of both Asia and Africa. Her leopard is being bold and submissive, regressive and reactive, honourable and dangerous. In this way, her poem magnifies the difficulties of definition. Her Asiatic leopard spurns not just civilization, but also geographical, racial and social categories that came as a result of the western belief in science, system and order. In contrast to Bowles, or her father's Whiggish confidence in social progress, Dickinson seems to be more sceptical about the notions of Enlightenment and civilization. Bowles's confidence in the “illimitable growth” of European races, for Dickinson would only lead to oblivion.

However, there is certain ambivalence in Dickinson's leopard poem, which is also present in the museum catalogue. Her sympathy towards the regressive and nostalgic leopard is fused with a suggested belief in America as the more civilized nation than its European counterpart. Like the Chinese men in the museum, her leopard also practices a certain kind of self-denial by enslaving herself with narcotic consumption, in order to resist the European encroachment on her liberty. Her poem thus foregrounds this close-knit relation between imperialism, consumerism and individual struggle. It demonstrates her awareness of this vacillation of America between patriotism and internationalism towards the foreign other. As Akira Iriye remarks, the American foreign policy has been profoundly contested throughout the nineteenth century up to the beginning of the twentieth century:

It seems likely that the internationalist doctrine was embraced as a hopeful view of world history and of foreign affairs in which the United States would play a leading and inspirational role, whereas individual Americans may have retained race prejudice as they came into contact with foreigners or as they pondered the future of their country ... On the whole it would seem that foreigners were tolerated to the extent that they exhibited their ability to assimilate Western civilization or demonstrated certain traits which Americans admired (40).

Dickinson maps the exotic and the foreign, practising a certain kind of biblical and literary orientalism that enables her to challenge western values embedded in Enlightenment thinking and Christianity. Furthermore, by identifying with the Asiatic other, she explores the fracture and shadow embedded in the rhetoric of national projects and the definition of civilization. The prospect of modernity is for Dickinson far from certain, progressive, or consistent. Frictions and conflicts, oppression and alienation, despair and anxiety, co-exist with the transcendental panorama presented by Emerson's tapestries of America. In particular, the passive aggressiveness of Dickinson's Asiatic leopard designates her anxiety towards a modernized society that involved as much suppression as liberation, if not more. She is both writing with and against these modern forces; by setting up normative textual spaces in her poetic landscape, she undermines these norms. By doing so, her eastern imagery both subscribes to and subverts the orientalism practised during her time.

The museum-like, pedagogical and carnivalesque scenarios in Dickinson's poems also inform how she draws poetic materials from metropolitan contexts. Boston provided her opportunities for glimpsing a diversified and cosmopolitan world. However, her attitude toward cities remains conflicting. While Dickinson underwent eye treatment in Boston in 1864, she wrote to Lavinia, her sister, portraying Boston as a wilderness: "I have found friends in the wilderness. You know Elijah did ..." (L 239). In an earlier letter in 1853 to Austin, her brother, she also referred to Boston as "some 'vast wilderness'" (L 128). As Domhnall Mitchell points out, in this letter the anonymity of the metropolis became a refuge from the crowd at home (2000 31). The metropolitan characteristics of the anonymous mass turn the city into another geographic blankness, which, paradoxically, provides friends, independence and liberation. Although she seemed to develop a dislike of Boston later in her life,<sup>106</sup> her early urban experience would have enriched her poetic imagination. Hiroko Uno observes that Dickinson was most likely to have been in contact with eastern fabrics and artefacts during her stay in Boston with the Norcross family, relatives on her

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<sup>106</sup> In an 1851 letter to Austin, Dickinson complained that her sister Vinnie and she "were rich in disdain for Bostonians and Boston, and a coffer fuller of *scorn, pity, commiseration*, a miser hardly had" (L 54).

mother's side, who dealt with dry goods and ran a crockery ware business (2008 45-47). Furthermore, there was a multi-coloured shawl in the Dickinson household that she might have worn, the pattern of which, Wardrop points out, indicates eastern influence.<sup>107</sup> Dickinson's contemplation upon eastern fabrics in her poems thus is also rooted in the material culture of her time. As Wardrop notes, the reference to various fabrics in her work shows not only her sense of fashion, but also her reliance upon global trade in her daily life (2009 69 & 202). Indeed, the bewildering thread of God and the tapestries of America reveal Dickinson's poetic conceptualization through her physical connection with and material consumption of eastern goods in an increasingly globalized New England.

As Timothy Morton comments, “the 'exchange' of goods is made to imply an exchange of cultures. The model is mercantile: an exact and equal exchange takes place, as if culture were a marketplace of ideas” (81). Being aware of the potential benefit a cosmopolitan world could offer, Dickinson's attitude towards the marketplace of culture seems equivocal. As Peter Stoneley points out, “Dickinson occupied an ambivalent position in relation to the commercializing and aggrandizing culture around her” (582). If commercialization results in spiritual sterility, she is also not hesitant of enjoying its cultural fruits. Take her Chinese museum experience for example. Dickinson recorded paying 12.5 cents each for two pieces of calligraphy by a Chinese writing master, which she considered “very precious” (L 13). Conversely, when she attended Jenny Lind's 1851 concert, she seemed to have found Lind's huge success in America less credible. After declining her brother's invitation to Lind's concert in Boston, Dickinson eventually attended her Northampton concert (Mitchell 2000b 76), and expressed a more critical response towards Lind's popularity in a letter: “how we all loved Jennie Lind, but not accustomed oft to her manner of singing didnt fancy that so well as we did her ... I'd

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<sup>107</sup> Wardrop points out that there were another two shawls Dickinson might have worn constantly during her lifetime. One was a blue net worsted shawl and the other one was a wool paisley shawl. The first one might have been worn in a warmer season, and the second could have been used for a more chilly weather. The cooler colour of the turquoise-blue crocheted shawl, which might have been worn in August during Dickinson's meeting with Higginson, forms a contrast with the multi-coloured shawl, the pattern of which indicates an eastern influence (2009 37-40).

rather have a Yankee ... She took 4000\$/ *mistake* arithmetical/ for tickets at Northampton aside from all expenses” (L46). As Judith Pascoe remarks, “Dickinson was reminded of the financial aspect of Lind's art every time she opened a newspaper in the days before the local concerts” (8). Dickinson was certainly aware of, and might have grown more critical of, this tension between cultural exchange and the mercantile model it was based upon in the cultural market of New England.

### “My Splendors, are Menagerie –”: Spectatorship and Consumption

However critical Dickinson was of Jenny Lind's popularity, she had certainly enjoyed Lind's powerful stage presence, as had many of her contemporaries.<sup>108</sup> As a matter of fact, this experience might have helped her germinate her poetics about perception. She recorded in a letter her impression of one of Lind's trademark songs “Home, Sweet Home”.<sup>109</sup> For Dickinson, however, what attracted her more was the demeanour of the artist, not her music:

*Herself*, and not her music, was what we seemed to love – she has an air of *exile* in her mild blue eyes, and a something sweet and touching in her native accent which charms her many friends – “Give me my thatched cottage” as she sang grew so earnest she seemed half lost in song and for a transient time I fancied she *had* found it and would be seen “na mair,” and then her foreign accent made her again a wanderer – ... (L 46)

This account also characterizes Dickinson's poetic response in terms of visual consumption. Perception for her is exercised through a process of losing sight. As her “Perception of an Object costs” (Fr1103B) explains, the object in view is lost in the process of perception. To be able to perceive, to consume intellectually, one has to lose the real image and keep the idealized version in mind:

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<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Le Baron Marsh, a contemporary of Dickinson, could still recall in *The New England Magazine* Lind's charming performance with “its perfect simplicity and self-forgetfulness” forty years later (396).

<sup>109</sup> Marsh described Lind's singing of that song as “matchless,” “the ideal singing of that song” (396).

Perception of an Object costs  
 Precise the Object's loss -  
 Perception in itself a Gain  
 Replying to it's price -

The Object absolute - is nought -  
 Perception sets it fair  
 And then upbraids a Perfectness  
 That situates so far -

As Shira Wolosky notes, in the poem “Dickinson ... questions whether mastery, possession, is indeed perfect ... Absolute possession becomes a mode of distancing, of removal” (2000 139). The perceiver is alienated from the idolized object, since its “Perfectness” is set so fair and far that it becomes unreachable. I would add here that Dickinson seems to also argue for the impossibility of one's absolute possession of or mastery of the object in view. As Robert Weisbuch states, in the poem the object-subject dualism “is replaced by an idea of imperfect, partial relatedness. As soon as the absolute *Object* is perceived, it becomes a mere object” (1972 161). Robin Peel further remarks that the viewer is separated from the perfection of beauty; “it is we who are constructing the beauty” (378). Indeed, one's visual power is reconstructed through this recognition of one's visual limitation. The poem thus echoes Dickinson's observation of Lind's performance through her being “half lost in song”. To gain the perception of “my thatched cottage”, Lind loses herself in the process of home-coming “for a transient time”. To gain perception through Lind's performance, Dickinson also has to imagine losing Lind on the stage for a while.

Dickinson transforms Lind's sentimental performance into a transporting experience of her own. Lind's being seen “na mair” and returning to her beloved “thatched cottage”, in Dickinson's eyes, discloses the powerful moment of dislocation and liberation through one's artistic power. By gaining perception, however, the artist also comes to terms with its dissipation. In “A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident”, Julia Kristeva asks “How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex, and identity?” (298) Dickinson would have agreed with Kristeva on this necessary condition of being an

artist. Lind becomes an eternal wanderer and exile through her dramatic performance, as much as Dickinson positions herself in her poetic mapping an eternal emigrant outside heaven's door. The process of perception seems often a painful separation or even violent struggle. In her discussion of Dickinson's "liberatory poetics", Maria O'Malley explores Dickinson's use of linguistic violence to liberate the mind:

A contradiction ... emerges in the Romantic and post-Romantic emphasis on poetry as a means of both instilling certain perceptions and at the same time liberating the mind. This contradiction lies in language's capacity both to provoke and forestall thought. Dickinson negotiates this paradox by exploding her reader's preconceptions rather than reconfiguring them. Hence, her repeated use of apophasis, or negation, in her poetry. Poets may wish to open up the minds of their readers, but Dickinson reminds us that the mind is not so easily altered. Violence, for Dickinson, must be inflicted on the reader, and this need for violence underscores the ways in which her poetic method twists our understanding of words and alters their textual associations. (67)

Indeed, the processes of instilling and distilling, for Dickinson, are two sides of one coin. The gain of perception is set and done through the reply of its loss. Judith Pascoe observes how Dickinson's conception of herself as an artist was modelled upon Lind's female self-fashioning (2). I would suggest that Lind's self-fashioning also shapes Dickinson's poetic development through Dickinson's understanding of the art-crafting process. From the "self *denial*" of the Chinese men to Lind's being "seen 'na mair'", Dickinson perceives in these performers what she considers essential to a poetic experience, the experience of negation, violence, limitation and dissipation. Her poems delineate how this process of conceptualization also indicates a process of disillusion.

The process of viewing in Dickinson's poems often resembles the process of a food chain, in which her object in view is consumed by her speaker, and her speaker is in turn aware of her being viewed by the presence of readers. This process of

spectatorship as consumption is elaborated in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” (Fr319), in which the speaker aspires to be part of the Aurora Borealis, while reflecting upon her own mortality:

Of Bronze - and Blaze -  
 The North - tonight -  
 So adequate - it forms -  
 So preconcerted with itself -  
 So distant - to alarms -  
 An Unconcern so sovereign  
 To Universe, or me -  
 Infects my simple spirit  
 With Taints of Majesty -  
 Till I take vaster attitudes -  
 And strut upon my stem -  
 Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,  
 For Arrogance of them -

My Splendors, are Menagerie -  
 But their Competeless Show  
 Will entertain the Centuries  
 When I, am long ago,  
 An Island in dishonored Grass -  
 Whom none but Daisies, know -

Charles Anderson asserts that the use of “scientific terms” such as “infection” and “oxygen” here is appropriate since “she is concerned here with the very life of poetry” (51). I would expand this adoption of words from medical science here, suggesting that the process of viewing is depicted in the poem through the notion of physical consumption. Visually, the northern light and the speaker's own creation are both portrayed as shows and “Menagerie” to be watched. Biologically, her aspiration to become part of the scene is described as an infection with “Taints of Majesty”, implying tuberculosis with its taints of blood in the lung.<sup>110</sup> The speaker both

<sup>110</sup> Infection and lack of oxygen indicate mortal weakness, and “taints” might even suggest fevers or respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis. In another poem “A Word dropped careless on a Page” (Fr1268), for example, Dickinson describes writing as an infection that breeds from sentences, “the Malaria” or “Despair” inhaled long after the “Wrinkled” author is gone – “At distances of Centuries”. Eleanor Wilner argues that the comparison between poetry and disease in Dickinson's poems shows “the potency of poetry” – her “verbal alchemy” “by which she could exercise a control over nature and persons beyond the bounds of any moral constraints, whereby her subjects become her victims, her readers her accomplices” (132). I agree that Dickinson's disease metaphor attempts to show the contagious relationship between the author and the reader. However, I would

consumes the view, and is being consumed by her mortal condition, foreshadowing her own oblivion as “An island in dishonored Grass”. The process of consummation in art is achieved through one's consumption and eventual dissipation. Furthermore, “Bronze” and “Blaze”, blacksmithing metaphors, also characterize the consuming and consummating nature of art with its posthumous glory. To become a part of the splendour, or to make one's own, the speaker has to forsake her own life.

As Cynthia Griffin Wolff comments on the ominous implication of the conclusion in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -”, “an artist who is liberated from the Divinity's power may be nothing more than an artist deprived of heroic possibility” (433). Although by calling her works “menagerie”, exotic animals in captivity, the poem seems to imply that the process of creation is one of conquest; however, the speaker is eventually the subjugated one in death. Dickinson was choosing in her draft between “Daisies” and “Beetles” for the last line of the poem (Franklin 337). The imagery of “Beetles”, which Robin Peel considers a version more sinister (18), might highlight a sense of irony in the second stanza, since the corpse of the speaker would become one of the menagerie collections, or one source of fertilizer to be fed on in nature. As shown in the introduction, Dickinson often identifies her speaker with small plants, animals and insects, suggesting the connections and similarities between the powerful and the seemingly insignificant. Mary Allen considers such identification an affirmation of the worthiness of the artist: “Not only does the arrival of animals literally mark the season of growth, but they are shown as regularly performing artists who, without the influence of praise, maintain an artistic integrity” (37). Jane Donahue Eberwein also observes that Dickinson's letters and prose fragments “show her playing with heaven's glow as well as including in questions and aphorisms that habitually linked her own small self with cosmic possibilities” (1987 134). I would add that this playfulness with “heaven's glow”, her connection with the cosmic, is profoundly interwoven with her recognition of one's physical, or even “animalistic” limitation.

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suggest that this “infection,” rather than an exercise of power and control, reveals the physical vulnerability of the creator that consumes her life while creating. On Dickinson and tuberculosis, see George Mamunes's “So has a Daisy vanished”: Emily Dickinson and Tuberculosis (2008 2, 7 & 40). Mamunes associates Dickinson's use of “tint” in a few poems with a signal of consumption.

Artistic creation, for Dickinson, seems to be closely associated with the notion of consumption, an ecological as well as aesthetic process that is at once lethal and monumentalizing, enshrining and entombing.

Both Elizabeth Browning and Henry Thoreau, two of Dickinson's favourite writers, struggled with tuberculosis for the most of their lives and both died when the Civil War broke out (Mamunes 131 & 140-45). The association of creation with consumption in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” might also suggest Dickinson's association of biological and national crisis to elucidate her poetic concepts. As John Shoptaw points out, the use of martial vocabulary in the poem such as “alarms” and “sovereign” suggests an allusion to the initial enlistment of the Union in arms at the start of the Civil War (9-10). By intermingling images of militarism with physical and visual consumption, her poem highlights the violent process of gaining perception. In an 1851 letter about the Auroral light, Dickinson accounted the scenery of the Aurora Borealis as more like a warning than simply a majestic show:

The sky was a beautiful red, bordering on a crimson, and rays of a gold pink color were constantly shooting off from a kind of sun in the centre. People were alarmed at this beautiful Phenomenon, supposing that fires somewhere were *coloring the sky*. The exhibition lasted for nearly 15 minutes, and the streets were full of people wondering and admiring. (L 53)

This alarming “Crimson” in the sky echoes the blaze in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” and the red poppy in the sky in “It was a quiet seeming Day -”. All of them reveal experiences of an impending threat viewing the sublime. Perception here is understood as a process of both visual and physical consumption, exhausting and emblazoning, fusing and consummating. As Carol Quinn comments, the Auroral imagery in Dickinson's poems designates an apocalyptic space (60-61). The northern lights are emblematic of both liberation and dissipation.

Dickinson's poem and letter about the Auroral light reveal an unsteady relationship between the viewer and the scene, despite a transcendental vision promised by her northern lights. As Domhnall Mitchell points out, the northern culture was “in

vogue” throughout the second half of the nineteenth century (2000b 80). The sensational success of Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightingale”, embodied this fashion for the North. Promoted by P. T. Barnum, a purveyor of the exotic, Lind was compared by the *New York Herald* to “one of the great civilizers of mankind – one of those few great and gifted intellects, who, like Columbus, Dante, Raphael, Gallileo, lead on the whole human race by penetrating the dark future and filling it with light”.<sup>111</sup> Claiming that Jenny Lind “came to this country willingly, gladly – her heart was with America and its people, and not with the aged, decaying, effete monarchies of Europe”, the article made Lind “the dream of a great American poet ... of the future”, “before whose magical light every luminary in the musical heaven sinks into shade”. She was a pioneer of civilization who passed the torch of liberty “from the hands of the southern nations” to “the hardy northern races”, like “the magnetic telegraph” which enlightened the virgin soil of America with her “electric” prophecy and poetic vision for a “future empire”. With its racial view of history and geopolitical interpretation, the article informs the hierarchical representation of nation and race in the popular consciousness. Lind's popularity in America was considered not simply a cultural phenomenon but also a manifestation of national destiny. Dickinson might have shared this enthusiasm for the northern culture to some extent, but her “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” reverses the perspective from ascendancy to oblivion, resisting such a rhetoric of cultural and national projects. Her conception of “Majesty” and “Splendors” is emphatically a tainted and earthly one, and so might have been her vision of the future of the American empire.

In a way, Dickinson's Auroral light poem could be read as rewriting the rhetoric of individual or national triumphalism. By presenting individual struggle for self-expression, her poem challenges the geo-politics that permeated the patriotic discourses of her time. The political antagonism between the old and the new world was made explicit in these exhibitions Dickinson encountered. What Dickinson seems to see, however, is not so much an American dream come true, but stories of

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<sup>111</sup> “Jenny Lind, The Northern Light”, *New York Herald*, September 17, 1850. This article is available at *The Lost Museum*: <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/lm/173/>>.

individuals in displacement and exile, as embodied in her Asiatic leopard and northern light gazer. The self-denial of the Chinese men and the wanderer-like Jenny Lind represent self-exile. The “Unconcern” of the Auroral light in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -”, like the self-forgetful Jenny Lind, achieves its sovereignty through its being “distant - to alarms -” and “preconcerted with itself”. This realization of self-reliance is accomplished through self-denial. The master of her menagerie is also its slave. This ambiguous interplay between the viewer and the view is conceptualized in “Ah, Teneriffe!” (F751A), a version that was sent to Susan Dickinson (addressed to “Sue” and signed “Emily”). Teneriffe, a dormant volcano to the west of Africa and an icy existence, turns the pleading speaker, presumably Dickinson herself, into another statue-like entity:

Ah, Teneriffe!  
Retreating Mountain!  
Purples of Ages - pause for *you* -

Sunset - reviews Her Sapphire Regiments -  
Day - drops you her Red Adieu!

Still - Clad in your Mail of ices -  
Thigh of Granite - and thew - of Steel -  
Heedless - alike - of pomp - or parting

Ah, Teneriffe!  
I'm kneeling - still -

Although the retreating mountain is often read as an overpowering and impenetrable divine presence in nature (Wolff 434; Peel 228), I would suggest that the relationship between the viewer and Teneriffe is more contagious and co-present than its apparent subjugation indicates. Their roles seem interchangeable. Although “Mail of Ices”, “Thigh of Granite” and “thew - of Steel” all present a monumental quality of the mountain, they also correspond to the “kneeling still” of the viewer-speaker. By entombing herself in stillness like the mountain, the speaker also performs a ritual of monumentalization with her still/steel body. The supplicant becomes as much mystified and immortalized through her self-inflicted or self-fashioned immobility.

The poem thus delineates an interchange of positions, a transaction of spectator-ship between “*you*” and “*I*”, the mountain in perception and the speaker. The poem reconfigures the power structure between the viewer and the view. The speaker, by kneeling still, becomes a steely counterpart of the regal volcano. As Judith Farr points out, the poem is a love letter to Susan Gilbert: “Vesuvius was one of Emily’s nicknames for Sue, and ‘Teneriffe was its analogue ... she was ‘retreating,’ growing more aloof toward Emily, time had shown” (1992 146). The intimate interaction in the poem between the retreating mountain and “*I*” seems to embody the subtle relationship between Susan and Emily Dickinson in real life.

This interaction depicted in the Teneriffe poem deviates from the hierarchical relation set up by the travellers of Dickinson's time in projecting Teneriffe as a feminine mountain to be explored and conquered by the male-human gaze. Teneriffe was reputed as a mysterious mountain. In the *Atlantic Monthly*, S. G. W. Benjamin describes Teneriffe as “the queen of the Canaries”, portraying its regality through its visual distance:

To ascend this celebrated peak had long been my ambition, as well as, more recently, to discover if the climate and scenery of the queen of the Canaries were equal ... to those of Madeira ... Tenerife, five thousand feet more lofty, is rarely seen at a distance, owing to peculiar atmospheric conditions ... It was therefore almost useless for me to strain my eyes to discover it on the voyage, although the weather was fine ... Erelong Santa Cruz appeared on the shore directly ahead, with the mountains rising behind in ever-ascending scale, and at last the extreme summit of the great cone called the Piton towered before us, clearly cut against the azure of the sky. As the sun rose, the yellow pumice-stone and snow of the little peak assumed a rich roseate hue. The whiteness of the peak gave to it and to the island its name. Tenerife, the white mountain, it was called by the aborigines of Las Palmas, for so it looked to them sixty-eight miles distant ... (330)

Dickinson's ever-retreating Teneriffe resonates with Benjamin's description of its ever-ascending scale, its whiteness and roseate hue in the sunlight. In contrast to Benjamin's desire to “ascend” and “discover” the Queen mountain, however,

Dickinson's poem accentuates an emulating, supplicating and enshrining process. The regal presence of Teneriffe is to be revered and imitated, rather than conquered and dissected. Her perception of an object costs precisely the loss of the object.

Dickinson explores in both "Of Bronze - and Blaze -" and "Ah, Teneriffe!" an alternative form of empowerment that relies not on one's dominance of the view, but on a contagious relationship between the viewer and the view. The northern light viewer emulates the light, as much as the kneeler copies the steeliness and stillness of the mountain. Both types of viewing create the effect of enshrinement that simultaneously enshrouds the viewer. This type of viewing is done through the almost auto-erotic consumption and consummation of oneself. The speaker turns herself into her own menagerie in captivity, which, paradoxically, endows artistic freedom. She is both a viewer and a part of the show. This dynamic process of creation is elaborated in "The Show is not the Show" (Fr1270B), in which the boundary between the viewer and the show becomes indistinguishable:

The Show is not the Show  
 But they that go -  
 Menagerie to me  
 My Neighbor be -  
 Fair Play -  
 Both went to see -

The seeing/being seen dyad is literally "consumed" by Dickinson's radical visual exercise in the poem. Spectatorship is also a form of self-exposure. The poem dissolves the division of visual consumption by turning the audiences into the exotic other, being consumed by the performer/voyeur/speaker. The "Fair Play" the speaker sees is being "fair" when the hunter is turned into the prey and the hierarchy is turned upside down.

Dickinson's voyeuristic speaker can find resonance in Charlotte Brontë's depiction of Lucy Snow in *Villette*, one of Dickinson's favourite novels. Lucy Snow, the main character in the story, habitually hides herself away as an observer and a predator of

the passing world: “Withdrawing to a quite nook, whence unobserved I could observe – the ball, its splendors and its pleasures passed before me as a spectacle” (210). Short of economic means, Lucy Snow turns herself into a visual consumer of all these imperial luxuries surrounding her. However, knowingly or unwittingly, Lucy Snow also falls prey to an elaborate espionage, spying on and being spied upon by other characters till the very end of the novel. A similar focus upon a cyclical progression of visual consumption, an almost Darwinian evolution of perception is developed in Dickinson's poems. Her speaker can morph into the role of both the menagerie and the owner, the consumer and the consumed, the sublime and the viewer in the power game between “both who went to see”. Dickinson's account of Jenny Lind's performance is another example of this visual practice:

Father sat all the evening looking *mad*, and *silly*, and yet so much amused you would have *died* laughing – when the performers bowed, he said “Good evening Sir” – and when they retired, “very well – that will do,” it wasn't *sarcasm* exactly, nor it wasn't *disdain*, it was infinitely funnier than either of those virtues, as if old Abraham had come to see the show, and thought it was all very well, but a little excess of *Monkey!* (L121)

Instead of Jenny Lind's show, her father's reaction is turned into another “excess of *Monkey*” for display. This humour of excess characterizes Dickinson's understanding of seeing as a power of possession in her poems. Both her letters and poems indicate her keen awareness of the triangular power relations between the view, the viewer-artist and her own creation for viewing, based upon a model of visual conquest and consumption.

Dickinson elaborates this power of sight-seeing by revealing its invasive force in her poems. She deliberately adopts the metaphor of “menagerie”, drawing one's attention to the violence of visual dominance. As shown in “I never felt at Home - Below -” in the second chapter, God's telescope turns the earth into a panoptic prison. This all-seeing God is intimidating for its visual imposition. Such emphasis on one's visual possession, however, can also be deceptive. In poems such as “Dew - is the Freshet

in the Grass -" (Fr1102B), Dickinson shows how natural commentators are unable to comprehend the "signs" of nature correctly:

Dew - is the Freshet in the Grass -  
 'Tis many a tiny Mill  
 Turns unperceived beneath - our feet  
 And Artisan lies still -

We spy the Forests and the Hills  
 The Tents to Nature's Show  
 Mistake the Outside for the in  
 And mention what we saw.

Could Commentators on the Sign  
 Of Nature's Caravan  
 Obtain "admission" as a Child  
 Some Wednesday Afternoon.

Charles Anderson reads the poem as the alienation of man from nature (83). Cynthia Griffin Wolff further considers nature in the poem to be deceptive to the poet-speaker with her "feet" (328). I would add that this division between nature and man in the poem dramatizes the imposition of human visual and semiotic interpretation upon nature. The "Mistake" is exacerbated when the speaker proposes to "Obtain 'admission'" to nature's show. By charging what is sacred and private in nature, the poem highlights both the imperial power of viewing and its inadequacy.

The northern lights, Jenny Lind and the Chinese museum, novelties of her time, are turned into spectacles in her poems and letters for visual consumption. However, she re-imagines these tourist encounters in her almost carnivalesque poetic space, in which boundaries between the viewers and the performers, private and public spheres, and commerce and art are allowed to be undermined. The speaker in "Of Bronze - and Blaze -" is consumed in order to be part of the Auroral light. The speaker in "The Show is not the Show" redefines the definition of viewing by turning herself into the real audience. "Dew - is the Freshet in the Grass -" further discloses the ineffectual aspect of viewing, challenging human visual mastery. Her poems embody her collection of "Menagerie" that stares out at readers to question their

complacent understanding of the world.

As shown in the first section of the chapter, this economic force is not only an egalitarian force, but it also results in violating human spirit by reducing nature and art to “Disgrace of Price”, as Dickinson states in “Publication - is the Auction” (Fr788). Her metaphors of consumption, commerce and consumerism play out the intricate relation between the viewer-artist, the view, and artistic creation in various scenarios. From the fabric of God's mind to the tapestries of paradise, from the caged Holy Ghost to Dickinson's menagerie, from the heavenly June Bee to the book of the afterlife, Dickinson maps the commercial onto the natural and the spiritual to emphasize the precarious nature of viewing. Seeing can be an aggressive act, and her understanding of viewing in the context of commercialization, mainly its liberating power and its implicit violence, allows her to explore and even exploit this subtle relation between the viewer and the view in her poems. Although Dickinson condemns the disgrace of price in some poems, she also adopts this mercantile mode pervasively and effectively to capture the otherwise elusive nature of cultural and spiritual property. Michael T. Gilmore observes that towards the mid-nineteenth century, “the commodity form ... solidified its hold on literature: the storyteller and his audience confronted each other solely in the capacity of a seller of goods and potential customers” (17). The dynamics between the viewer and the scene, delineated by Dickinson, corresponds to the financial confrontation between the seller and the customer. In particular, her tourist encounter underscores her reception and perception of the unresolved tension between spiritual ownership, imperial contestation, and financial manipulation. Capitalism enhances the cosmopolitan dimension of the world, but it also puts social and natural relationships at stake. The packaging, marketing and transaction of human consciousness become an enterprise that Dickinson grapples with in her poems.

**“Between my finite eyes -”: Viewing as Possession and Penetration**

Quite a few of Dickinson's poems particularly focus on the violence of viewing. By treating the act of sight-seeing as an invasion rather than empowerment, they flip the experience of viewing inside out. The viewer who seems to be in a dominant position can be turned captive during the process. In his discussion of the tourist gaze, John Urry observes that “the organizing sense within the typical tourist experience is visual: “Sight is viewed as the noblest of the senses, the most discriminating and reliable of the sensuous mediators between humans and their physical environment” in the history of Western societies (146). Dickinson seems to conscientiously obviate such a faith in sight. To counteract this violence of viewing, she transforms viewing into a consuming process for both the viewer and the view in her poems. Dickinson's poem “Before I got my eye put out -” (Fr336A) exemplifies this explosive energy and the consumptive effect of viewing:

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

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

The Meadows - mine -  
The Mountains - mine -  
All Forests - Stintless stars -  
As much of noon, as I could take -  
Between my finite eyes -

The Motions of the Dipping Birds -  
The Morning's Amber Road -  
For mine - to look at when I liked,  
The news would strike me dead -

So safer - guess - with just my soul  
Opon the window pane  
Where other creatures put their eyes -

## Incautious - of the Sun -

As Sharon Cameron notes, the poem refuses death by denying “eye-vision” for “soul-vision” (1992 100 & 137). Michelle Kohler further suggests that to see without limitation is to see with the “compound experience” of one's physical and spiritual vision; however, this complete vision is also a deadly “double vision” (2004 47). Viewing for Dickinson is so powerful that no one could afford to (ab)use it. Furthermore, Dickinson's notion of viewing as consumption here might also be related to one's experience with photography. The natural landscape depicted in the poem reminds one of a photo-shooting scenario or a picture gallery, since being called “the sun picture”, as James R. Ryan points out, photography in the nineteenth century would be associated with the sun (201 & 206).<sup>112</sup> Like museum objects, the panorama of nature is to be taken in and looked at “Between my finite eye” in the poem, which might make the speaker grow cautious “of the Sun”. Urry suggests that “[t]o photograph is ... to appropriate the object being photographed”, which “tames the object of the gaze” (127). Furthermore, as Urry points out, “[p]hotography involves the democratisation of all forms of human experiences, both by turning everything into photographic images and by enabling anyone to photograph them”; for Urry, photography is “a promiscuous way of seeing which cannot be limited to an elite, as art” (128). I would add that in the case of the poem, nature is literally turned into pictures or commodities to be possessed by the viewer, if only momentarily. For a poet who critics such as Betsy Erkkila and Donmall Mitchell assert to be sceptical of democratic masses, this democratic and commercial potential that the photographic way of viewing provides might be indeed too overwhelming for the cautious soul of Dickinson's elite speaker.

Dickinson's dislike of photography might also explain this avoidance of the sun in “Before I got my eye put out”. Helen McNeil comments on her “refusal to be photographed after her seventeenth birthday” that Dickinson “indicated her dislike of reproduction herself” by “visual silence” (76). Christa Vogelius further argues that

<sup>112</sup> Robin Peel also notes that “In the antebellum period, study of the sun was given a scientific boost by the arrival of photography” (225).

Dickinson's "notorious camera-shyness" can be explained through her association of photography with death (27). I would add that this shunning away from "visual" possession might also suggest Dickinson's awareness of the increasing public emphasis on one's visual power over nature. As Urry notes, the growth of "scenic tourism" during the eighteenth century "enables people to take possession of objects and environments". This visualization of travel experience, Urry explains, "facilitates the world of the 'other' to be controlled from afar, combining detachment and mastery"; as Urry explains, "Areas of wild, barren nature, which were once sources of sublime terror and fear, were transformed into what Raymond Williams terms 'scenery, landscape, image, fresh air', places waiting at a distance for visual consumption" (147). James R. Ryan further argues that photography became in certain instances "a tool of both scientific empiricism and Western imperialism" with its "panoptic surveillance and an unambiguous purveyor of imperial vision" (206-07). Dickinson's speaker in "Before I got my eye put out" seems to find the "imperial vision" through her visual survey too overwhelming that it becomes offensive. For Dickinson, this claim to mastery and ownership through visual imposition and photographic prospecting exposes the limitation of human perception. To react against this violence of viewing, the speaker resorts to an even more drastic strategy of rebellion by getting her eye out against the consuming power of the sun. Viewing implies a claim over nature, from which the speaker swerves radically.

In particular, the speaker in "Before I got my eye put out" deviates from a panoramic vision of the world, which is, however, the very basis of a transcendental prospect. In "Politics", Emerson compares a wise man to God's incarnation: "The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy ... He needs no library, for he has not done thinking ... no experience, for the life of the creator shoots through him, and looks from his eyes" (2001 219). Emerson is also critical of militarism; however, he tends to use sight as a metaphoric assertion of one's sovereignty over the world. By assigning the poet with the role of seeing all, Emerson accentuates the poetic ability to perceive the truth in *Nature*: "The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke

that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet” (2001 28). Like Emerson, Dickinson finds seeing very powerful. And like Emerson, Dickinson is sceptical of the ability of photography to represent the object in view truthfully.<sup>113</sup> However, as many scholars point out, Dickinson is also sceptical of the Emersonian confidence in vision. As Michelle Kohler comments, Dickinson's poem is a direct response to and critique of Emerson: “What for Emerson is a vanishing into transparent unity is for Dickinson the vanishing into death, and what for Emerson is the expansive promise of seeing and being everything is for Dickinson an explosion that would end seeing and being altogether”.<sup>114</sup> Cynthia Griffin Wolff also asserts that Dickinson “set herself in opposition to Emerson's optimistic view of nature by appropriating the word 'Landscape’” “in the most mutilated terms” (347). Daneen Wardrop further argues that “Looking is owning, to a transcendentalist, but Dickinson turns this transcendentalist truism on its ear” (2002 152). Indeed, Dickinson surveys, or in Wolff's term, “mutilates” her poetic “property” only to find this Emersonian metaphor implausible. As she writes in “I am afraid to own a Body -” (Fr1050), both the body and the soul are a “Profound - precarious Property -”. The risk of owning is death.

The drastic reaction of Dickinson's speaker in “Before I got my eye put out” indicates Dickinson's understanding of viewing as “taking” – it is based upon an economic relationship. As shown in the second chapter, Mary Loeffelholz points out Dickinson's revision of Emerson's “readerly economics” – his visual claim of property and ownership (12). Indeed, this Emersonian claim of ownership suggests a

<sup>113</sup> In Dickinson's 1862 correspondence with Higginson, Dickinson replied to Higginson's request of her photography: “Could you believe me - without? I have 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? (L268)” As Adam Frank points out, Dickinson is sceptical of the new medium, and “competes with it in offering Higginson a verbal self-portrait that emphasizes what no photograph of the time could render accurately – color” (5). In Emerson's correspondence with Thomas Carlyle in 1846, both Emerson and Carlyle also complained about the “photographic misrepresentativeness” of Emerson's daguerreotypes. See Sean Ross Meehan's “Emerson's Photographic Thinking” (27-29).

<sup>114</sup> Michelle Kohler points out that “each natural image in “Before I got my eye put out” has its counterpart in *Nature*” (2004 49-50).

capitalistic structure that perpetuates the hierarchical power relation between the viewer as the master and the view as the slave, commodity, or the “menagerie” in Dickinson's words. Undeniably, both Dickinson and Emerson challenge conventional ways of seeing. However, they adopt distinctively different rhetorical approaches. I suggest that Dickinson's poetic mapping shifts the focus from the imposing and surveying gaze of the viewer to the consuming and consumptive relationship between nature and the viewer. Instead of submerging in nature, Dickinson's poem delineates a tension that threatens the viewer into explosion at any time. Emerson, conversely, celebrates the empowerment of one's visual consumption in *Nature*: “Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (2001 29). This notion of viewing with a “transparent eyeball” and its forceful sunlight presents an extremely vulnerable situation for Dickinson. This metaphoric consumption of Emerson forces her speaker to blind herself. As Loeffelholz notes, the nineteenth century middle-class “women are what they buy” (20-21). In this case, Dickinson's speaker is threatened to become what she sees. By appropriating this Emersonian moment of transcendence, Dickinson dramatizes viewing as a process of self-consumption.

To some extent, “Before I got my eye put out” responds more closely to Thoreau's warning in *Walden*, when he encourages readers to discern the true light that brings the dawn and opens one's eyes: “The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star” (325). For both Emerson and Thoreau, however, humans are capable of seeing what God sees through nature, a belief that Dickinson does not seem to share. By exploring the position of the seer-consumer-speaker, her poem reveals a potential transformation of the outside world from nature to “sight” and then to self as the sight, a process that exposes the pleasure and danger of viewing as consuming. For Dickinson, one can easily become what one buys and sees. As shown in “My friend attacks my friend!” Dickinson's speaker morphs from a viewer of the

picturesque battlefield into a soldier that would “shoot the human race”. Harold Bloom depicts Dickinson's response to “the maleness of her central precursors” as an “antithetical struggle” (1975 177-78). Alternatively, critics such as Margaret Homans, Mary Loeffelholz and Helen McNeil, as shown in the introduction, propose to see Dickinson's poems as deconstructing this dualistic thinking. I agree that this “maleness”, exemplified in one's visual power, is intricately teased out in Dickinson's economic metaphors to obscure its very division. I would add that her poems disclose Dickinson's conception of vision as a process of co-presence and co-operation between the viewer and the view. As discussed in “Ah, Teneriffe!” their roles are potentially interchangeable because of the contagious and consumptive nature of viewing.

If, as Mary Loeffelholz states, middle-class women in the nineteenth century could only be a consumer rather than a producer of goods, Dickinson's “Before I got my eye put out” seems to suggest a boycott to manufactured products from the patriarchal sun. Walt Whitman's “Song of Myself” offers an alternative with his maternal imagery. Whitman portrays a vehement physical response towards a penetrating sunlight that resembles child birth in one section:

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me,  
If I could not now and always send sunrise out of me.

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,  
We found our own my soul in the calm and cool of the daybreak. (37)

The experience of sublimity is both fertilizing and life threatening. To react against it, Whitman's speaker has to “send the sunrise out”, a gesture Wardrop considers maternal and gestative, resembling the process of reproduction through labour and delivery (2002 39). For Whitman, the sunrise holds the power to impregnate and endanger, penetrate and liberate at the same time. By emulating the sun and ascending, the soul, or our souls in Whitman's all-emcompassing manner, becomes “dazzling and tremendous as the sun”. This “birth-giving” transformation, in contrast to Dickinson's self-deprivation, is eventually elevating and welcoming for Whitman.

For Dickinson, perceptions are always conditioned by one's position. Transcendence is made problematic in her poems to stress the relativity of perspectives and the limitation of perception. Claiming artistic sovereignty, Dickinson's speaker in "Before I got my eye put out" has to place her soul cautiously upon her metaphoric window pane. This seemingly timid gesture is daringly symbolic in the sense that it embodies the process of boundary setting as well as boundary crossing. Turning Emerson's "infinite space" into a framed space, Dickinson gives shape to a panoramic view while acknowledging mortality. Dickinson might have been aware of Higginson's evocation of windows in his Atlantic essays as a metaphor for vision. In "Letter to A Young Contributor", Higginson comments on the beauty of language that "a single word may be a window from which one may perceive all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them" (403). In "Literature as Art", however, Higginson reminds writers of the danger of telling the truth: "If you could paint the sunset before your window as gorgeous as it is, your picture would be hooted from the walls of the exhibition ... the literary artist may almost say, as did the Duke of Wellington when urged to write his memoirs, I should like to speak the truth; but if I did, I should be torn in pieces" (753). Staying beside the window view becomes both a gateway to the glory of nature, and a safety valve that keeps the seer alive. The restricted views in Dickinson poems somehow empower rather than paralyse the viewer. Thus her metaphoric windows are lenses through which her viewer sees the world more effectively. This restriction becomes a source of creative power. In "They called me to the Window, for" (Fr 589), for example, the skyscape becomes both a site for magic shows and a canvas for the speaker's conjecture through her window:

They called me to the Window, for  
 "Twas Sunset" - Some one said -  
 I only saw a Sapphire Farm -  
 And just a Single Herd -

Of Opal Cattle - feeding far  
 Opon so vain a Hill -  
 As even while I looked - dissolved -  
 Nor Cattle were - nor - Soil -

But in their Room - a Sea - displayed -  
 And Ships - of such a size  
 As Crew of Mountains - could afford -  
 And Decks - to seat the Skies -

This - too - the Showman rubbed away -  
 And when I looked again -  
 Nor Farm - nor Opal Herd - was there -  
 Nor Mediterranean -

Inder Nath Kher argues that the poem is about “the creative imagination of the poet” rather than “the sphere of ordinary observation” (71). Barton Levi St. Armand, alternatively, suggests Dickinson's application of the Hudson River school manner to the sky in the poem to show how “natural art surpasses human artifice” (282). Robin Peel further notes that in poems such as this one the mundane and ordinary is transformed into a surreal and exotic “geography of imagination” (217). I would add that the cooperation between the viewer and the sky here is crucial in understanding Dickinson's process of perception. Although the poem credits nature for this heavenly spectacle, the seemingly passive receiver of the show participates as much as nature does. The passive verb tense of “dissolved” and “displayed” is anticipated by the active participation of the speaker's “I looked” and “looked again”. The voyeuristic viewer is subtly transformed into an onlooker to an active participator of the whole show. The sky becomes an interactive contact zone in which the mental power of the attentive speaker interweaves with the natural forces of the wind, the cloud and the setting sun. The viewer's role as an audience morphs into the role of a collaborator of this sky painting.

“They called me to the Window, for” vividly expresses the power of looking as an active as well as interactive gesture of creating. This skyscape of “Sunset” contrasts with the exploding sunlight in the noon in “Before I got my eye put out -”. It is not only picturesque, exotic, transient and mesmerizing, but it also demonstrates a correspondent relationship between the view and the viewer. If the Emersonian sunlight is too dazzling, blinding and imposing, the mellow while mutable hue of the sunset is Dickinson's perfect sky painting. Units of evaluation and expressions of

distance and quantity, such as a “Single” herd, so “vain” a hill, and “such a size” as “Crew of Mountains” could afford, all indicate the attempt of the meticulous viewer to appraise nature, and nature's malleable tendency to resist any single linguistic or visual interpretation. Her sky show involves both visual interaction, creation and erasure, replacing the visual imposition of a photographic mapping. Furthermore, by making the showman indeterminate and anonymous, maybe to avoid being “vain” like the hill cloud, the speaker, and presumably Dickinson herself, shows reluctance to take credit for herself for a show that nature puts on. Domhnall Mitchell argues that “Dickinson’s speakers more generally act less than they are acted upon: they are either attacked, imprisoned and wounded, or forced to be observers, disengaged but also immobilised. The cumulative impression is one of partial privilege but not of power: a feeling of distinction without any concomitant apprehension of the ability to intervene directly or to change” (2006 107). Poems like “They called me to the Window, for”, I would suggest, makes looking more powerful than it seems. If being an observer means being inert and passive, her poem transforms this act of looking into an alternative – a more cooperative way of creation. Gazing is, in a Wordsworthian sense, a prelude to artistic creation, and in an Emersonian sense, owning. Straddling these two types of looking, Dickinson combines the process of viewing with the process of creating in her poems, making spectatorship itself an artistic performance.

What distinguishes Dickinson from many writers of her time is this refusal to identify the centre of power or the source of light that inspires her, including herself. Instead, she chooses to frame this light into a shape that she can handle. As Diana Fuss comments, for Dickinson, “the more limited the space, the more unlimited the speaker” (1998 32). By setting boundaries, Dickinson knows where to look. The window is an anchorage point for her vision. By measuring and surveying through a restricted view, her poems reshape the contours of a transcendental prospect. As mentioned in the introduction, Karl Keller comments that “Emerson gave Emily Dickinson *a way* to believe” (169). I would suggest that Emerson's version of nature serves not only as a paradigm, but also a point of departure for her. His convergence

of natural, national and divine landscapes is a poetic topic for Dickinson to explore in her own poetic estate. For her, a transcendental prospect can only be glimpsed at, not taken or possessed. As “The gleam of an heroic act” (Fr1686) suggests, the sublime is only revealed through a glimpse:

The gleam of an heroic act  
Such strange illumination  
The Possible’s slow fuse is lit  
By the Imagination

Inder Nath Kher uses the poem as an example to explain Dickinson's notion of imagination as a process of mental reconstruction: “Imagination is the fire which burns down the artificial constructs of our day-to-day empirical reality, and creates in their stead symbolic forms through which we can perceive the dark, deep dimensions of our individual souls” (67). I would argue here that the illumination of “The Possible” in the poem does not just destroy the external reality. The phrase “slow fuse” seems to suggest a process of negotiation between reality and imagination, nature and poetry. This “gleam” of heroism might not be captured by the quick flash of a camera, but it could be lit slowly by imagination. The relationship between perception and the image might be seen for Dickinson as a fusing one.

Furthermore, the “slow fuse” of possibility would be annihilated by an Emersonian penetrating sun, like a negative film destroyed by too much exposure to the light. “The gleam of an heroic act” seems to suggest that the Emersonian way of seeing is not only physically impossible, but also metaphorically ineffective in envisaging a heroic or divine vision. James E. von der Heydt remarks that “Dickinson, like any Emersonian writer of nature, seeks to name this impossible doubleness: she knows that she is both a passive and a dynamic perceiver of vast space” (88). However she finds Emerson's idealism attractive, she is also never hesitant in pointing out this visual impracticability of his aesthetic theory in her poems. She revises Emerson's transparent view with her perception through a glimpse rather than a panoramic whole. Hence her seemingly retiring and passive viewer might have actively

participated in the literary, and potentially economic scenery that Emerson has painted.

**“In many and reportless places”: Panorama and Reportless Places**

Dickinson developed in her poems a suspicion towards the notion of the whole, a panoramic vision that was embraced by her contemporary Transcendentalists. This craze for a comprehensive overview was also prevalent in popular travel writings and foreign exhibitions. The Boston Chinese Museum, for example, had as its motto that “words may deceive, but the eye cannot play the rogue” printed on its catalogue cover, providing visitors with an “extensive view of the central flowery nation” with various wax figurers, staged scenes and dioramas. This promotion of a comprehensive view, as William Stowe points out, empowers the viewer through sight-seeing: “Totalizing and envisioning imply domination. Tourists are sightseers: their subjugating gaze reduces individuals, institutions, artworks, and landscapes to bits of knowledge and elevates the tourists and their class, race, gender, and nation to the position of the authoritative knower”. (2007 308) Panorama was in fashion, and this penchant for visual dominance also prevailed in travel writing. In 1856, James Bryce encouraged travellers to produce travel books on “the whole panorama of Europe”, which “confirms, corrects, illuminates, or shades the mental impressions about places and things which have been accumulating for years and years” (43). William Bromwell's *Locomotive Sketches with Pen and Pencil*, the 1854 tour book of the rail route from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, similarly indicated the importance to “give a correct estimate” of American “resources, peculiarities, and institutions” to foreigners, since “seeing is not understanding” (11). This attempt to have an authentic and correct overview, whether it was about China, Europe or America, made seeing the whole a powerful empirical tool to account for the outside world.

Dickinson's poems expose the empirical incompetence of viewing. Dioramas, curiosities and travel books all assert their authority and credibility in their all-encompassing representations, either of a country, a landscape, a culture, or a historic

period of time. Dickinson's scepticism, alternatively, renders such a claim to topographic authenticity and encyclopedic knowledge inadequate. Bromwell's ambition to represent a precise version of America correctly contrasts with her uneasiness with this confidence in human perception. In “Nature' is what We see -” (Fr721B), the speaker argues that nature can only be felt, not represented:

“Nature” is what We see -  
 The Hill - the Afternoon -  
 Squirrel - Eclipse - the Bumble bee -  
 Nay - Nature is Heaven -

“Nature” is what We hear -  
 The Bobolink - the Sea -  
 Thunder - the Cricket -  
 Nay - Nature is Harmony -

“Nature” is what We know -  
 But have no Art to say -  
 So impotent our Wisdom is  
 To Her Sincerity -

As Margaret Homans asserts, the poem “exposes the futility of efforts to master nature by finding linguistic equivalences for it”. Indeed, with three negations, the poem questions human capability “to say”, revealing the gap between sensing and representing. Furthermore, by putting “Nature” in quotation marks, the poem reminds readers of its heavily charged social and cultural connotations. As Homans asserts, Dickinson in the poem is “mocking Emerson's belief that nature 'is made to serve' the ends of whatever argument he happens to be pursuing” (190-91). For the nineteenth-century Americans especially, nature was profoundly associated with one's nationhood. Stowe states that American travellers in the nineteenth century helped establish a landscape tradition initially “by using the magnificence of the American landscape to claim superiority to European scenery” (2009 29). If nature is equated with nation for Americans, Dickinson's poem shows this linguistic equation deeply problematic. In contrast to the Transcendental convergence of nation, nature and God, she separates nature from humans to stress the imposition of human inscription. One can feel nature, but not speak for her.

“Nature” is what We see -” can be seen as a response to a plethora of travel writings and foreign exhibitions in their eagerness to represent the knowledge of the world and to account for the unknown. As Foster Rhea Dulles mentions, one contributor observed in the *Quarterly Review* as early as 1829 that “authorship and traveling are all the fashion” (13). To travel, to see and to write were to own. Since the expansion of steamship capacity in the 1840s accelerated the cultural exchange between the New and Old worlds, commercial, tourist, and missionary trips across the Atlantic and Pacific solidified the popularity of travelogues. Insatiable, James Bryce encouraged travellers to produce more books on foreign travel by stressing their literary significance:

We have little sympathy with the jealousy of many books, which is now considered so very wise to exhibit. We are thankful for any small favor in the way of amusement and instruction, and rarely meet with a volume of travels which does not amply repay perusal ... A permanently valuable book of travels is as rare as a poem that outlasts its author's life, or a play that pleases two generations. (33-34)

It is not surprising that “literary pilgrims” from Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Byrant, James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Emerson to Henry James, as Dulles points out, all contributed copious travel accounts of their experiences overseas to their countrymen, as did numerous guidebooks after the Civil War.<sup>115</sup> Mid-nineteenth-century New England was a prosperous literary as well as financial market, and a large number of publications for travellers had been produced as a response to the flourishing tourist business and improved transportation.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Dulles cites the publication of Pembroke Fethridge' *Harper's Handbook for Travellers in Europe and the East* (1879), and the travel guides of Baedeker and Thomas Cook as examples of the postbellum prosperity in tourism (13-14).

<sup>116</sup> Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray observe that the publishing industry was the fourth largest in Boston by mid-nineteenth-century for the increasing reading public of the New England community (1997 210-67). Ronald J. Zboray also points out the significant impact of the completion of the northeastern rail network in the 1850s for American reading public (1993 9-82).

Dickinson creates her own travel sketches that would outlast her life. However, her tourist mapping displays an alternative way of travel by focusing on glimpses rather than panoramas, on places that cannot be reported or represented. Her natural landscape evades political and cultural inscription, and it is through her poetic mapping of these evasive places, such as the frost, the Auroral light, and the sunset, that Dickinson delineates a genuine human interaction with nature. While her fellow travellers enjoy a bird's eye's view from a dominant position, Dickinson chooses to depict the skyscape which distinctly erases human ownership. In “In many and reportless places” (Fr1404), the viewer experiences nature not through visual imposition but through its almost consumptive and consuming sensation:

In many and reportless places  
 We feel a Joy -  
 Reportless, also, but sincere as Nature  
 Or Deity -

It comes, without a consternation -  
 Dissolves - the same -  
 But leaves a sumptuous Destitution -  
 Without a Name -

Profane it by a search - we cannot -  
 It has no home -  
 Nor we who having once inhaled it -  
 Thereafter roam.

Possibly referring to the sky, the poem “reports” these “reportless places” that cannot be geographically located, and are becoming places of mystery and sacred memory. They are spots that evade public inspection, intrusion or revisitation. By emphasizing one's private connection to these places, the poem becomes a tour guide that paradoxically rejects all kinds of public representation. James McIntosh reads the poem as a peaceful “acceptance” of the speaker's “own predicament as a transient and ignorant creature” (140). Richard E. Brantely, alternatively, calls Dickinson's “sumptuous Destitution” a signature conundrum, which epitomizes her “Late-Romantic Hope” through the “interpenetration” or “coalescence” of hope and despair (28). Indeed, these reportless places seem to imprint their marks on the viewer-

speaker, leaving her both ecstatic and insatiable, if eventually acceptant. As Evan Carton notes, this poem about “reportless places” is itself a report (83). By recording these unnameable places, Dickinson is writing an alternative travelogue of the world. Furthermore, Dickinson's “reportless places” are elusive, fluid and dissoluble locations that can be “inhaled” like the air, creating consuming and consumptive effects resembling the physical reaction of breathing. This imagery of consumption is also present in another poem “A Word dropped careless on a Page” (Fr1268A), in which literary creation is depicted as an infection:

A Word dropped careless on a Page  
 May consecrate an Eye  
 When folded in perpetual seam  
 The Wrinkled Maker lie

Infection in the sentence breeds  
 And we inhale Despair  
 At distances of Centuries  
 From the Malaria -

The imagery of “Infection” and “inhale” here corresponds with the consumptive joy one experiences in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” and “In many and reportless places”. Eleanor Wilner argues that by associating poetry with diseases or black magic, Dickinson recognises her “verbal alchemy” as being “an indecent power by which she could exercise a control over nature and persons beyond the bounds of any moral constraints” (132). I would argue here that this poetic potency for Dickinson does not lie in the power of control. “The Wrinkled Maker” in the poem could also be a victim of her own sacrificial art, which creates both feverish and consumptive effects – potently contagious and deliciously fatal – for the creator as well as the reader after her. As Joanna Yin comments, “Dickinson creates as she deconstructs” (78). Through her notion of consumption, Dickinson's poems convey the vehemence of one's sensuous interaction with both nature and poetry. Furthermore, by defying human search and naming, Dickinson's reportless places in “In many and reportless places” resist the violent intrusion of linguistic definition, public rhetoric and patriotic inscription upon nature. She maps against the (mis)representation of America by

recording many of these “reportless” and unmappable locations. In poems such as “Of Bronze - and Blaze -”, “The nearest Dream recedes - unrealized -”, “It was a quiet seeming Day -”, “One of the ones that Midas touched”, and “They called me to the Window, for”, Dickinson makes the skyscape a prominent feature. As she states in “‘Nature’ is what We see -”, “Nature is Heaven”. The coming and dissolving of the air is one of these locations in nature that can only be inhaled rather than tracked, searched and reported.

Dickinson's “I've known a Heaven, like a Tent -” (Fr257) is a useful example in understanding these reportless places she might have in mind. In the poem, the speaker attempts to capture a heavenly vision of “the Thing” before its dissolution in the air in North America:

I've known a Heaven, like a Tent -  
 To wrap it's shining Yards -  
 Pluck up it's stakes, and disappear -  
 Without the sound of Boards  
 Or Rip of Nail - Or Carpenter -  
 But just the miles of Stare -  
 That signalize a Show's Retreat -  
 In North America -

No trace - no Figment - of the Thing  
 That dazzled, Yesterday,  
 No Ring - no Marvel -  
 Men, and Feasts -  
 Dissolved as utterly -  
 As Bird's far Navigation  
 Discloses just a Hue -  
 A plash of Oars, a Gaiety -  
 The swallowed up, of View.

Viewing here is not a transcendent and ascending experience. On the contrary, it is exhausting and disorienting. Like the mutable window scene in “They called me to the Window, for”, the glimpse of the heavenly vision, possibly the northern light, is like “a plash of Oars”, “swallowed up” out of view. The “miles of Stare” and “the swallowed up, of View” embody the blinding effect of viewing and the blank

aftermath of the retreating show. Echoing her “sumptuous Destitution” in “In many and reportless places”, the heavenly spectacle exemplifies such a reportless place in North America that dazzles and confounds her viewer through visual consumption. Cynthia Griffin Wolff associates “Jesus's Crucifixion” with Dickinson's imagery of carpentry in “I've known a Heaven, like a Tent -”. As Wolff notes, “the ancient myth of the redeemer Who came only to depart and thus affirm our desolation” (303-04). I would add that this bleak viewing experience in the poem might also be related to Dickinson's potential reading of and response to Helen Hunt Jackson's travelogue *Bits of Travel at Home*. Jackson describes the view of the dissolving Auroral light outside her window in Bethlehem, Northampton one morning in a manner similar to Dickinson's sky show:

As I write, the air is full of whirling leaves, brown and yellow and red. The show is over. The winds like noisy carpenters, are taking down the scenery. They are capricious and lawless workmen, doing nothing for a day or two, and then scurrying about madly by night to make up for lost time. Soon the naked wood of the stripped trees will be all that we shall see to remind us of last week's pomp and spectacle. But the thing next in beauty to a tree in full leaf is a tree bare; its every exquisiteness of shape revealed, and its hold on the sky seeming so unspeakably assured; and, more than the beauty of shape and the outlining on sky, the solemn grace of prophecy and promise which every slender twig bears and reveals in its tiny gray buds.  
(194)

Brought up in a religious family (Philips 53-54), it is not surprising to see that Jackson would make a connection between Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, with the appearance of the Auroral light. Her hope for the assuring promise of a risen God, however, is dimmed into Dickinson's blank sky that swallows the view up, an expression that Wolff suggests to affirm the Creator as “some unknown predator” (304). Michelle Kohler further remarks that Dickinson's poem rearticulates “the teleological mode of vision in which America's special destiny is manifest on the continent”. As Kohler argues, in poems such as this one, “North America is typified by repeatedly perplexed, stranded viewers” (2010 33-34). Jackson's relocation of God's New Jerusalem in North America seems to have disoriented Dickinson's

armchair tourist-viewer.

The North American skyscape in “I’ve known a Heaven, like a Tent -” (Fr257) offers Dickinson a viewing experience that consumes the view and exhausts the viewer, resisting the spiritual confirmation of Jesus’ resurrection. This spiritual-aesthetic experience of viewing as consumption in such reportless places is described in another poem “By my Window have I for Scenery” (Fr849), in which another type of consumption – the commercial consumption of spices – is evoked:

By my Window have I for Scenery  
 Just a Sea - with a Stem -  
 If the Bird and the Farmer - deem it a “Pine” -  
 The Opinion will serve - for them -

It has no Port, nor a “Line” - but the Jays -  
 That split their route to the Sky -  
 Or a Squirrel, whose giddy Peninsula  
 May be easier reached - this way -

For Inlands - the Earth is the under side -  
 And the upper side - is the Sun -  
 And it’s Commerce - if Commerce it have -  
 Of Spice - I infer from the Odors borne -

Of its Voice - to affirm - when the Wind is within -  
 Can the Dumb - define the Divine?  
 The Definition of Melody - is -  
 That Definition is none -

It - suggests to our Faith -  
 They - suggest to our Sight -  
 When the latter - is put away  
 I shall meet with Conviction I somewhere met  
 That Immortality -

Was the Pine at my Window a “Fellow  
 Of the Royal” Infinity?  
 Apprehensions - are God’s introductions -  
 To be hallowed - accordingly -

In *The Poetics of Spice*, Timothy Morton associates the spice trade with the emergence of consumerism and Romantic poetry, remarking that spice “participates in discourses of spectrality, sacred presence, liminality, wealth, exoticism, commerce and imperialism” (9). As Morton comments, “For Keats and Percy Shelley, to talk about spice was to talk about capitalism, and most notably, consumerism and luxury” (10). Dickinson's poem, in a similar way, connects the spice wind with exoticism, commerce and spiritualism, turning the window into a port of geographical, commercial and religious transactions. Judith Farr points out that poems like this one “coupled the near with the far – Amherst and the South Seas, the forest of the present with the Bible's oaks and cedars” (2004 23). As Farr notes, the view of the sky with “the tree's commerce of spice” in the poem suggests “the exotic myth of a prelapsarian Latin America, established by the landscape tradition of the 1860s” (1992 297). Indeed, Dickinson's window view becomes her gateway to an exotic tropical heaven. However, the voice of the spice “to affirm” in the first half of the poem is thwarted by the wind of doubt within in the second half. As James McIntosh points out, this poem is “about apprehension all along” (143). “Sight”, “Odors” and “Voice” of spice – symbols of exoticism and luxury, become less affirming than confounding. They are the “dumb” definition of divinity.

Dickinson's views of these reportless places, whether in North or South America, Amherst or Bethlehem, seem to either dissolve into blankness, or evoke uncertainty and apprehension. The indeterminacy of location and definition in her poems embodies a diffusion of faith from the centre of God to the peripheral space of “Peninsula”. The “coercive and critical rhetoric of Calvinism”, Susan Manning states, reduces the world “to an enigmatic spectacle, the self to a spectator and other people to spectres whose lack of solidity and uncertain significance continually entice and decoy the search for objective truth” (1990 107). Dickinson records such poetic “spectres” that, like the Auroral light and “Odors” of “Spice”, entice and evade human search at the same time. As Roland Hagenbüchle comments, the essence of Dickinson's work “is a linguistic quest that focuses intensely on semantic boundaries ... one of the allurements (but also one of the difficulties) of her poetry is

its liminal or threshold quality” (34). This threshold quality is most literally illustrated in her sightseeing outside her metaphoric window, which might symbolize linguistic definition or visual limitation. What is beyond the window frame, nevertheless, remains a mystery.

### **“Vesuvius at Home”: Volcanic and Narcotic Consumption**

Dickinson's interest in the giddy or even blinding view is manifested in another two images that reoccur in her poems, the volcanic and the narcotic. As shown earlier in this chapter, her viewing process is depicted through metaphors of not only consumerism, but also the consuming and consumptive effect of creation. In “Volcanoes be in Sicily” (Fr1691), Dickinson elaborates this poetics of consumption by conceptualizing her intellectual contemplation as volcanic consumption, which Hsuan L. Hsu compares with Herman Melville's “Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand” in *Moby Dick* (18):

Volcanoes be in Sicily  
And South America  
I judge from my Geography  
Volcanoes nearer here  
A Lava step at any time  
Am I inclined to climb  
A Crater I may contemplate  
Vesuvius at Home

Wendy Barker regards Vesuvius as a fiery centre of Dickinson's Self that “does not only exist across the Atlantic” (1987 119). I would suggest that Dickinson's transatlantic sight-seeing at home – this juxtaposition of Sicily and South America and Amherst, also highlights the proximity that Dickinson places herself beside the world.<sup>117</sup> The eruptive consumption of her literary volcano, in particular, designates Dickinson's viewing and mapping as an intellectual tour. In the poem, Dickinson plays with the meanings of consumption on various levels. According to Noah

<sup>117</sup> Hsuan L. Hsu suggests that Dickinson's “My Geography” in the poem might draw on the textbook *System of Modern Geography* by S. Augustus Mitchell, used at Mount Holyoke Seminary, or Samuel Griswold Goodrich's “Peter Parley” geography books (212).

Webster's 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, the dictionary used in the Dickinson household, the word "consumption" has three meanings:

1. The act of consuming; waste; destruction by burning, eating, devouring, scattering, dissipation, slow decay, or by passing away, as time; as, the consumption of fuel, of food, of commodities or estate, of time, &c.
2. The state of being wasted, or diminished. Etna and Vesuvius have not suffered any considerable diminution or consumption. Woodward.
3. In medicine, a wasting of flesh; a gradual decay or diminution of the body; a word of extensive signification. But particularly, the disease called phthisis pulmonalis, pulmonic consumption, a disease seated in the lungs, attended with a hectic fever, cough, &c.

Her speaker is not only a consumer-tourist, as indicated in the first meaning, but she also practices the second and third definitions, when the process of contemplation becomes eruptive mentally and consumptive physically.<sup>118</sup> With "Vesuvius at home", the poem converges her interior travel with geological and physical consumption. Echoing her "sumptuous Destitution" in "In many and reportless places", this metaphoric volcano embodies Dickinson's fusion of multi-layered meanings of consumption.

Dickinson explores the notion of consumption as a process of creation in several of her poems, many of them borrowing the Romantic trope of candlelight and artistic creation. As shown in "Of Bronze - and Blaze -" and "Ah, Teneriffe!" perception is addictive, infective and lethal. In "The Lamp burns sure - within -" (Fr247), "the busy Wick" of the imagination is lit and burned at the same time "At its phosphoric toil!" The "Slave" that labours to "supply the Oil" is transformed into the mental labour of the poet who "burns golden - on -/ Unconscious that the oil is out -". The Romantic notion of the creative power as an inner light is further revised into her

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<sup>118</sup> George Mamunes, for example, suggests reading Dickinson's imagery of the volcanic eruption as "a gush of blood from the lung" (6).

notion of consumption in “The Poets light but Lamps -” (Fr930), in which not only the oil, but also the poets who “stimulate” the lamps of inspiration eventually “go out”, leaving “the Wicks” to disseminate their “Circumference”. The subservient function of the poet in these poems deviates from the Romanticist and Transcendentalist notion of the poets as sovereigns standing at the centre of the world. Images of burning, toiling and going out contrast the dissemination of golden lights to highlight the process of consumption required by the power of creativity. In another poem “Essential Oils - are wrung -” (Fr772), the speaker emphasizes the cooperative efforts of artistic expressions. The “Attar from the Rose” that can “Make Summer” is not “wrung” and “expressed by Suns - alone -”. “It is the gift of Screws” that makes art last, when “The General Rose - decay -” and “When the Lady lie/ In Ceaseless rosemary -”. Again, the images of everlasting art in “Essential Oils” and “Ceaseless rosemary” parallel the decay of a common rose and the mortality of the lady. Consummation of art demands the very physical sacrifice of the artist.

In fact, Dickinson might have experienced some physical illness resembling tuberculosis herself. She had been forced to leave school in 1845-46 due to poor health, during which she paid an extended visit to Boston for recuperation. Two years later, her cough returned and she had to go home twice from Mount Holyoke, the second time for good (Habegger 148-49; Mamunes 30-32). As stated earlier, several of Dickinson's favourite writers, such as Elizabeth Browning and Henry Thoreau, died of tuberculosis. Samuel Bowles and Helen Hunt Jackson both migrated to the west and Europe, in search of a climate cure for their respiratory problems.<sup>119</sup> Several of Dickinson's family members on her mother's side and quite a few of her schoolmates also suffered from symptoms of consumption from a young age (Mamunes 22-30). With such a fatal disease looming in the background, Dickinson might have written such an anxiety of a potential consumptive death into her poems.

Opium in Dickinson's time was often used to release the consumptive symptom of

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<sup>119</sup> About Samuel Bowles' health problem, see George Mamunes's “*So has a Daisy vanished*”: *Emily Dickinson and Tuberculosis* (62). About Helen Hunt Jackson's illness, see Kate Phillips's *Helen Hunt Jackson: a Literary Life* (19-21).

tuberculosis. As George Mamunes suggests, Dickinson might have taken laudanum for her lung problem, since it was a prescription quite commonly available as a cough suppressant at that time (31-32). The public attitude toward opiate consumption had evolved throughout the nineteenth century. Aletha Hayter notes that at the beginning of the nineteenth century opium was still not considered a dangerous addictive drug, but a household supply very much like the use of aspirin today (30). Keith McMahon also points out that before the 1870s opium was considered in England and the United States as at worst a “bad habit” (39). As shown earlier in the chapter, despite its anti-opium campaign, the Chinese Museum Dickinson visited also made opium sound irresistible. Opium was depicted as a lethal attraction: “A more seductive luxury than opium cannot exist”, for it brought “the most delightful dreams” before the smoker became “a slave to the drug” (66-67). This ambivalent attitude towards opium was most vividly portrayed by Thomas De Quincey. He called opium the “dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain”, comparing the taste of opium to “an apocalypse of the world within me!” The association of opium with Romantic and Victorian writers might have further mystified the use of the drug as a source of literary creativity. Although De Quincey made clear at the beginning of his autobiography that opium-eating did not make a dull person more intelligent,<sup>120</sup> the flirtation between drug use and Romantic inspiration had been imprinted in the popular psyche.

Dickinson would have been aware of the controversial use of opium for leisure and medicinal effects alike. As mentioned in the introduction, in the catalogue of the Chinese museum, John Peters referred to De Quincey as one of the authorities on the danger of opium addiction (67). A few years later, Dickinson actively sought *The Confessions of an Opium Eater* by De Quincey,<sup>121</sup> a topic I will pursue further in the fourth chapter. Dickinson's interest in narcotic consumption might also have been

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<sup>120</sup> As De Quincey states in *Confessions of An English Opium-Eater*, “If a man 'whose talk is of oxen' should become an opium-eater, the probability is that (if he is not too dull to dream at all) he will dream about oxen” (2009 54).

<sup>121</sup> In 1858, Dickinson made a request of the copies of De Quincey's *Klosterheim* and *The Confessions of an Opium Eater*.(L191) See also Jack L. Capps, *Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836-1886* (81).

related to its exotic representation in the press of her time. George Parson Lathrop, the son-in-law of Nathaniel Hawthorne, had an article in *Scribner's Monthly* about his venture into an opium den in 1880 and his observation of these opium-smokers:

From one of these a lean, wan face ... stares out upon us with terrible eyes – eyes that dilate with some strange interior light; ferocious yet unaggressive eyes; fixed full upon us, yet absolutely devoid of that unconscious response for which we look in human eyes ... This is the gaze of what is called an ‘opium devil’ ... though human blood runs in his veins, it is little better than poppy-juice ... All are seeking oblivion ... (417)

Although it is not certain if Dickinson had ever read Lathrop's article, she had referred to one of Lathrop's poems in a letter to the Norcross cousins, and she was certainly aware of the association between narcotic visions and their consuming effects upon the human body.<sup>122</sup> In *Our New West*, Samuel Bowles portrayed an alternative version of a Chinese opium smoker in his most excited and frightening state:

The wildly brilliant eye, the thin, haggard face, and the broken nervous system, betray the victim to opium-smoking; and all tense, all excited, staring in eye and expression, he was almost a frightful object, as we peered in through the smoke of his half-lighted little room, and saw him lying on his mat in the midst of his fatal enjoyment. (408)

The opium den became another tourist spectacle. These opium-smokers were not only consumed physically by the use of narcotics, but also visually by the public as exotic curiosities. The narcotic vision perceived by opium users, and its consequently devastating bodily effect, populated the social and cultural imagination towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Such brightened but also vacant gazes of opium smokers also characterize Dickinson's poetic mapping of a world with its opaque visions and blinding effects. Her depictions of the “miles of Stare” in “I've known a Heaven, like a Tent -”, and

<sup>122</sup> Dickisnon referred to George Parson Lathrop's elegy in a letter to the Norcross cousins in 1881. See Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (673). See also Barton Levi St. Armand, *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society* (41).

the poppy in the cloud in “It was a quiet seeming Day -”, for example, suggest a mesmerizing and almost narcotic experience of blankness that is also typically seen in opium users' eyes. Dickinson's poems about the sunset and the window views, Robin Peel notes, are also “visionary” and “dreamlike”, similar to drug-induced poetry (217). I suggest here that this popular portrayal of opium gazes might serve as an inspiration for Dickinson's poetics of eruption and consumption. The volcanic eruption in “Volcanoes be in Sicily”, like the earthquake in “It was a quiet seeming Day -”, makes poetic vision apocalyptic, explosive, and dissipating. The heroic moment, like a narcotic moment, can only be glimpsed through a combusted blaze that is both burning and dying. Dickinson's “His oriental heresies” (Fr1562A), a poem often regarded as an example of the poet's experience of uplifting moments in life (Brantley 2004 111), delineates this dynamic relation between narcotic consumption and its apocalyptic vision. Possibly referring to flowers of an eastern origin in her garden, the “oriental heresies” contain a liberating energy in nature:<sup>123</sup>

His oriental heresies  
 Exhilarate the bee  
 And filling all the Earth and sky  
 With gay apostasy

Fatigued at last a clover low  
 Ensnare his jaded eye  
 Sweet homestead where the butterfly  
 Betakes himself to die.

Intoxicated with the peace  
 Surpassing revelry,  
 He spends the evening of his days  
 In blissful revelry,

Recounting nectars he has known  
 And attars that have failed,  
 And honeys, if his life be spared,

<sup>123</sup> In her 1880 letter, Dickinson commented that “the Flowers” were “like Asia” (L650). In an 1882 letter, she expected the blooming “Exuberance” of “an Eastern Creature” in her soil again (L746). In another note, she claimed that “The Orient is in the West” (L978). In fact, the first flower the ambitious botanist pressed was the *Jasminum* or jasmine, the Asian tropical flower. For more on Dickinson's use of Asiatic imagery, see Rebecca Patterson's *Emily Dickinson's Imagery* (156-57). On Dickinson's herbarium, see Judith Farr's *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (2004 99).

He hungers to attain.

Although Dickinson often uses her “bee” imagery to depict drinking and the delight of intoxication in other poems,<sup>124</sup> this “oriental heresies” here might also refer to the narcotic “intoxication” that had spurred the curiosity of the American public into the opium den in the second half of the nineteenth century. In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey recounted years later his opium-taking enjoyment in Liverpool: “In after years ... I yielded to my natural inclination for a solitary life. And, at that time, I often fell into these reveries upon taking opium ... I have sate, from sun-set to sun-rise, motionless, and without wishing to move” (2009 99). For De Quincey, such narcotic moments detached him from “the uproar of life,” from “the tumult, the fever, and the strife”, bringing “a respite granted from the secret burthens of the heart; a sabbath of repose; a resting from human labours”. As De Quincey explained, the hope of life was “reconciled with the peace which is in the grave” in these reveries; he philosophised them as “a tranquillity that seemed no product of inertia, but as if resulting from mighty and equal antagonisms; infinite activities, infinite repose” (2009 100). Dickinson was also a lover of revelry. MacGregor Jenkins, who knew Dickinson when he was a child, observed that “We children often saw her at sunset, standing at the kitchen window, peering through a vista in the trees to the western sky” (St. Armand 264). As mentioned in the introduction and will be explored further in the fourth chapter, Dickinson would have been interested in De Quincey, who also led a relatively more solitary life and embraced the dark aspect in life. The heretic bee that is “Intoxicated with the peace/ surpassing revelry” in Dickinson's poem resembles an opium-intoxicated De Quincey, some addict who “spends the evening of his days/ In blissful revelry”, recollecting his hopes in the past and conjecturing peace in the grave.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the aversion towards the use of opium in

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<sup>124</sup> Richard Brantley points out that “Dickinson's characteristic image of the humble-bee symbolizes best, perhaps, her revivalistic intoxication with the religion of nature” (2004 110). Dickinson's “bee” poems such as “I taste a liquor never brewed,” (Fr 207) and “We - Bee and I - live by the quaffing” (Fr 244) and “A Drunkard cannot meet a Cork,” (Fr 1630) are further discussed by Donhmall Mitchell in relation to the temperance movement in Dickinson's time.

America would contribute to the exclusion of the Chinese immigration in 1882.<sup>125</sup> Dickinson's word choice of “heresies” and “apostasy” in her “His oriental heresies”, written around 1881, could also be read as an evocation of racial, religious and social nonconformity that isolated and eventual excluded the Chinese immigrants in America, as discussed in a previous section. By exoticizing and orientalizing the bee's ecstasy, the poem implies that the death of the bee is an ideological martyrdom, whether it dies for art or its own ideal. As Vivian Pollak notes, the Orient in “His oriental heresies” “functions as a reminder of an exotic world elsewhere, which is more willing to indulge the heretical sexual and political hungers of a woman like herself” (2000 86). Like another Asiatic nonconformist, the leopard in “Civilization - spurns the Leopard!” discussed in this chapter earlier, the intoxicated bee is also an apostate who, resembling the unassimilating, rebellious or even treacherous racial others in America, spurns Christian civilization.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, by spreading his apostasy and meeting his death, the bee seems to fulfil his destiny in a cyclical manner, an “oriental” fashion that is similarly depicted in another poem “This quiet Dust was Gentlemen and Ladies” (Fr1090B):

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<sup>125</sup> During the 1870s, when the “Chinese question” was crystallized on a national scale, as Stuart Creighton Miller observes, Chinese opium smoking took the place of Irish whiskey drinking to be a disturbing social and political issue in America (199). In *The Opium Debate And Chinese Exclusion Laws In The Nineteenth-Century American West*, Dinan L. Ahmad further points out that opium serves as one of the important incentives for the legislations to exclude the Chinese in the 1880s (51-76).

<sup>126</sup> Interestingly enough, Dickinson's reclusion has been associated with her Asian temperament. Christopher Benfey, for example, considers Dickinson's “reclusive posture” akin to Asian aesthetic practice: “[h]er retreat from society, her self-imposed seclusion, reminds us of the Chinese and Japanese tradition of the scholarly recluse, the sophisticated artist-writer who turns his or her back on the compromises exacted by a corrupt public world, electing to pursue instead the more private and eccentric satisfactions of art and self-discovery” (2007 82-3). As mentioned earlier, Hiroko Uno also points out the potential influence of Buddhism by the Chinese museum Dickinson visited in Boston on Dickinson's renunciation of society (2008 57-61). Yanbin Kang further relates Brita Lindberg-Seyersted's observation of the reducing presence of “I” in Dickinson's later poems to “the spirit of Daoism and of classical Chinese poetry that expresses Daoist ambience”. As Kang argues, “Dickinson often reduces the first person singular pronoun in late poems, in an effort to withdraw” (76). Alternatively, Inder Nath Kher responds to Northrop Frye's comment on Dickinson's “Oriental” “manner of existence”, arguing that “without trying to make her look like an Indian or a Chinese poet, her Oriental manner should mean a certain way of life in which one apprehends the paradoxical or seemingly duplicate nature of reality, not by way of passive acceptance of creation but by active participation in its process in which there are contradictions, ironies, and tensions” (129).

This quiet dust was Gentlemen and Ladies  
 And Lads and Girls -  
 Was laughter and ability and Sighing  
 And Frocks and Curls.

This Passive Place a Summer's nimble mansion  
 Where Bloom and Bees  
 Exist an Oriental Circuit  
 Then cease, like these -

This “oriental circuit” characterizes the cycle of nature, transforming an active and boisterous summer “mansion” into a “Passive Place”. “This Passive Place”, like one of these “reportless places”, brings joy but leaves one in “sumptuous Destitution”. Dickinson convolutes visual and physical, volcanic and narcotic consumption in her poetic mapping to explicate the process of gaining perception through dissipation. She shapes her poems into various circuses, and expects her readers to look at her menageries, to consume, to perceive, perhaps to sigh and eventually to be “infected”, like “The Wrinkled Maker” herself centuries later.

The notion of consumption fashions Dickinson's poetic viewing and mapping, since both struggle and labour, joy and luxury lie at the very heart of her creative production. From the militant chase of the June Bee in “The nearest Dream recedes - unrealized -”, to the fatality of the oriental apostate in “His oriental heresies”, visions are not courted with a Wordsworthian tranquil contemplation or preserved through the Emersonian submergence in nature, but fought for with vehement. Dickinson's tourist personae show how her poetic and social concerns are intricately related to her understanding of different modes of consumption – commercial, physical, and geological – which in turn shape her poetic modes and strategies. As Gordon observes, Dickinson’s poems open up “a mid-space between experience and imagination” (109). Her imagery of tourism and consumerism plays a significant role in the formation of her poetic perception. Her poetic mapping of spirituality goes in tandem with the economic evaluation and exploitation of the other and the theatrical presentation of exotic spectacles. As William Stowe states, “Successful travel ... combines the satisfactions of the free, imaginative construction of experience with

the joys of shopping” (2007 306). Dickinson's travel metaphors are closely linked with the emergence of consumer culture, in which physical, social, and cultural values clash and coalesce into a carnivalesque as well as a tapestry-like synthesis of a cosmopolitan society.

The Chinese museum and Jenny Lind's tours, along with guide books and travelogues, showcase the operation of the New England cultural enterprise that was intertwined with the expansion of capitalism. They also shed some light on Dickinson's understanding of consumerism and consumption as forms of both liberation and oppression, whether they are inflicted upon the self or the other. By exploring the notion of consumption on various levels, Dickinson's poetic mapping encourages a mutual, contagious, co-present and interactive mode of viewing the world; and this intimate relationship will be my focus in the next chapter. I will explore her poems of visitation and reception, examining the relativity and interchangeability of perspectives in her writing. I intend to show how her poems exceed social boundaries to travel through planetary possibilities.

## Chapter IV

### “Exactly - as the World”: Dickinson's Global Mapping and Neighbouring

#### Introduction: “I saw no Way—”: Hemispheric Reversal

“As a ship aground is battered by the waves”, Emerson states in “Intellect”, “so man, imprisoned in mortal life, lies open to the mercy of coming events” (1857 297). Dickinson's poems convey a similar sense of vulnerability. However, as mentioned in the introduction, she clings to the sense of physical imprisonment, accentuating the impossibility of unification with nature, either through the Emersonian transparent eyeball, or the Wordsworthian dancing with daffodils. Although poems such as “To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee” (Fr1779) and “Volcanoes be in Sicily” (Fr1691) highlight the constructedness of place,<sup>127</sup> she also accentuates the physicality of the environment in some other poems by turning nature into a global traveller that visits the private chamber of her speaker. The physical intensity of this interactive relationship between one and nature is the focus of this chapter. Her poems about visitors from nature offer a topographic paradigm to evaluate and adjust one's position in and relation to the concrete and rotating earth. This chapter thus examines her metaphoric neighbouring of the world, showing how her poems explore a more tangible interconnection with the moving earth.

Despite her famously self-imposed isolation, Dickinson's spatial imagination gestures towards a planetary environment beyond her social context. She seems profoundly interested in a volatile globe. In one of her most enigmatic poems “I saw no Way - The Heavens were stitched -” (Fr633), Dickinson imagines the speaker “I” being tossed out like a ball onto the surface of the universe, or “the circumference” of the

<sup>127</sup> Edward Hitchcock has a coloured diagram of a volcano at the very beginning of the book, showing “sections of the earth's crust”. Dickinson might have had this diagram in mind when she wrote about the Volcanic poem. Another potential inspiration is *Familiar Lectures on Botany* (1829) by Mrs. Almira Lincoln, Dickinson's botanical textbook at Mount Holyoke seminary and Amherst Academy. As Elizabeth A. Petrino points out, the frontispiece of the book “depicts a map of Chimborazo, a volcano in Ecuador, suggesting the book's importance for the emerging poet's interest in topography” (2004 108).

speaker's "globed mind", as Robert Weisbuch calls it (1972 164):

I saw no Way - The Heavens were stitched -  
 I felt the Columns close -  
 The Earth reversed her Hemispheres -  
 I touched the Universe -

And back it slid - and I alone -  
 A Speck upon a Ball -  
 Went out upon Circumference -  
 Beyond the Dip of Bell -

The poem echoes Emerson's depiction of human consciousness as a pendulum in "Experience": "The consciousness in each man is a sliding scale, which identifies him now with the First Cause, and now with the flesh of his body; life above life, in infinite degrees" (2001 208). The mobilized poetic space in this poem is a typical example of her experimentation with this Emersonian vacillation between the physical and the mental, the bodily and the spiritual. Furthermore, this elasticity of her poetic space and the indeterminacy of one's location, as shown in the poem, is also deeply engaged in the perception of her time towards a globe of uncertainty and instability. In Hawthorn's novel *Blithedale Romance* (1852), a copy of which is also in the Dickinsons library (Farr 2004 158), his character Coverdale similarly complains about the vortex-like existence of his residence in Blithedale:

It was impossible, situated as we were, not to imbibe the idea that everything in nature and human existence was fluid, or fast becoming so; that the crust of the earth in many places was broken, and its whole surface portentously upheaving; that it was a day of crisis, and that we ourselves were in the critical vortex. Our great globe floated in the atmosphere of infinite space like an unsubstantial bubble. No sagacious man will long retain his sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old standpoint. (108-09)

As Sam Halliday observes, the phraseology of Hawthorne's characters such as Coverdale and Clifford Pyncheon echoes Marx's "All that is solid melts into air" in

*The Communist Manifesto* (1848). They share “a perception that the category of matter is historically outmoded” (123). Dickinson's poetic landscape explores such a fluid and elastic space that had been popularized by her contemporary writers.

“I saw no Way - The Heavens were stitched -” discloses an attempt to hold onto such a bubble-like floating globe, while expressing the desperation and inefficacy of this endeavour. Her acute awareness of this human limitation brings her back from being an aspiring viewer of natural wonders, to a struggling individual groping for a tangible earth. Christopher Benfey states that like Emerson, Dickinson is a poet of mood (1984 23). This poetic stress on mood and atmosphere, I would suggest, is also directly rooted in Dickinson's understanding of the fluidity of the material world; and “I saw no Way - The Heavens were stitched -” helps illuminate her attention to the physicality of the environment by portraying an electrified atmosphere that threatens to reverse the globe. As Edward Hitchcock observes in *The Religion of Geology*, the “true nature of electricity” is most conveniently understood “as a fluid” (420). Dickinson might have perceived the relationship between the universal energy and the human mind in terms of this electric fluidity. Suzanne Juhasz remarks that the poem “calls attention to the mind’s fluid structure” (77). Carol Quinn, alternatively, points out the possibility of reading the poem as a response to the Aurora Borealis. Since the northern lights result from the instability of the magnetic North pole, the irregular electric charges in the polar area also make hemispheric reversal possible (63-68). With its juxtaposition of the mind with the planet, the poem pushes the physical and metaphysical boundary to its extreme. It is this close correspondence between the mind and the universe in motion that I would explore more in this chapter. I suggest that the elasticity of the mind in her poems is understood in terms of an immediate link with electric charges, chemical substances and planetary forces.

Like many of her contemporary writers, Dickinson's poems exhibit how the macroscopic world reflects and embodies the microscopic one in our heads. This intimate relationship between the inside and the outside is radically shaped by her electric and atomic conception of the world. Although Dickinson does not seem to

share the Transcendental belief in one's submergence in nature and God, she also states in a letter that "Travel why to Nature, when she dwells with us?" (L321). The relation between the inside and the outside, home and travel, paradise and earth, for Dickinson, is perceived in both oppositional and relational terms. She turns the telescope of human perception around not only to examine the interiority of the mind, but also to magnify one's position in relation to a cosmic world. Dickinson's cartographic imagination is conducted not through the imposition and measurement of the human eye upon nature, but through its opposite, the reversal and inversion of the commanding gaze. By mapping undetermined spaces, her poems inform her understanding of individual connections to the immediate and fluctuating environment.

This topographic approach of Dickinson can be seen in the light of Kenneth White's geo-poetics. White elucidates the notion of geo-poetics by highlighting the significance of sensing one's space:

It means becoming aware of the expansion and the singularisation of our universe-multiverse ... a sensation of immensity and incommensurability ... a sense of relativity and topology. It means, globally, a heightened sensitivity towards the environment in which we try to live ...

This will mean ... re-discovering something like what used to be called natural philosophy, as well as something we might call cosmo-aesthetics. We should ... be able to talk of 'space' without specifying and formulating what mathematical approach we are using. These mathematical lines, these angles, exist, others, many others, might also exist, but beyond them all, is ... space, that can be apprehended and appreciated. (1992 165)

Dickinson's poetic mapping of nature, in a similar way, looks at what one can see, hear and know about nature but has no art to tell. While recognizing this human inability to speak for nature, her poems also reveal the heightened sensitivity towards a constantly revolving earth. In particular, Dickinson practices her geo-poetics by imagining one's reception of all kinds of social calls from nature, from visitors as

small as particles of air and bacteria, to guests as big as the suns or even the whole galaxy. These poems of natural visitation, whether earthly or cosmic, show an interactive or even interchangeable relationship between oneself and the planet in rotation.

In this chapter, I focus on these poems of visitation and reception, exploring how her global mapping is achieved through her spatial oscillation between the interior and the domestic on the one hand, and the exterior and cosmic on the other. The first section examines her mapping of seasonal and global transition, discussing nature and the transiting planet as both visitors and hosts of her speaker. By comparing her with Higginson and Emerson, I show how Dickinson dramatizes the instability and fluidity of the universe to accentuate a more reflexive and reversible nature of human perception. Her poetic attention to a conflicting and an almost apocalyptic vision in natural transition is indicative of her heightened sensitivity towards the physical world. Her poems develop such a vigilant attitude towards a volatile universe. The second section then looks more closely at her depiction of earthly rotation and planetary revolution through her notion of neighbouring. By adopting metaphors of neighbours, her poems indicate a dynamic and even transgressive spatial relation between oneself and the globe that is distinctly different from the Emersonian positioning of humans in the centre of nature.

Dickinson's notion of neighbouring a both foreign and familiar natural world is embodied in her use of compound vision. The third section thus investigates such a use of double vision in her poems. By comparing her with Transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, and Romanticists such as Lord Byron, Shelley and De Quincey, I show how her spatial perception both adopts and drastically departs from her contemporary writers. The fourth section examines more closely Dickinson's poetics of doubling through the aesthetic theory of De Quincey and the scientific theory of Edward Hitchcock. In particular, I explore De Quincey's notions of "involute" and "palimpsest" in relation to Dickinson's compound vision. I look at how the works of both Dickinson and De Quincey offer alternative ways of seeing

apart from the Transcendentalist and Romanticist visions of her time. The fifth section continues this discussion of neighbouring and double vision by examining her positioning of one's consciousness. For her, as well as for Thoreau, the external world and the internal world become two co-existent entities that parallel the mind. Her poetic focus on the space in-between elucidates her radical and elastic spatial imagination. The sixth section then explores the "worldliness" exemplified in her speaker by looking at the radical spatial alignment between the domestic and the cosmic in her poems. I show how her seemingly private or provincial perspective is deployed to argue for multiple visions of the world. The final section returns to the notion of physicality by looking at the atomic presence of human consciousness in her poems. I show how Dickinson adopts the theories of Emerson and Hitchcock to create a poetic space of extreme physical intimacy. I suggest that Dickinson uses her imagery more literally than has been recognized. Her spatial imagination designates interconnectedness between one's inner self and the cosmic world in its very physical sense.

### **"To stay as if, or go": Neighbouring an Unsteady Universe**

Although Dickinson's poems often depict a window view rather than a panorama, her emphasis on singularity paradoxically creates an exceptional openness to an Emersonian universe of fluidity and mobility. In poems such as "As if some little Arctic flower" (Fr177), discussed in the second chapter, the advent of the summer in the Arctic region resembles a singular floral migration south into a tropical paradise. Interestingly, Dickinson seems to consider natural transition as a more effective way of travel for her. As Judith Farr points out, Dickinson was "profoundly attracted to the foreign and especially to the semitropical or tropical climes that she read about in *Harper's* and *The Atlantic Monthly*" (2004 99). Dickinson tends to use the imagery of the exotic and the foreign to conjecture her connection with a rotating globe. In an 1863 letter, she quotes Higginson's statement that "'fascination' is absolute of Clime" (L 280), referring to his association of natural transition with seasonal travel in his article "Procession of the Flowers". In the article, Higginson points out the

correlation between seasonal transitions and the location of one's latitude: "the change of seasons is analogous to a change of zones, and summer assimilates our vegetation to that of the tropics" (654). This notion of time travel, resulting from the relative position of the earth to the sun, also indicates one's physical or geographical displacement through atmospheric or even cosmic journeys.

The shared interest of Dickinson and Higginson in planetary transition helps illuminate Dickinson's passion for changing climes. Seated by her window, she is able to observe a migrating universe that brings in climates from various altitudes and latitudes. Seasonal transition is also a planetary phenomenon, a journey that nature takes daily and annually. Like space travel, natural transition discloses a perennial open door to exotic worlds. Many visitors in her poems are such mysterious global-trekkers in nature. Tropical plants, for example, embody physical relocation not only for the plants, but also for Dickinson. In "'Tis Customary as we part" (Fr628), clematis, the plant of Asian origin, is a rare visitor that travels long distance to cement human and natural relationships:

'Tis Customary as we part  
 A Trinket - to confer -  
 It helps to stimulate the faith  
 When Lovers be afar -

'Tis various - as the various taste -  
 Clematis - journeying far -  
 Presents me with a single Curl  
 Of her Electric Hair -

Not only does climate change indicate change of location, but exotic flowers also symbolize an immediate transportation of remote places to New England. As Rebecca Patterson observes, "In extravagant mood, the poet's flowers become all 'Asia' (157). In an 1882 letter, Dickinson expected the blooming "Exuberance" of "an Eastern Creature" in her soil again (L746). In fact, the first flower the ambitious botanist pressed was the *Jasminum* or jasmine, native to tropical Asia. Farr points out that clematis "began to enter the trade from Asia in the 1860s" (2004 256). Also

known as “traveller's joy,” clematis signifies Dickinson's celebration of not only diversity in nature, but also varieties of locations on earth (Farr 2004 256). World travellers in nature like this reassure the existence and possibilities of a world elsewhere outside New England. Just as curios in the nineteenth century almost represented the practice of travel (Leask 23 & 44) as discussed in the third chapter, clematis here also presents glimpses of these geographical and cultural possibilities through its singular visitation.

Furthermore, this “Electric Hair” in Dickinson's clematis poem might refer to the electromagnetic power in nature. Thomas H. Johnson explains that the “Curl” in the poem might indicate “the fruiting bodies of the clematis – long, arching, and hair” instead of the flower itself (Farr 2004 256). Here I would add that this electric curl also reminds one of the telegraphic energy of the magnetic field that produces the Auroral light. In “Intellect”, Emerson claims that “Every substance is negatively electric to that which stands above it in the chemical tables, positively to that which stands below it” (1857 295). Emerson's perception of the world as a magnetic field was also popular in the cultural imagination of his time. Jerusha Hull McCormack points out that electricity in mid-nineteen-century America was “greeted as a mysterious life-force which imbues all creation, both animate and inanimate ... In this mode, the electro-magnetic telegraph was theorized as a medium for a kind of preternatural communication” (570) Dickinson's electric curl of clematis, in a similar way, can be seen as a “natural” version of the telegraph. Shaped like lightning, this “Electric Hair” represents a spiritual force in nature that can communicate physically to “stimulate the faith”. The exchange of flowers to strengthen relationships is not just “Customary”, as social protocol dictates, but it also contains a telegraphic energy that makes spiritual and physical connection possible. Exotic plants thus become electric plants, designating a fluid planetary transition.

Not all mysterious visitors for Dickinson need to come all the way from Asia. The most quotidian natural phenomenon on earth, the night, is also the most invisible. In “The Mountains stood in Haze -” (Fr1225), the night is a familiar stranger that visits

the speaker daily:

The Mountains stood in Haze -  
 The Valleys stopped below  
 And went or waited as they liked  
 The River and the Sky.

At leisure was the Sun -  
 His interests of Fire  
 A little from remark withdrawn -  
 The Twilight spoke the Spire.

So soft upon the Scene  
 The Act of evening fell  
 We felt how neighborly a thing  
 Was the Invisible.

Wendy Barker regards darkness in the poem as a “comfort” necessary for Dickinson's “female earth” “free in the sun's absence” (111). Yanbin Kang also notes that the going and waiting of the river and the sky in the poem “illustrate nature’s untrammelled freedom” (78). Indeed, “Went”, “waited” and “withdrawn” all exemplify an animated process of natural transition. In particular, the lingering twilight plays tricks on the eyes of the speaker and the ears of the reader. The mountains were hazy, the valleys “went” or “waited” and the sun was leisurely withdrawing its “Fire”, creating a sense of mistiness over human vision. Three “ws” further prolong the hovering sensation of uncertainty, registering the hesitation of the speaker towards the twilight through their semi-vowel sounds. Conversely, the alliteration of “spoke”, “Spire”, “So soft upon the Scene” whispers the coming of the night and lulls one's sight and hearing into drowsiness and sleep. One can only feel the closeness of the falling night, a gesture that Inder Nath Kher suggests to “indicate a temporary suspension of life” (72). For Kher, this experience of the twilight in the poem is associated with Keats' “*Negative Capability*”. However, this sense of uncertainty depicted in the poem, I would suggest, heightens, instead of suspending one's sense of living. As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, Dickinson's poems seem to practice Kenneth White's geo-poetics by espousing hypersensitivity towards the invisible and seemingly intangible presence in the environment. In the

poem, this awareness of the surrounding space is increased in the dark. Other senses take precedence over sight in one's approach towards the unknown in nature. The myopia of human vision can be compensated through feeling. Like the clematis with its electric curl in "Tis Customary as we part", the arrival of the night is another testimony of the cosmic fluidity that stimulates faith through one's sensing without sight.

Dickinson seems to find sight unreliable and delusive. The sunlight creates illusions on the human eye, making nature opaque rather than transparent. "The Mountains stood in Haze -" presents how the light can be an illusionist that turns presence into absence and vice versa. The sun gives no guarantee of progress. Instead, her poem underscores the interrelated and neighbouring relation between day and night. These two seemingly exclusive concepts are actually continuous of each other as part of the orbiting process around the sun. Absence of sight does not indicate the lack of presence. The spatial continuity between the dark and the light parallels the temporal continuity between day and night. In this way, and by extension, national transition, as Dickinson states in one letter discussed in the first chapter, symbolizes a revolutionary force in the universe: "The Snow is so white and sudden it seems almost like a Change of Heart - though I dont mean a 'Conversion' - I mean a Revolution" (L678). The twilight not only symbolizes a moment of change, but also embodies a revolving progression in nature. The universe is not only fluid, but also reversible in its cyclical movement. The twilight gives out insecure signals of either waiting or going. Through this "neighborly" experience of uncertainty and invisibility, human sight also undergoes a moment of revolution in perceiving the cosmic world differently, perhaps more cautiously.

As Dickinson's early valentine describes, the earth is "supposed to" turn upon an axis and revolves "By way of a gymnastic" "In honor to the sun -". This elastic movement of the earth informs her perception of the world as an unstable, fluid or even reversible entity. The possibility of hemispheric reversal sends out apocalyptic signals to her. Thus Dickinson's natural mapping turns temporality into spatial and

sensual experiences, highlighting the seemingly routine but actually erratic relationship between the past and the future, day and night. Being “neighborly”, the night is both mysterious and familiar, distant and near. Her orbiting and rotating earth offers a universe of irregular itineraries, like her serpentine version of a cosmic train discussed in the first chapter. This earth of an ambiguous status is further explored in “The Crickets sang” (Fr1104B). In the poem, the night is “becoming” rather than coming, indicating a process of transformation from a stranger to a neighbour:

The Crickets sang  
 And set the Sun  
 And Workmen finished one by one  
 Their Seam the Day upon -

The low Grass loaded with the Dew  
 The Twilight stood, as Strangers do  
 With Hat in Hand, polite and new  
 To stay as if, or go -

A Vastness, as a Neighbor, came,  
 A Wisdom, without Face, or Name,  
 A Peace, as Hemispheres at Home  
 And so the Night became -

Although, as Wendy Barker points out, twilight and evening in Dickinson's poems can be linked with “a gentleness and unobtrusiveness that allows her a sense of 'Vastness'”, the poem also suggests that this “genuine rest” is gained through a process of struggle (107). The uncertain action of the twilight – “To stay as if, or go” – embodies the unstable transition between day and night, faith and doubt, transforming darkness from a fidgeting stranger to a familiar neighbour. “Hemispheres at Home”, the “impossibly abstract metaphor” in David Porter's words (1981 34), are made possible through this wrestling process in the twilight. From vastness to wisdom to peace, the poem delineates an anonymous and invisible but also ever-present process of revolution in the universe.

The invisible in nature is most vividly portrayed in Dickinson's exploration of

placeless and viewless space. Swerving from the conventional associations between light and reason, sight and empowerment, her natural mapping challenges the metaphoric power of Enlightenment through one's sensing the dark and the absent. Sights, like places, vary in accordance with not only individual position on earth, but also the position of the earth in relation to the sun. By mapping the invisible, Dickinson is asserting visual autonomy from her Enlightenment and Transcendental precursors. The fluidity of the mind for Dickinson corresponds to an electrified vision beyond literary and metaphoric representation, gesturing toward a liquidized universe with its stumbling acrobatic stunt, a representation Dickinson finds more truthful; and her speaker is constantly facing such a tumbling universe. Her portrayal of the twilight zone between day and night dramatizes this sense of both hope and doubt in an unsteady universe. In "The Day came slow - till Five o'clock -" (Fr572B), for example, the arrival of the day is both stunning and alarming:

The Day came slow - till Five o'clock -  
 Then sprang before the Hills  
 Like Hindered Rubies - or the Light  
 A Sudden Musket - spills -

The Purple could not keep the East -  
 The Sunrise shook abroad  
 Like Breadths of Topaz - packed a night -  
 The Lady just unrolled -

The Happy Winds - their Timbrels took -  
 The Birds - in docile Rows  
 Arranged themselves around their Prince  
 The Wind - is Prince of Those -

The Orchard sparkled like a Jew -  
 How mighty 'twas - to be  
 A Guest in this stupendous place -  
 The Parlor - of the Day -

Although, as Charles Anderson notes, the jewel imagery of the poem "creates an aura of oriental splendor" (132), depictions such as "A Sudden Musket - spills" and "The Sunrise shook abroad" also make the militant undertone of the poem a pronounced

feature. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff states, Dickinson “rechristens” the sky with “the crimson of dawn” in several of her sunrise poems; the sunset becomes a “punctual reminder of God's phallic brutality” (290). Indeed, the wisdom and peace brought by the neighbourly night in “The Crickets sang” are substituted by the drum-beating momentum of the morning in the poem. The revolution brought in by the day is mighty but also disconcerting. Although the arrival of the sunrise symbolizes rebirth, as “The Orchard sparkled like a Jew -” suggests, it is depicted with such a militant force that the ruby light almost becomes a premonition of human destruction.

Natural visitation in Dickinson's poems brings revolutionary forces, forces driven by the orbiting globe with an apocalyptic momentum that can transport, illuminate and potentially liberate and destroy the human race at the same time. This connection between natural transition and revolution is made clear in “The Birds begun at Four o'clock -” (Fr504B), in which bird songs are compared to the biblical flood, miraculous and overwhelming:

The Birds begun at Four o'clock -  
 Their period for Dawn -  
 A Music numerous as space -  
 But neighboring as Noon -

I could not count their Force -  
 Their numbers did expend  
 As Brook by Brook bestows itself  
 To multiply the Pond.

The Listener - was not -  
 Except occasional man -  
 In homely industry arrayed -  
 To overtake the Morn -

Nor was it for applause -  
 That I could ascertain -  
 But independent Extasy  
 Of Universe, and Men -

By Six, the Flood had done -  
 No Tumult there had been

Of Dressing, or Departure -  
And yet the Band - was gone -

The Sun engrossed the East -  
The Day Resumed the World -  
The Miracle that introduced  
Forgotten, as fulfilled.

Expanding and multiplying, the music of the bird embodies the natural potential to overthrow the earth. Verbs like “expand”, “overtakes” and “engrossed” portray the process of nature as a struggle for co-presence. Sharon Cameron thus remarks that in the poem “departure seems like annihilation itself” (1979 177). Like “The Day came slow - till Five o'clock -”, the poem makes the coming of the day powerful but never assuring. The rotation of the earth, like the birdsong, is a miracle that is performed and assured to be forgotten each single day. Nature, Dickinson reminds us over and over again, is never as stable or peaceful as it seems. This sense of struggle for survival is most explicitly elucidated in “Unfulfilled to Observation -” (Fr839), a poem I have discussed in the first chapter. Human perception is limited and imperfect. The suns bring more confusion and puzzlement to the human eye than harmony and transcendence:

Unfulfilled to Observation -  
Incomplete - to Eye -  
But to Faith - a Revolution  
In Locality -

Unto Us - the Suns extinguish -  
To our Opposite -  
New Horizons - they embellish -  
Fronting Us - with Night.

These poems of natural transition are full of both biblical and military imagery, turning the rotating universe into both a firework and a battlefield. Human visions are embellished and extinguished daily to show a universe of irregular cycles and potential apocalypse. As Wendy Barker states, “Dickinson was supremely aware of climate, of degrees of light, of the progression of a twenty-four-hour period we call a

'day"; Barker thus states that for Dickinson, "the sun is the antithesis of nurturing" (2002 81). Instead of being a beacon of peace, progress and democracy, the light in these poems is a dubious visitor, whose brightness threatens to devour faith and the earth, while reminding one of incomplete and imperfect human sight. St. Armand comments that "the truth of Dickinson's poems is the wisdom of a survivor rather than the didactic pronouncements of one of the saved" (246). Joan Kirkby also observes that Dickinson's "notion of poetry was an apocalyptic one" (1991 36). Indeed, Dickinson offers such an apocalyptic vision of the universe, which seems to fall apart while it takes shape.

Emerson is also a close observer of nature and the universe in motion. However, his version of natural transition seems to be more effortless and pleasant. In "Nature", Emerson describes transience in nature in terms of physical principles: "A little heat, that is, a little motion, is all that differences the bald, dazzling white, and deadly cold poles of the earth from the prolific tropical climates. All changes pass without violence, by reason of the two cardinal conditions of boundless space and boundless time" (1857 194-95). This almost idyllic vision of seasonal transition in the Emersonian nature contrasts Dickinson's cosmic space of tension, belligerence, action and counteraction. To some extent, Dickinson pushes the Emersonian universe of fluidity to the extreme, transforming natural transition into a battlefield for survival and contentions. Her perceptions are often to be gained through struggle and are inevitably circumscribed by one's location. A transcendental prospect of the world is simply an optical and scientific impossibility. As she states in "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -", a winter without "a Snow's Tableau" is a lie for a New England resident like herself. Even the queen, according to Dickinson, "discerns like me -/ Provincially -". For Dickinson, conflicting perspectives seem inevitable because of the imperfectness and limitation of human perception. Rotations of the earth remind one of this human need to renew one's perception daily, and this renewal is done, as she suggests in "Unfulfilled to Observation -", through confrontation.

### **“It's Location/ Is Illocality -”: Neighbouring as Confronting**

Dickinson's poems express ambivalent feelings of both longing for spatial intimacy and being cautious of the physical environment as illusive, confrontational, and threatening. Her notion of neighbouring the world does not disclose a world of hospitality or communal solidarity between man and nature. Instead, her speaker is neighbouring an extinguishable and reversible universe beyond any human dominance or divine intervention. Her poems thus make the role of humans in the ecological system marginal rather than central, vigilant rather than complacent. In “The Crickets sang”, the night arrives as a stranger before the whole hemisphere settles down and it turns into the old neighbour of humans again. In “The Day came slow - till Five o'clock -”, the speaker is not a hostess that receives the sun. Instead, she becomes a guest invited into the parlour of the day. In “The Birds begun at Four o'clock -”, her speaker, along with birds in their docile rows, is positioned at the periphery, instead of the centre of the cosmic show. In fact, the birds seem to have a more powerful role to play in the planetary transition with their music. Humans, like animals and plants, are neighbouring and co-existing with the world instead of transcending or commanding it. As both a guest to and a neighbour of the universe, humans are equally insignificant and even fragile in face of the “stupendous” revolution of the day.

Dickinson's poems reveal an intricate relationship between humans and nature. Her speaker cannot be one with nature, but she still yearns for closeness to it. Although the twilight, the dawn and the dusk stand for moments of uncertainty and doubt, they can also bring the most intimate moments one can have with nature. Being a privileged guest, or a familiar neighbour, one learns to be at home with nature. In “The Day undressed - herself -” (Fr495A), the speaker is privileged enough to witness the toilette of the day in her private chamber, in the context of the day's transglobal circumnavigation:

The Day undressed - Herself -  
 Her Garter - was of Gold -  
 Her Petticoat of Purple plain -  
 Her Dimities - as old

Exactly - as the World -  
 And yet the newest star -  
 Enrolled upon the Hemisphere  
 Be wrinkled - much as Her -

Too near to God - to pray -  
 Too near to Heaven - to fear -  
 The Lady - of the Occident  
 Retired without a care -

Her Candle so expire  
 The Flickering be seen  
 On Ball of Mast in Bosphorus -  
 And Dome - and Window Pane -

As Paul Giles notes, the poem tracks “private consciousness out through the geographical 'Hemisphere' into barely legible realms of the solar system” (2011 14). The private chamber of the day is anything but private or domestic. Her undergarments are displayed in the sky, and her privacy is turned into a public spectacle. Her wrinkles are not hidden, but exhibited like the military pageantry of “the Hemisphere”. Being near God and heaven, she is also exempt from the confinement of Christian conventions. Furthermore, the reference to Bosphorus, a meeting point between Europe and Asia, not only suggests the planetary transaction between the Occident and the Orient, between day and night, but might also hint at Florence Nightingale, a British pioneering nurse, dubbed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as “a lady with a lamp”,<sup>128</sup> who worked in Istanbul during the Crimean War in the 1850s. Conflating Bosphorus and Amherst, the poem turns the windowpane into an imaginary port of transatlantic exchange. As Daneen Wardrop notes, “in the space of several lines, the Lady of the Occident has traversed the globe to become, finally, the Lady of the Orient” (2009 195). The routine of the day is both intimate and global, erotic and militant, domestic and cosmic.

<sup>128</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1857 poem “Santa Filomena” was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* to honour Florence Nightingale's noble deed in the Crimean War (23).

“The Day undressed - Herself -” positions nature in both domestic and cosmic contexts to reveal an optical interplay between the viewer and the view, the east and the west. This drastic spatial alignment between the private and the planetary opens up a poetic space of both intimacy and infinity. The Bosphorus Strait, located at the heart of the Oriental civilization, is also the west, the retiring chamber of the lady of the Occident. The definitions of the Orient and the Occident, the day and the night, civilization and darkness are, like topography, relational and relative. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Dickinson also recognizes this process of co-presence as not just concordant or peaceful. Although she obviates visual dominance, her poem also shows her understanding of natural progression in terms of wrestling co-existence. While the newest star is “Enrolled upon the Hemisphere”, the light of the sunset flickers and expires on the other end of the world. To some extent, the poem echoes “Unfulfilled to Observation -” by suggesting that a revolutionary process is inevitably violent. By bordering the invisible, she feels the need to bargain in her poems with nature, God and the universe for home.

Without travelling far, Dickinson had already experienced the mystery of nature intensely. In an 1877 letter to Mrs James S. Cooper, Dickinson wondered “How strange that Nature does not knock, and yet does not intrude” (L587). Nature is both an outsider and an insider of the human world. It is both an unknown stranger and a frequent visitor. It is known enough to walk in uninvited, but not familiar enough to make one dispense all the civilities. Hence her notion of neighbouring conveys a sense of unease and circumspection. Her encounter with nature as a stranger, like the arrival of the night in “The Crickets sang”, designates a process of becoming, adjusting and accommodating on both sides. Using the metaphor of social calls, Dickinson reiterates the distance between the natural landscape and the human world that cannot be crossed as easily as Emerson's transparent eyeball prescribes for his readers. Emerson certainly considers nature a much better neighbour than human society. In *Nature*, he expresses this longing to avoid any human contact:

The name of the nearest friend sounds ... foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, – master or servant, is ... a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature. (2001 29)

Christopher Benfey remarks that the association of one's neighbour with a communal sense of belongings and hospitality is gradually taken over by the fear of neighbourly intrusion and encroachment in America:

Dickinson's stress on neighbors might be seen ... as making a peculiar moment in American social history, when the concept of one's neighbor has lost its biblical resonance of community and shared responsibility, and taken on the rather literal meaning of the one who happens to live next door. It is increasingly the case, in America, that we do not know our neighbors. Our concern for privacy may in effect redefine the meaning of 'neighbor,' when the major threat to our privacy is the encroachment of our neighbors. (1984 67)

Dickinson's poems show her understanding of the complexity of neighbouring. However, if the transcendental notion of self-reliance implies an independence that separates one from communal and social bonds, Dickinson's notion of neighbouring emphasizes this equally stressful relationship between man and nature. In particular, Dickinson is acutely aware of human intrusion into nature. As exemplified in "Dew - is the Freshet in the Grass -" (Fr1102) in the third chapter, humans are not only the observer, but also the spy on nature who "Mistake the Outside for the in/ And mention what we saw". From the perspective of nature, humans are intruders. For the revolving earth, hemispheres are its home. Hence Dickinson's poems of natural transitions can be taken as an attempt to push the definition of communities beyond their human meanings to highlight planetary interconnectedness.

God is a less welcome neighbour for Dickinson than for Emerson. In poems such as "The Frost was never seen -" and "Apparently with no surprise", God is depicted as the mastermind behind the assassination of flowers. God's divine power is

questioned as being accidental and arbitrary. In “Too little way the House must lie”, the speaker further protests against God's tyranny that forces each inhabitant to “lose its neighbor once -”. The earthly connections are preferable, if not more important than one's relation with God. In “Who occupies this House?”, discussed in the first chapter, the speaker considers the dead as strangers since “Eternity's Acquaintances/ Are mostly so - to me”. Immortality is like a foreign country, not an innate quality that Emerson finds in both nature and men. In “My period had come for Prayer -”, discussed in the second chapter, the speaker breaks into God's house, only to find “Vast Prairies of Air/ Unbroken by a Settler -”. Emerson sees “uncontained and immortal beauty” of the divine in the tranquil landscape. For Dickinson, God's house is no more accommodating than the wilderness. Being the nearest neighbour in “Four Trees - upon a solitary Acre -”, “Have any like Myself” and “I never felt at Home - Below -”, God is still alienating or even oppressing with his omnipresence. In “It was too late for Man -” (Fr689), heaven is certainly more formidable and inhospitable than the earth:

How excellent the Heaven -  
 When Earth - cannot be had -  
 How hospitable - then - the face  
 Of our Old Neighbor - God -

Heaven is the second choice. Emerson embraces the earth for its immortal quality. Dickinson only desires heaven “When Earth - cannot be had -”. Emerson discards social relations to explore the divine beauty in nature. Dickinson's speaker, conversely, imbues nature with social relations to accentuate her earthly perspective. As she states in a letter, “if God had been here this summer, and seen the things that I have seen – I guess that he would think His Paradise superfluous” (L329). Emerson seeks God in man through nature. Dickinson compares heaven and earth as an old neighbour of God.

Neighbouring is Dickinson's poetic strategy to bring a strange and shaky world closer. As shown earlier, Dickinson might have had Hitchcock's diagram of the

volcanic formation in his *The Religion of Geology* in mind when she wrote about earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Richard Sewall points out that Dickinson's poems contain “more earthquakes and volcanoes” “than in the poetry of Keats, Emerson, Browning, and Shelley combined” (345). Being a vigilant neighbour of such an environmentally risky world, Dickinson would have found positioning significant. In a world of divisions, frictions and uncertainty, her speaker is most circumspect and discreet. In “The missing All, prevented Me” (Fr995B), her speaker claims to be too engrossed in her work to be concerned about the outside world:

The missing All, prevented Me  
 From missing minor Things.  
 If nothing larger than a World's  
 Departure from a Hinge  
 Or Sun's extinction, be observed  
 'Twas not so large that I  
 Could lift my Forehead from my work  
 For Curiosity.

The poem reminds one of the penultimate stanza in “No coward soul is mine”, a stanza that Michael Moon suggests to have taken on “talismanic powers for Dickinson” (234):

Though Earth and moon were gone  
 And suns and universes ceased to be  
 And thou were left alone  
 Every Existence would exist in thee

Moon notes that Dickinson responds to such “rhetoric of hyperbole” strongly, a rhetoric that, as Moon refers to the *OED* meaning, is “not intended to be understood literally” (235). Cynthia Griffin Wolff also argues that poems such as “The missing All, prevented Me” adopts infantile voices that “pretend at being God”, which paradoxically rob them of authority (189). I would add that this employment of a hyperbolic or childlike expression also highlights Dickinson's perception of a physical world of fluctuating existence that one has no control over. For Jane Donahue Eberwein, “the habit of loss” in the poem is a “defense” against disasters

(1987 66). Sharon Cameron further argues that the poem “offers us more global vision” (1979 171). Indeed, the detachment and immobility of the speaker in the poem could be read as a strategic response towards a globe of contingencies. Dickinson wrote in an earlier letter to Abiah Root that “the world allured me & in an unguarded moment I listened to her syren voice. From that moment I lose my interest in heavenly things by degrees ... I feel that I am sailing upon the brink of an awful precipice, from which I cannot escape & over which I fear my tiny boat will soon glide if I do not receive help from above” (L11). Although Dickinson seems to find it necessary to distance herself from the world, this strategy might also be her way of embracing earthly voices, putting down the experiences of her “apocalypse of the mind” in words.

Dickinson's speaker is never far away from the world. With the act of neighbouring, she stays next to the borderline. As Dickinson states in “Volcanoes be in Sicily” (Fr1691), she finds her “Vesuvius at Home”. Through her cartographic imagination, her poems register a mobilized poetic space with one's sensual experiences. This lived space, however, is also a space of no name and no face, a “reportless” and even dangerous place to be in. In “A nearness to Tremendousness -” (Fr824), the vicinity of the unknown is a lawless space:

A nearness to Tremendousness -  
 An Agony procures -  
 Affliction ranges Boundlessness -  
 Vicinity to Laws

Contentment's quiet Suburb -  
 Affliction cannot stay  
 In Acres - It's Location  
 Is Illocality -

Paul Crumbly notes that this poem “alerts readers that proximity to power can bring painful dislocations” (1996 81). Marianne Noble further associates the poem with Dickinson's “masochistic sublime”, stating that the experience of pain is “intrinsically transgressive” (26-27). I want to stress the notion of neighboring here

in relation to the unknown and the sublime. For Dickinson, what is unknown and formless seems to be part of the near and familiar. It is taken out of the normative space and relocated in another space for the refused and suppressed. With its boundary-crossing, the poem delineates a spatial relation that paradoxically digresses from as well as defies its metaphorical framework. It is through these jarring forces between neighbouring and transgression that Dickinson explores the location of “Tremendousness”. By dwelling upon the borderline, Dickinson is enabled to feel the tremor of her volcano without defining and naming it.

### **“’Tis Compound Vision”: Telescopic Inversion and Doubling**

Dickinson's compound vision is germane to her notion of neighbouring and bordering. Her dwelling on the borders radically dissolves boundaries and multiplies visions at the same time. Her poetic lens can drastically zoom in onto the microscopic vision of the infinitesimal inner self, and zoom out onto the macroscopic vision of the planetary and the cosmic. This visual effect, a result of her speaker's position, makes her compound vision possible. Judith Banzer observes that many Dickinson poems are metaphysical ones “of a ‘Compound Vision’ by which the eternal is argued from the transient, the foreign explained by the familiar, and fact illuminated by mystery” (417). James Robert Guthrie also points out that Dickinson's compound vision becomes a “conceptual telescope” that the poet can use “to bridge the gulf between herself and heaven” (33-34). Richard Brantley further emphasizes the element of time in this compound vision of Dickinson; for Brantley, this compound vision means both one's hindsight and one's foresight (2004 137). The intermediate quality of the compound vision, I would add, points towards an intimate connection between one's biological existence and the physical environment. “The Admirations - and Contempts - of time -” (Fr830) explains compound vision through the procedure of anatomy:

The Admirations - and Contempts - of time -  
 Show justest - through an Open Tomb -  
 The Dying - as it were a Height

Reorganizes Estimate  
 And what We saw not  
 We distinguish clear -  
 And mostly - see not  
 What We saw before -

'Tis Compound Vision -  
 Light - enabling Light -  
 The Finite - furnished  
 With the Infinite -  
 Convex - and Concave Witness -  
 Back - toward Time -  
 And forward -  
 Toward the God of Him -

As Linda Freeman remarks, “[t]he open tomb is the reification of the space in between life and death, humanity and divinity or the corruptible and incorruptible body” (177). The speaker literally dissects corpses “through an Open Tomb” in the poem with the witness of “Convex” and “Concave”, in order to examine the substance of immortality. However, this autopsical incision with scientific advancement does not bring a precise and truthful picture to enhance the sight of God. Although, as Renée Bergland states, the grave “is an optical device that helps to construct an aerial perspective” (151), instead of a panoramic view, human vision is still conditioned and simply “reorganized” according to one's current “Height”. Optical instruments, paradoxically, lead to “compound vision” that does not focus on one spot but conflates visions through the photogenic process of “Light - enabling Light -”.

“The Admirations - and Contempts - of time -” informs Dickinson's use of compound vision as a poetic strategy to inspect the physical world as well as the afterlife. Her poetic vision is conducted through a process of perspective shift and optical reversal. Like the winter light in “There's a certain Slant of light” (Fr320), and the spring light in “A Light exists in Spring” (Fr962), the poem illustrates a compound vision that is not triggered by penetrating sunlights, but by the speaker's sensual experience of each single but also accumulating light, which illuminates a glimpse of infinity. In contrast to Emerson, who focuses human vision on the ability to see all, Dickinson

draws one's attention to the impact of time and space themselves on the limitation of human perception. "Height", "Estimate" and "see not" all suggest the imperfection of human vision. It is death, rather than omnipresence, that triggers human vision of the infinite. In another poem "There is a solitude of space" (Fr1696), this concave-convex visual effect is again evoked to test one's sense of space:

There is a solitude of space  
 A solitude of sea  
 A solitude of Death, but these  
 Society shall be  
 Compared with that profounder site  
 That polar privacy  
 A soul admitted to itself -

The mode of solitude is spacialized both metaphorically and literally in the poem. The sea is a space associated with death and immortality in the Christian convention. It indicates an inner quest that "A soul admitted to itself". This interior journey, however, is drastically flipped around by "That polar privacy", a compound vision that not only suggests a sense of doubleness but also draws one's attention to the physicality of the location of the self. This "profounder site" is more solitary partly because it implies this double isolation within, and partly because it could turn one's gaze both inward and outward, inward to the inner isolation, and outward to the Arctic sublime that overwhelms and paralyzes one's vision. Inder Nath Kher argues that in the poem "[s]piritual solitude is profounder than the solitude of space, sea, and even death" (239). I would suggest that this internal experience of the soul in the poem also stretches from the interior and spiritual, to the physically and geographically unknown, disclosing the indispensable connection between space, place and identity.

This sense of double loneliness, exemplified in "That polar privacy", is conveyed through one's neighbouring oneself beyond the boundary of human consciousness. It designates a double existence both inside and outside. This expansion and inversion of visions in her poems help enhance the density of perception and broaden its

horizon at the same time. Instead of focusing “the axis of vision” with “the axis of things”, as Emerson proposes in *Nature*, Dickinson's compound vision exposes more diffusion, opacity and fluidity of both the universe and the mind through the radical reversal of her visual axis. A similar visual inversion can be seen in Thoreau's *Walden*. He compares the lake to the “earth's eye” into which “the beholder measures the depth of his own nature”.<sup>129</sup> For Thoreau, however, human imagination transcends nature: “I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless”; the imagination for Thoreau “dives deeper and soars higher than nature goes” (277 & 279). In comparison, Dickinson is less inclined to set human imagination in competition with nature. Her polar privacy, similar to her “miles of Stare” in “I've known a Heaven, like a Tent -”, a poem discussed in the third chapter, accounts for nature's privacy as much as for the inner condition of human solitude, a compound vision she might have found more faithful to the process of human perception.

Another contemporary writer, Thomas De Quincey, also likes to invert the telescope of the human eye to examine the shadow of humanity. Like Dickinson, he also straddles the Romantic vision for the divine, and the modernist propensity for the fragmented and the alienating. As shown in the introduction and the third chapter, Dickinson had actively sought De Quincey's works. Her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson also quoted De Quincey in her typescript *The Annal of the Evergreens*, published posthumously, on De Quincey's theory of human perception.<sup>130</sup> John Evangelist Walsh remarks that Dickinson “showed a lively interest” in De Quincey; the multitude of magazine papers of De Quincey, Walsh suggests, “may yet turn out a storehouse of Dickinson ideas” (130) Judith Farr also notes that De Quincey's use of imagery in his confessions might have influenced Dickinson (1992 148-50, 202 &

<sup>129</sup> In note 54 of *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, Jeffrey S. Cramer points out that both Thoreau and Emerson practised a method of viewing often used by artists by bending over and looking through the legs (180).

<sup>130</sup> For Susan Dickinson's quote on De Quincey, see “Annals of the Evergreens” (18). Both typescripts and transcripts are available at: <<http://www.emilydickinson.org/susan/tannals18.html>>. Higginson also refers to De Quincey's criticism, essays and stories in his Atlantic essays, considering De Quincey as an authority in Gothic literature.

290). Indeed, there is a correlation between Dickinson's poetic conceptualization and De Quincey's aesthetics. In an 1846 essay "System of the Heavens revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes", De Quincey illustrates how the tentative human vision both projects and duplicates the natural sublime. He begins his essay by arguing that Lord Rosse "has revealed more by far than he found" (2003 V.15 400). According to De Quincey, it is through scientific advancement, particularly the exposure of the nebula in Orion, that the mightier abyss in the human mind is also revealed:

Great is the mystery of Space, greater is the mystery of time; either mystery grows upon man, as man himself grows; and either seems to be a function of the godlike which is in man. In reality the depths and the heights which are in man, the depths by which he searches, the heights by which he aspires, are but projected and made objective externally in the three dimensions of space which are outside of him. He trembles at the abyss into which his bodily eyes look down, or look up; not knowing that abyss to be, not always consciously suspecting it to be, but by an instinct written in his prophetic heart feeling it to be, boding it to be, fearing it to be, and sometimes hoping it to be, the mirror to a mightier abyss that will one day be expanded in himself ... it is one which swells upon man with the expansion of his mind, and that it is probably peculiar to the mind of man ... Man only has a natural function for expanding on an illimitable sensorium, the illimitable growths of space. Man, coming to the precipice, reads his danger; the brute perishes: man is saved; and the horse is saved by his rider. (2003 V.15 401-02)

Space from without not only corresponds to, but also mirrors and expands, the space from within. Viewing is an interactive process of both projection and reflection, duplication and expansion between the external image and the mind. In particular, the mind's eye, for De Quincey, both duplicates and is exposed by sublimity in nature. However, De Quincey sees the exposure of natural privacy as an unravelment of a dark secret in a cosmic world by human voyeurism. The visibility of the constellation by Lord Rosse's telescope discloses the unappetising truth of the universe:

[T]here is a picture ... a dreadful cartoon, from the gallery which has begun to open upon Lord Rosse's telescope ... it must be drawn from another silence, from the frost and from the eternities of death. It is the famous nebula in the constellation of Orion; famous for ... its frightful magnitude and for the frightful depth to which it is sunk in the abysses of the heavenly wilderness ... and famous in all time coming for the horror of the regal phantasma which it has perfected to eyes of flesh ... (2003 V.15 403)

Instead of human progress, De Quincey finds the perfection of this cosmic horror to the human eye. What Lord Rosse reveals is not the future of human advancement, but the past of universal silence, frost and death.<sup>131</sup>

This visual correspondence between the heavenly or natural wilderness and the inner eye-I is also a poetic topic Dickinson is profoundly interested in. She might find the skyscape more inviting than repulsive, but she is also sharply aware of this unknown other that the natural sublime unveils in the human mind. As Gudrun Grabher comments on Dickinson's poems about the other, "it is this encounter with the other that triggers the encounter with the self" (232). Dickinson maps the illocality of the unknown other both within and without through her compound vision in a manner similar to De Quincey. In "I tried to think a lonelier Thing" (Fr570), she describes the process of conceptualization as a process of duplication and reflection:

I tried to think a lonelier Thing  
 Than any I had seen -  
 Some Polar Expiation - an Omen in the Bone  
 Of Death's tremendous nearness -

I probed Retrieveless things  
 My Duplicate - to borrow -  
 A Haggard comfort springs

From the belief that Somewhere -  
 Within the Clutch of Thought -  
 There dwells one other Creature

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<sup>131</sup> Robin Peel points out that Dickinson's poems also reflect her awareness of the astronomical theories of her time, especially the fact that "the stars are now hundreds of years older than the ones we see" (245-6).

Of Heavenly Love - forgot -

I plucked at our Partition -  
 As One should pry the Walls -  
 Between Himself - and Horror's Twin -  
 Within Opposing Cells -

I almost strove to clasp his Hand,  
 Such Luxury - it grew -  
 That as Myself - could pity Him -  
 Perhaps he - pitied me -

As Jane Donahue Eberwein notes, the poem pushes the “portrait of loneliness to its limit”, generating “a fantasy of a mirror image of” the speaker herself (1987 55). Echoing “That polar privacy” in “There is a solitude of space”, the poem thematizes the notion of “Duplicate” and “Twin”, the doubleness of vision. On the one hand, the probing, plucking and prying through “our Partition” and “the Walls” turn the speaker into an inmate of her own self, imprisoned by her own “Clutch of Thought”. On the other, the poem also plays upon the image of “cell”, suggesting that the imprisonment is also physical, since a cell can be both a biological unit within one’s body, and a prison unit without. Furthermore, the page/column break at the end of the fourth stanza materializes the physical break between these two “Opposing Cells”, accentuating the visual, material and textual distance in-between.<sup>132</sup>

Hiroko Uno points out that Dickinson “knew the great divisibility of matter, in the remarkable forms of animacules revealed by the microscope, many millions of which can be embraced in a single drop of water” (1998 105). The duplication of “Myself” in the poem presents such a process of thinking. The poem becomes a thinking project that resembles a scientific experiment Dickinson conducts with her poetic microscope. Furthermore, “An Omen in the Bone” in the poem also suggests an anatomic practice that Nina Baym claims to be influenced by Mary Lyon, who founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, which Emily Dickinson attended in 1847-48: “Lyon's penchant for moralistic scientific analogy might have influenced Dickinson's poetic practice. For example, Lyon applies to human beings the

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<sup>132</sup> Frankin's variorium edition indicates the page/column break at the end of “Cells” (1998 568).

comparative anatomy platitude that a trained anatomist can infer an entire animal from 'but one bone or one tooth'" (2001 149). The process of inference in the poem indeed reflects the scientific investigation of Dickinson's time. With her compound vision, the poem conjures up a thought process of multiple doubling. "Horror's Twin", "Between Himself" and "Within Opposing Cells" all indicate divisions within and without one's cells, on the paper and in one's mind, a division that can both divide and duplicate.

To some extent, "I tried to think a lonelier Thing" echoes Emerson's comment in "Intellect" that "We are the prisoners of ideas" (1857 298), dramatizing the sense of double loneliness through the imagery of imprisonment. This captivity within "the Clutch of Thought" also reminds one of Lord Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon", in which the imprisoned monk reaches out for the hands of his dead brother:

... why delay the truth? – he died.  
 I saw, and could not hold his head,  
 Nor reach his dying hand – nor dead,  
 Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,  
 To rend and gnash my bonds in twain.  
 He died – and they unlock'd his chain,  
 And scoop'd for him a shallow grave  
 Even from the cold earth of our cave. (Line 144-151 8-9)

Dickinson transforms the despair of this Byronic hero into an even more dramatic scene of separation and death within her thought. While Byron's prisoner strives in vain for his dying brother, Dickinson makes her prisoner-speaker more isolated by creating her own inner twin, impossible to touch. Another possible allusion is to Percy Shelly's "Epipsychidion", addressed to another prisoner Emilia Viviani in a convent:<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> As Joanne Feit Diehl points out, Dickinson would have read *Epipsychidion* closely: "her close reading of Epipsychidion is suggested both by the lines that appear in the margins of her copy of Shelley as well as by a group of her poems belonging to a single packet which appear to use, as their gem, phrases that echo Shelley's poem" (137). The Houghton Library has *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Philadelphia: Grissy and Markley, 1853) as part of the collection of Dickinson's family books, signed by Susan Gilbert and dated 1854.

One hope within two wills, one will beneath  
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,  
 One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,  
 And one annihilation. Woe is me! (Line 584-587 140)

Dickinson's double imprisonment resonates with the use of prison imagery in Byron and Shelley.<sup>134</sup> Her poem becomes a literary competition to “think a lonelier Thing”, in which her desperate inmate-speaker takes a more drastic measure by refusing to confirm the existence of the imagined other for “a Haggard Comfort”. Chained in the cell of her own consciousness, the speaker strives for any physical contact in vain. This “appetite for restriction”, as Jane Donahue Eberwein calls it (1987 88), turns one's understanding of loneliness inside out. The double of the speaker almost becomes a real other, returning her longing strife with pity.

From “Death's tremendous nearness” to “Heavenly Love - forgot -”, “I tried to think a lonelier Thing” shows a relationship of neighbouring through the speaker's probing and prying into the invisible other. Hope and death are shown as two close-knit concepts, like two inmates in the clutching thought of the speaker. This doubleness of vision conveys the loneliest thing one can imagine. In particular, the polar privacy of this “Horror's Twin” is located “Between Himself”, not just within himself. As “Perhaps he - pitied me” suggests, the inner other is not only a product of her imaginary exercise, but is also transformed into an alien other without, someone who looks back at her with sympathy. At the end of the poem, the telescope of the speaker is turned around to examine her own clutching thought. As Jed Deppman states, there is this difference between “a recognizably Romantic misery-loves-company logic” and “a more desperately lonely awareness that one is completely fabricating one's source of comfort” as exemplified in the poem (2004 98). Maybe what is lonelier is not to imagine an intangible other, but to recognize the very act of imagining as being fictitious. Dickinson's “thinking” competition with her Romantic precursors in this poem reveals such a sense of desperation beyond consolation.

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<sup>134</sup> Jane Donahue Eberwein points out that Byron's prison imagery might have influenced Dickinson (1987 86-88). Harold Bloom comments upon Dickinson's potential response to Shelley's “Epipsychidion”, quoting this passage as an example of “lover's apocalypse” (2008 4).

Instead of satisfying a voyeuristic desire to see and to know, these poems of Dickinson undermine the hierarchy of the human gaze embedded in this very act of mental conjecture. By subverting this spectatorial mastery, her poems delineate the impossibility of having a visual and mental dominance both within and without. Her compound vision, conducted through the notion of neighbouring and doubling, is symptomatic of this visual reversal, when the viewer reaches the realization that the subject that looks out is also the object to be gazed at and the landscape outside duplicates the “polar privacy” of one's interior landscape. Dickinson thus shows thinking as a radical process of spatial alignment, a polar privacy that is both solitary and doubling, without and within. Her compound vision coalesces images of the microscopic and the macroscopic, the mental and the physical, to express a heightened sense of perception. The imagined other is not only out of sight, but even might turn oneself into an imagined other. In comparison with the messianic moment in Whitman's “Song of Myself”, the transparent eyeball of Emerson, and the mesmerized gazer in Wordsworth's “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, Dickinson's speaker experiences moments of much more intense suspense and reflexivity without any confirmation. This relationship between the viewer and the view is reflective, reversible, divisible and dissoluble.

### **Palimpsests of the Brain: Doubling in Dickinson and De Quincey**

The aesthetic theory of De Quincey is instructive in elucidating Dickinson's compound vision. The fusion of the exterior landscape with the interior one is also significant in his opiate vision. In his childhood memory, death is “more profoundly affecting in summer than in other parts of the year” because of “the antagonism between the tropical redundancy of life in summer and the dark sterilities of the grave” (2009 126). “The two coming into collusion”, De Quincey states, and each “exults the other into stronger relief” (2009 151). This tropical/sterile, bright/dark contrast is further exemplified in his equivocal depiction of opium as both the light and the shadow, the sacred and the guilty. Through the law of antagonism, he developed a theory of involution, a term, as Alina Clej points out, used to depict “the

intricate formation of the mind” (2009 100):

[F]ar more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of concrete objects, pass to us as involutes (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us directly, and in their own abstract shapes (2009 151).

De Quincey elaborates the notion of involutes in “The Palimpsest”, arguing that thoughts and ideas are not perishable, but covered up in layers of human memories like the palimpsest, or the “diplomata of human archives or libraries”: “Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished” (2003 V.15 175). De Quincey reassures his readers of the indestructibility of human spirit. In his essay, he draws an analogy between the stratified existence of past memories and natural phenomena to explain the operation of human perception:

Yes, reader, countless are the mysterious hand-writings of grief or joy which have inscribed themselves successively upon the palimpsest of your brain; and, like the annual leaves of aboriginal forests, or the undissolving snows on the Himalaya, or light falling upon light, the endless strata have covered up each other in forgetfulness. But by the hour of death, but by fever, but by the searchings of opium, all these can revive in strength. They are not dead, but sleeping. (2003 V.15 176)

This geological analogy of the human brain echoes the scientific theory of Edward Hitchcock. In *The Religion of Geology*, Hitchcock explains the inextinguishable existence of physical substances: “[T]he chemist knows that not one particle of matter has ever been ... deprived of existence; that fire only changes the form of matter, but never annihilates it. When solid matter is changed into gas, as in most cases of combustion, it seems to be annihilated, because it disappears; but it has only assumed a new form, and exists as really as before” (375). Human thought, according to Hitchcock, is also governed by physical principles. He compares the universe to “a tremulous mass of jelly” and “one vast picture gallery” that preserve

every vibration, movement, and history of the world. The universe becomes a canvas “sketched by countless artists, with unerring skill” (439). This physical phenomenon, Hitchcock states, is the doctrine of reaction: “we may safely infer that human conduct, and thought, and volition impress upon the globe, nay, upon the universe, marks which nothing can obliterate” (488). He explains the indestructibility of matter further by emphasizing the indelible nature of human action: “Men fancy that the wave of oblivion passes over the greater part of their actions. But physical science shows us that those actions have been transfused into the very texture of the universe, so that no waters can wash them out, and no erosions, comminution, or metamorphoses, can obliterate them” (410). Both Hitchcock and De Quincey believe in the indestructibility of human thoughts.<sup>135</sup> The human brain is also a material existence that records the actions of human consciousness. For them, as well as for most nineteenth-century intellectuals, both the spiritual world of the mind and the material world are physically interconnected.

Dickinson would have been interested in this scientific interpretation of the human brain. When she met Higginson for the first time in 1870, after their correspondence of eight years, she brought up the subject by asking, “Is it oblivion or absorption when things pass from our minds?” (L 342b) Higginson, as Jerusha Hull McCormack points out, was a staunch believer in spiritualism.<sup>136</sup> By asking Higginson the question, Dickinson also showed her comprehension of this physical possibility of human spirit. Coincidentally, as his friend recalled, De Quincey also made a similar remark in a dinner party: “Is such a thing as forgetting possible to the human mind?” “Is not every impression it has once received, reproducible?” (Morrison 260) De Quincey's palimpsest theory of the human brain, in particular, seems to answer Dickinson's inquest into the mind. The strikingly similar use of imagery in both writers suggests their shared concerns about human consciousness. In particular, De Quincey's geological reading of the human brain that “Everlasting layers of ideas,

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<sup>135</sup> Hiroko Uno notes that Dickinson “knew the “Indestructibility” of matter” and has been “deeply influenced by the ideas of Edward Hitchcock” (1998 105-07).

<sup>136</sup> McCormack states that “Higginson's belief in an afterlife – together with the possibility of communicating with the spirits of the dead—was unquestioning and unshakeable” (586).

images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light” echoes Dickinson's compound vision in “The Admirations - and Contempts - of time -” (Fr830), in which her speaker argues that at the moment of death, our vision “reorganizes” as light enables light. Like Dickinson, in “The Palimpsest”, De Quincey stresses that “heterogeneous elements” of life will fuse and reorganize in the human brain “in the retrospect from dying moments, or from other great convulsions” (2003 V.15 175). As Diana Fuss remarks, “If poets are repeatedly drawn to the deathbed, and to the scene of love and loss enacted there, it may well be because the promise of an all-seeing 'dying eye' conveys precisely the kind of privileged vantage point that poets themselves strive to attain in their writing” (2009 879). De Quincey's opiate dreams and Dickinson's thinking exercise offer both writers such a vantage point to have a better view of the world. Like De Quincey, Dickinson returns constantly to the moment of death, physical agony and “great convulsions”, to the mythic cycle of creation, death and revival in her poems, in order to make sense of the heterogeneous elements in the passing universe.

In particular, De Quincey believes in the scientific power of resurrection. Chemistry, especially opium-eating, wields a supernatural power to evoke past events. The fossilization and carbonization of the human brain, for De Quincey, can be made reversible with the aid of modern science. Like Hitchcock, De Quincey uses the indestructibility principle to explain the function of the human brain, but he takes it a step further to apply mythological significance to science:

Chemistry, a witch as potent as the Erichtho of Lucanto ... has extorted by her torments, from the dust and ashes of forgotten centuries, the secrets of a life extinct for the general eye, but still glowing in the embers. Even the fable of the Phoenix, that secular bird, who propagated his solitary existence, and his solitary births, along the line of centuries, through eternal relays of funeral mists, is but a type of what we have done with Palimpsests. We have backed upon each phoenix in the long *regressus*, and forced him to expose his ancestral phoenix, sleeping in the ashes below his own ashes (2003 V.15 174).

Like Lord Rosse's telescope, chemistry exposes the past life buried in embers and ashes. Some poems of Dickinson can be read as a response to De Quincey's mythic interpretation. "Ashes denote that Fire was -" (Fr1097), for example, offers a forensic reading of the dead and the past, a secret that "Only the Chemist can disclose" through the carbonized fossils and extinguished ashes. In another poem "The smouldering embers blush -" (Fr1143), the coy embers defy Prometheus's attempt to acquire the knowledge of fire. De Quincey mythologises the palimpsest of the human brain into a modern fable of spiritual resurrection and scientific exposure. Dickinson, alternatively, reveals a more agnostic or sceptical attitude towards this resurrecting power of science.

Dickinson's poems find the past, even when retrieved, still unknowable. As Robin Peel points out, "Dickinson's objection was not to science, but to what she perceived to be the arrogance of science" (16). Fred D. White also remarks that "What science achieves for Dickinson ... is a clearer sense of what human beings can and cannot know".<sup>137</sup> These poems of Dickinson seem to revise De Quincey's trust in science. The chemist might be capable of investigating the embers and fossils by anatomizing what carbonized into the ashes, as shown in "Ashes denote that Fire was -", but what constitutes fire, life and art still cannot be deciphered by science alone. Dickinson writes in a letter that "Nature is a haunted house – but Art – is a house that tries to be haunted" (L459a). Scientists treat nature as a big laboratory for exploration. Artists, contrarily, tend to be fascinated by the supernatural side of Nature, the part that cannot be rationalized by empirical evidence. Another poem "Long Years apart - can make no" (Fr1405) rewrites the mythic analogy of De Quincey's chemist-sorcerer into an amorous rendezvous between the fire and the hand. The transaction between the finite and the infinite, the physical world and the human consciousness, nevertheless, remains a secret. The privacy of the universe stays intact from human inquiry.

Dickinson's images of electricity, light and fire indicate her perception of the

<sup>137</sup> White's paper "Sweet Skepticism of the Heart': Science in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson" is available at: <<http://www.cswnet.com/~erin/ed13.htm#top>>.

universe as unsteady and fractured. Her poetic practice of compound vision can be taken as a response to the fluid but also indelible nature of the universe. De Quincey, in a similar way, perceives the elastic world in terms of antagonism and contradiction. As mentioned in the introduction, he explains in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* that “wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other” (2009 126). The law of antagonism, for De Quincey, indicates more similarities than differences between two opposite thoughts. In “The English Mail-Coach”, De Quincey elaborates this theory, turning his dreaming realm into a Gothic version of espionage and conspiracy within one's brain:

The dreamer finds housed within himself – occupying, as it were, some separate chamber in his brain – holding, perhaps, from that station a secret and detestable commerce with his own heart – some horrid alien nature. What if it were his own nature repeated, – still, if the duality were distinctly perceptible, even that – even this mere numerical double of his own consciousness – might be a curse too mighty to be sustained. But how, if the alien nature contradicts his own, fights with it, perplexes, and confounds it? How, again, if not one alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five, are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself? These, however, are horrors from the kingdoms of anarchy and darkness, which, by their very intensity, challenge the sanctity of concealment, and gloomily retire from exposition. (2003 V.16 400-23)

Dickinson is also interested in such a process of doubling and multiplying self. Several of her poems depict such a Gothic encounter with the inner other. In “The Soul unto itself” (Fr579), for example, the inner self is “an imperial friend” or “the most agonizing Spy” that “An Enemy - could send -”. In another poem “Me from Myself - to banish -” (Fr709), these two selves are “mutual Monarch”. The attempt to banish the inner self comes to a deadlock. Margaret Homans considers Dickinson's doubling an “understanding of the fictiveness of language” and a democratization of “the structure of poetry” against the masculine tradition of unitary and hierarchical version of language (211).<sup>138</sup> Daneen Wardrop, alternatively, proposes reading the

<sup>138</sup> As Homans explains, “Dickinson's self-division allows her to avoid direct competition with the

inner other as the “unsocialized, libidinous self” that confronts the “acceptable, social self” (1996 97). Both interpretations indicate Dickinson's poetic tendency, linguistically or psychologically, to reflect upon the notion of dualism, a tendency that is also present in De Quincey's narcotic vision of one's numerous selves. As Barry Milligan comments, De Quincey's writing is replete with his repeated rewriting and subverting his own writing in a circular manner:

De Quincey essays repeatedly outline hierarchical divisions between East and West, inside and outside, self and other, only to invert the hierarchies and blur the divisions in processes closely associated with the use of opium. By effortlessly moving the devalued other term from the bottom to the top, De Quincey implies that bottom and top, self and other, are interchangeable, that the spectrum of difference is not a line but a circle, that what lies at the farthest end of the spectrum necessarily comes full circle back to the near end. (46-49)

The divisions and structures in the writings of both writers are never stable or simply hierarchical but circular and reversible. This reproducibility and reversibility that characterize the writings of Dickinson and De Quincey exemplify what David Harvey considers as the symptom of modernity: “Modernity ... not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterized by a neverending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself” (11-12). Indeed, from visitation to abdication, spying to assaulting, Dickinson's “The Soul unto itself” and “Me from Myself - to banish -” disclose an unsteady state of modern consciousness that resembles De Quincey's inner aliens. Rational analysis and social etiquettes are equally futile in this inner encounter. Subjugation and sovereignty become two sides of one coin.

Furthermore, the alien double is capable of overthrowing oneself through its secret manoeuvring. Although De Quincey's army of darkness eventually retreats to “the kingdoms of anarchy and darkness”, Dickinson's inner other can transform from a visitor into a hostess of one's inner chamber. In “One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted -” (Fr407B), the self risks murder, or as Sarah Blackwood calls it, “self-

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masculine unitary self, while at the same time also allowing her a power of her own” (212).

disidentity” (55), in her own brain:

One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted -  
 One need not be a House -  
 The Brain has Corridors - surpassing  
 Material Place -

Far safer, of a midnight meeting  
 External Ghost  
 Than its interior confronting -  
 That cooler Host -

Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,  
 The Stones a'chase -  
 Than Unarmed, one's a'self encounter -  
 In lonesome Place -

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

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

From a visitor who seeks haunting experiences, to a refugee who bolts the door against the haunting spirit, the poem presents a startling reversal of the power structure within one's consciousness. The rules of social calls are undermined in the poem through spatial reversal. The cooler host hides in the apartment to become an assassin, and the guest locks the door of her host's chamber to keep the dweller out. As Domhnall Mitchell remarks, “rooms functioned as spatial codes for the etiquette that increasingly rationalized social behaviour in the nineteenth century, and in this poem those codes are flouted or turned on their head” (2000 49). The spatial fluidity embodies the reversibility of host-guest relationships. It renders the chamber in one's brain scarier, since social structures and hierarchies cannot be counted on for one's survival.

Like “I tried to think a lonelier Thing”, “One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted -” can be taken as another literary exercise. It combines the external and the internal ghost, the “Material Place” and one's brain chamber to imagine a “lonesome Place”. Inder Nath Kher argues that in the poem “the 'superior spectre' of our inner reality” becomes “a threat to our material, vegetative existence”, a threat that “vanquishes our external reality” (28). Jane Donahue Eberwein similarly asserts that Dickinson, like most American writers, “stressed the interior, psychological aspect of gothicism rather than its exterior trappings of haunted abbeys, spectral apparitions, and mad monks” in the poem (1987 120). I would argue here that this material place might not necessarily refer to a physical place. Instead, it could also be read as a textual space that Dickinson challenges in this poem as a symbol of the Gothic convention. Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes that “the literary form of the Gothic novel is literally absorbed into the speaker” (464). Barton Levi St Armand also comments that in Dickinson's poems of extravagant Gothicism such as this one, “she internalized the haunted abbeys and frowning chateaus of Poe and Radcliffe” (97). I would suggest further that this internalization might also be seen as Dickinson's revision of the conventionality of Gothicism, since the definition of fear, shaped by its metaphorical tradition, is surpassed in the poem by the speaker's own imagination to expose its banality as a generic space. By suggesting the “Material Place” as a normative textual space, the poem undermines the boundary not only between the inner other and the external spectre, but also between the literary and physical space. By opening up another Gothic chamber in one's imagination, Dickinson competes with the Gothic writers of her time in instructing readers how to fear. As suggested in the plurality of “Ourself behind ourself”, her versions of selves are drastically multiplied through material and textual space as well as internal and external places.

De Quincey wrestles in the narcotic dreamland with his palimpsest of alien doubles. Dickinson, alternatively, wrestles for a more dynamic poetic space to accommodate human fear. Dickinson's encounter with the inner other is activated by her perception of both the world and the mind as elastic spatial, mental and textual structures. However, she does not seek to placate and exorcise the otherness within, as De

Quincey did with his oriental dreams, but to open up possibilities of human perception. Charles J. Rzepka observes that for De Quincey, “opium is an imaginative text; the imaginative text is an opiate” (1995 31). Although in some poems Dickinson's poetic landscape registers such an opiate vision, her sceptical voice also resists a narcotic reading of the world and emphasizes a more sensual relationship with the world instead. Alina Clej observes that “What constitutes De Quincey's founding modernity is not simply an awareness that writing has more to do with language and previous writing than with personal experience ... but his implicit recognition that human identity is by and large a matter of artifice” (256). What makes Dickinson less like De Quincey, seems to be her earnestness in considering self-exploration as not just a textual or imaginative, but also a physical and sensual experiment. As Albert J. Gelpi remarks, Dickinson’s poetic judgement is “regulated not by understanding and reason, nor by virtue and vice, but by pleasure and pain” (105-06). This sensuous earthly world is Dickinson's opium that she found difficult to quit. De Quincey's metaphoric propensity to present a conflicting world of loss and antagonism is revised into Dickinson's compound vision to examine her beloved world scientifically and physically.<sup>139</sup> Fred D. White observes that “Dickinson wishes to make the scientific angle of vision, complete with scientific and technical language, amplify rather than reduce the mystery of what is being dwelt upon”.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, her gaze outward inevitably turns inward at the same time to offer an alternative visual freedom, a literary approach De Quincey also adopts only to expose more horror.

To some extent, both Dickinson and De Quincey toy with the science of power, and the power of science. Besides their shared relish for compound visions, their texts are themselves the best exemplification of a palimpsest, through their continuous literary projects of repeating, rewriting, self-enclosing, and self-referencing.<sup>141</sup> However, as

<sup>139</sup> Love, grief and religion, Natalie Ford observes, are the trinity De Quincey creates for his emotional bases (242).

<sup>140</sup> See White's “Sweet Skepticism of the Heart’: Science in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson”, available at *Erin's Poetry Palace*: <<http://www.cswnet.com/~erin/ed13.htm#top>>.

<sup>141</sup> Nancy Mayer compares Dickinson's modernist narrative to a palimpsest (2008b 11). H. Jordan Landry further comments on Dickinson's editorial and literary practice by comparing Dickinson's poems to a palimpsest in which her letters to Susan “bleed through” (50).

Alina Clej points out, De Quincey was a “hack writer” who was “afflicted by a surfeit of knowledge – a post-Enlightenment syndrome aggravated by the rapid proliferation of journals and books”; he “suffered not just from a lack of something to say”, Clej argues; “he suffered from overfullness” (10). Dickinson, alternatively, fashions her poetic identity not only through her literary echoes, reactions or borrowing, but also through her self-recycling. As James McIntosh comments,

Her ideas and themes repeat themselves in the course of her career; her development is circular as well as linear. Her self-delighting process of speculation is to a large extent self-enclosed and self-referential. She lives in her own intellectual frame of reference and comes back over and over to the same introspective preoccupations. (36)

The scholarship on both Dickinson and De Quincey reveals interesting similarities and useful contrasts in their modernist elements, which characterize both their literary styles and representations of self. They both share Romantic tradition, but they also drastically digress from it. Despite the biographical contrast between Dickinson's shunning from publicity, and De Quincey's striving for literary and financial success, both writers show unusual receptiveness and responsiveness towards anxiety and suffering, their continuous devotion to shaping and fashioning their poetic self-representation, and their enduring strength in participating, reflecting and responding to the changing social, cultural and natural atmospheres of their times.

The literary echoes between Dickinson and De Quincey exemplify their recognition of the conundrum in human nature. In an age of scientific exploration, more dark secrets inside humanity are also unravelled. For De Quincey, scientific advances are an exposure of the horrid secret of the natural sublime, which consequently reveals the alien being within oneself. Dickinson, alternatively, finds the universe fluid, shaky and reversible, embodying the structure of the mind. Their double vision presents a universe that is not out of focus, but contains too many focuses. As Sabine Sielke remarks, Dickinson resists the “new faith in seeing”, embodied in the rise of realism and scientific inventions; for Sielke, Dickinson “capitalizes on tropes of

visual perception, thereby acknowledging both the significance and the limitations of the increasingly visual cultures that were emerging". By doing so, Sielke argues, "the poet exposes the impediment of our philosophically and technologically enlightened views" (77-78). The kaleidoscopic sights of the world seem to tempt and dazzle her. Dickinson's compound vision responds to such an opaque world with its lack of a single focus. In a manner similar to De Quincey's narcotic vision, Dickinson's compound vision exposes partitions, cracks, abysses and gaps as opposed to "philosophically and technologically enlightened views" of her time.

Furthermore, Dickinson's compound vision informs her literary response to her contemporary writers who attempted to redress a world out of focus, or in Wordsworth's words, out of tune. It addresses the complexity of the human brain in relation to the pressing and passing external world. However, her use of compound vision is as much a diffusion as an explanation of this anxiety of her time, when human vision is not capable of focusing and having the whole view at the same time. As Gary Lee Stonum points out, Dickinson's poetic quest does not seek unification:

In contrast then to the romantic quest aiming to unite knowledge and power ... Dickinson's venture disassociates the public, objective realm of representable knowledge from the radically private nature of power. That such power exists in and of the self is Dickinson's single most unshakable conviction, and her second-firmer belief may be that it is primarily activated by the confrontation with otherness. Beyond that, however, not only does the nature of such power elude investigation but Dickinson seems conscientiously to hold any further determination of it in abeyance. (177)

Dickinson refuses any confirmation partly because knowledge brings one to the recognition of the fictitious nature of power. Scientific investigation, embodied in her poetic mapping, exposes this impossibility of uniting knowledge and power, the view and one's vision. As shown in the third chapter, gaining perception means the loss of the object in view. Dickinson's double vision elucidates the process of thinking as a process of encountering the other both within and without. She reverses the structure of visual hierarchy by turning the telescope inside out to show the impossibility of

having only one focus for the whole picture. She indeed deviates from her Romanticist and Transcendentalist precursors with her conscious resistance to the “public, objective realm of representable knowledge”.

Hence Dickinson's poetic mapping revises the Romanticist and Transcendentalist belief that the axis of vision has to be aligned with the axis of things; it is the crack between visions in which Dickinson invests her poetic energy. For Emerson, the treachery of human senses can be redeemed through the transparency and unification of vision. For Dickinson, the treachery of nature makes human perception possible. In the discussion of optic instruments in Dickinson's poems, Hiroko Uno remarks that Dickinson uses negative experiences to confirm existence. Her compound vision is her optic instrument to approach the world in a more scientific and objective way:

[F]rom behind the door, Dickinson could objectively see both the outside world and her own inner world or both the affirmative and negative sides of things, with her unique slanting sight or “Compound Vision”. With this cool sight with these “two eyes”, Emily Dickinson could choose the “death in life” to appreciate negative existences, and then could change them into affirmative beings ... this unique vision or sight is an essential condition of her composition of poetry, in which “Nothing” is dynamically transformed into “Something”. (2002 168)

This negative experience can also be considered as an experience of visual reversal, when Dickinson the telescope holder, turns the optic instrument the other way around to examine the nature of privacy, as well as the privacy of nature. She adopts compound vision as her poetic instrument to account for a world out of focus in order to affirm human perception. As Stonum remarks, Dickinson's version of the sublime “departs from the normal practice in continually seesawing coolly on the hair of crisis” (190). Her poetic exploration of the “polar privacy” undermines visual dominance and trespasses the boundary between the inside and the outside to emphasize an interactive and interrelated connection with the other. Her mapping of the invisible conceptualizes this fluidity, reflexivity and reversibility of human perception.

**“This Consciousness that is aware”: Beside Oneself and the World**

Gaston Bachelard states that “Inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (47). Dickinson's poetic mapping expresses this endeavour to experience a space sensually through neighbouring the world; and her compound vision materializes this attempt to capture the momentary illumination through one's encounter with the unknown other both within and without. Undeniably, neighbouring the unknown threatens the violation and transgression of boundaries. Jane Donahue Eberwein remarks that “The poet necessarily observed boundaries most intently from the inside – the dimension of her senses, consciousness, and sense of selfhood. Therefore, she looked to boundaries for protection of these values that seemed to secure her identity” (1987 162). By staying in the domain of one's consciousness, Dickinson's speaker exerts her selfhood most intensely. However, the realm of one's consciousness in her poems is not always clearly defined as the inside. Dickinson states in a letter that “Paradise is no Journey because it (he) is within – but for that very cause though – it is the most Arduous of Journeys – because as the Servant Conscientiously says at the Door We are (always – in variably –) out –” (PF 99; L 3: 926). In her poetic journeys, she is invariably outside. She is not only outside nature or the heavenly gate, but more often outside her own consciousness.

I suggest that Dickinson's cautious speaker, by confronting one's perception of interiority, chooses to stay “beside” rather than “behind” her door ajar, since the boundary between privacy and publicity is easily reversed in her poems. Neighbouring thus becomes both a poetic strategy and a necessity for Dickinson. By neighbouring the world, one avoids the violence of visual invasion, and is enabled to gain perception. In addition, her compound vision opens up a universe of radical visual reversal and spatial fluidity, a universe to which one can only stay so close. Many of her poems express a longing for vision, instead of staying behind or away. In 1904, Louise Norcross, one of Dickinson's favourite cousins, depicted Dickinson's composition in the pantry: “The blinds were closed, but through the green slats she saw all those fascinating ups and downs going on outside that she wrote about”

(Habegger 398). Diana Fuss offers another insight into the poet's actual command of the view outside her bedroom window:

The place critics routinely identify as removing Dickinson from the domain of the visible in fact invests her with considerable scopic power. More a panoptic center than an enclosed prison cell, Dickinson's bedroom affords its occupant maximum visual control. The poet commands from her corner room a clear view of the Holyoke mountains to the South and the Evergreens to the West. (1998 29)

In her textual world, Dickinson also positions her speaker peripherally in order to obtain her scopic power. As Domhnall Mitchell states, “The windows suggest plenty, an abundance of perspectives, and at the same time a desire to distinguish oneself from those with fewer means” (2002 207). From such a marginal vantage point, she paradoxically achieves what the panoptic centre of God in “I never felt at Home - Below -” exerts through her own valves of vision and attention. Her visual control of the outside world, in both her real life and poetic world, offers her ample visibility to record glimpses of the passing and the fading. She confronts the intrusive world of reality and death by her imaginary neighbouring of, or in some poems intrusion into, the invisible. By standing next to the window, she feels intimacy.

In many poems, Dickinson's operation of her poetic power is exercised through spatial intimacy. The notion of neighbouring thus is important to explain encounters, visitations and receptions of the outside world in her poems. “This Consciousness that is aware” (Fr 817B), for example, juxtaposes one's consciousness alongside with the social and natural environment to depict the journey of one's life:

This Consciousness that is aware  
Of Neighbors and the Sun  
Will be the one aware of Death  
And that itself alone

Is traversing the interval  
Experience between  
And most profound experiment  
Appointed unto Men -

How adequate unto itself  
 Its properties shall be  
 Itself unto itself and None  
 Shall make discovery -

Adventure most unto itself  
 The Soul condemned to be -  
 Attended by a single Hound  
 Its own identity.

Jane Donahue Eberwein notes that Dickinson restores “the isolation of Bunyan's journey” in the poem “with the drama of suspenseful spiritual life” (1987 83). Paradoxically, the soul here seems to be both alone and not alone. Inder Nath Kher points out the journey as “the inward movement” of the struggling soul “chased by its own identity” (79-80). Meagan Evan further considers this journey “a purifying process by which consciousness, or the “Soul,” separates itself from all other things and becomes entirely self-defined” (90-91); however, as Evan comments, “The hound is a figure for selfsameness, the self becomes entirely self-defined, but as a figure it also preserves a multiplicity about which the poem is deeply ambivalent” (92). It is this doubleness that Cynthia Griffin Wolff regards as a state of mind that “borders upon derangement” (467). I would add that this “inward” and “purifying” process of one's “awareness” is also a vacillating process that continues to linger between oneself and the world. Death is to be acknowledged, the first stanza seems to say, through one's awareness of “Neighbors” and “the Sun” – one's earthy attachment. This awareness indicates the responsiveness of the soul toward not only the interior, but also the exterior experience of one's traversing. In particular, it reiterates the cosmic significance of one's interior journey, since the outside world of nature and the sun reminds the soul of her finite existence in an infinite universe. Furthermore, the solitary journey of life is also shaped by the relationship between oneself and one's identity, a fictitious, potentially more psychologically identifiable and presumably more socially constructed version of self as a unity. Co-presence and companionship are retained, or even stressed in this seemingly most profound and solitary journey one can take.

Dickinson's positioning of oneself in the poem can find resonance in Thoreau's illustration of his thinking process. For Thoreau, the conscious self can also be separated from one's own entity. In *Walden*, he elaborates this relation of doubleness within oneself through the concept of spectatorship:<sup>142</sup>

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense ... I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes. (130-31)

Like Dickinson's journey with her "single Hound", one's entity for Thoreau can also be "a kind of fiction" or "a work of the imagination". He turns this presence of the other me into a spectacle, consumable and de-constructible. Dickinson, however, seems to find a more companionable relationship in this encounter with one's double. Her profoundest experiment is taken precisely in this journey through the space of in-between, both between oneself and one's identity, and between oneself and the external world. Critics such as Suzanne Juhasz, Jane Donahue Eberwein and Gary Lee Stonum and James McIntosh, as shown earlier in the chapter, have stressed interiority as the primary locus of Dickinson's poems. Susan Manning further points out a lack of distinction between the self and the other in Dickinson's poems that "there are no 'others,' only absent-presences in the poetic mind ... The only relationship is an internal one – self within or behind the self – so that the processes of consciousness become the primary location for knowledge of identity and value, the nearest thing available to an absolute" (2002 287). This astonishing elasticity of the mind, exemplified in Dickinson's poetry, breaks down the boundary of outer-

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<sup>142</sup> In *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, Jeffrey S. Cramer points out that in "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England," Emerson expresses a similar idea: "The key to the period appeared to be that the mind had become aware of itself" (130-31).

inner and self-other dyads. However, this fluidity of the mind also makes her notion of human consciousness a frequently rotating and alternating entity, receptive and responsive to the outer world. As Robert Weisbuch remarks, “Dickinson cannot take seriously the all-or-nothing question of whether the internal or the external is the source of the other”; for Weisbuch, “Dickinson's poetic techniques generally put the question aside to examine things-as-they-are, a procedure which anticipates modern phenomenology” (1972 160). The external reality, represented by the sun, her neighbours, and death in her single hound poem, seem to play a crucial role in linking one's finite existence with the infinite universe for her. Dickinson states in “The missing All, prevented Me” (Fr995) that nothing except an unhinged world and the sun's extinction could disrupt her work. Her radical perception of the universe as an unsteady existence makes this drastic alterity of consciousness possible. Her perception of such a physically present universe, her “global consciousness,” as Paul Giles calls it (2011 1), allows various visual duplications and reversals to take place in her poetic space.

#### **“Because I see - New Englandly -”: Transatlantic and Transglobal Exchange**

Dickinson's “profound experiment” with her “single Hound” constantly involves guests, visitors, or neighbours, revealing its solitary but never isolating nature. Her speakers are still deeply engaged with the world, perhaps ever more so when the journey of the soul is intensely solitary. Even Queen Victoria in England becomes her point of reference in poems such as “The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -” (Fr256). In the poem, the speaker is both provincial but also “queen-like”, implying her sophistication and worldliness despite her relative isolation in New England:

The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -  
 Because I grow - where Robins do -  
 But, were I Cuckoo born -  
 I'd swear by him -  
 The ode familiar - rules the Noon -  
 The Buttercup's, my Whim for Bloom -  
 Because, we're Orchard sprung -

But, were I Britain born,  
I'd Daisies spurn -

None but the Nut - October fit -  
Because - through dropping it,  
The Seasons flit - I'm taught -  
Without the Snow's Tableau  
Winter, were lie - to me -  
Because I see - New Englandly -  
The Queen, discerns like me -  
Provincially -

The “New Englandly” way of seeing highlights the local environment as a shaping force of one's perception. This regional identity is not simply an identity one is fashioned with, but is also becoming an identity one clings onto, since “through dropping it”, the world, like the season, would “flit”. This sense of crisis, of a shaky existence in a universe, compels Dickinson's speaker to “discern” and “swear by” a certain criterion “for Tune”. In this way, Dickinson foregrounds in this poem an awareness of location, since human perceptions are inevitably “provincial”. As shown in poems such as “Unfulfilled to Observation -”, human observation is conditioned and restricted by the horizon of the earth and the rotating transition of the heavenly body. Discerning one's “criterion for Tune” becomes a necessity in one's search for the anchorage of one's perception.

By aligning with the queen, however, “The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -” also connects the local with the transatlantic, the rural and the royal. Claiming herself as being “Orchard sprung”, the speaker positions herself not only as a regional bard with her Robin's tune, but also as a poet for humanity. David Porter considers the poem as a “New England *Lyrical Ballad*”, indicating Dickinson's “linguistic location” (1981 224). Cynthia Griffin Wolff also remarks that in the poem she “might speak as 'Representative' – not merely for herself or for her time, but for all men and women and for all time” (143). Instead of restricting her poetic tune provincially, the speaker aspires to register her New Englandly tune with a universal criterion, opening up her provincial perspective to not only a royal but even a global vision. Furthermore, the poem exposes the limitation of human perception in “I'm taught -/

Without the Snow's Tableau/ Winter, were lie - to me -" by showing the definition of season as a social and geographical construct. Location establishes one's notion of time and space, one's "Criterion for Tune", but it also restrains aesthetic perception. By switching one's perspective from the New England speaker to the English queen, the poem presents truth as partial and incomplete. In "Procession of the Flowers", Higginson compares the English winter to "a chilly and comfortless autumn" in New England (649). Dickinson's possible allusion to Higginson's remark in the poem can be taken as her appreciation of the transatlantic differences in perceptives. Seeing "New Englandly" exemplifies a repositioning of oneself in a global procession of shifting landscapes, climates and horizons. By juxtaposing the near with the far, the poem undermines the proposed provincialism and gestures beyond a fixed regional identity towards a more fluid relation in planetary exploration.

"The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -" provides a paradigm to examine Dickinson's provincialism as being simultaneously cosmopolitan and even planetary. Her notion of neighbouring, especially her poetic emphasis upon spatial intimacy, is shown in her presentation of parallel universes in the poem. Her provincial vision is also a double vision that subverts a panoramic representation of the world. Critics have pointed out how the poem challenges regional perception. Gary Lee Stonum, for example, notes that Dickinson's transformation of New England into an adverb "amplifies the phrase's textuality, its implication in a network of contexts and associations" (33). This textual association, Michelle Kohler further remarks, "points to the constructedness of truth attached to places" (2010 33). Christine Gerhardt, alternatively, associates Dickinson's regionalism with an ecological consciousness, which "challenges any one-dimensional, restrictive localism" (75). Paul Giles further portrays the poem as operating "mutual forms of decentering" "on a radical axis" (2011 17). Dickinson's provincialism thus can be read as a drastic gesture to deconstruct as well as reconstruct normative spatial and textual space. By presenting two axes of things at the same time, her provincialism is turned into universalism. With her compound vision, the poem delineates a world of multiple visions.

From regionalism to mutual abdication, “The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -” maps out Dickinson's monarchical perception as a quantum swing of telescopic visions. Human limitation, exemplified in her focus on provinciality, is conveyed through her transatlantic or even atmospheric imagination. Many of her poems reveal such a subtle but profound sense of worldliness, particularly through her themes of visitation, reception, neighbouring and hospitality, situations that reflect her own life experiences. Although she stopped attending church at around the age of thirty and later refused to cross her “Father’s ground” for any visits (Lundin 4), her life in Amherst had shown a consistent participation in a mobile social and cosmic atmosphere. As mentioned in the introduction, the Dickinson household never lacked visitors. Diana Fuss notes that the location of the Homestead, where the Dickinsons returned in the mid-1850s, was only a block away from the railway and had become a final point of destination for many travellers to the Connecticut Valley by 1856. Dickinson’s lack of travel might be compensated by the fact that both the Homestead and Amherst had been made accessible for visitors from far and wide, where Dickinson's father, “the only man in town influential enough” to build the Amherst and Belchertown Rail Road, as Fuss puts it, resided (2004 53). Meeting and neighbouring were, for Dickinson, an alternative and probably more preferable way of travel. Some of her most famous poems, such as “Because I could not stop for Death” and “The Soul selects her own Society -”, showed how her imaginary travel was shaped by her vocabulary of gentility, respectability and diplomacy that reflected the status of the Dickinsons as a distinguished family in Amherst.

As Mary Loeffelholz points out, Dickinson's poetic travel draws on her domestic experiences that are distinctly different from those of the male literary tradition:

She is not a quester or a 'vagabond' herself ... the powerful male I/eye moving in nature ... was not an assimilable role for her. Without Wordsworthian recourse to movement, distance, and the contest of faculties, Dickinson has a much smaller range of dislocations in which to invest imagination with power over nature – and nature ... inevitably means the 'nature' given to her through prior texts as well as the nature literally outside the windows of her father's Homestead” (134).

I would add that Dickinson's "smaller range of dislocation" and limited experiences of "movement" help her conjure up visitations of the most ubiquitous, experiences no less universal than Walt Whitman's iconic leaves of grass. One of the most notable, and perhaps also the most exotic and erotic visitors in Dickinson's work is paradoxically the most invisible and familiar one, the influenza. In an 1850 letter to Abiah Root, she imagines the cold as a gentleman caller, travelling all the way from Switzerland:

I am occupied principally with a cold just now, and the dear creature will have so much attention that my time slips away amazingly. It has heard so much of New Englanders, of their kind attentions to strangers, that it's come all the way from the Alps to determine the truth of the tale. It says the half was n't told it, and I begin to be afraid it was n't. Only think – came all the way from that distant Switzerland to find what was the truth! ... It would n't get down, and commenced talking to itself: "Can't be New England – must have made some mistake – disappointed in my reception – don't agree with accounts. Oh, what a world of deception and fraud! Marm, will you tell me the name of this country – it's Asia Minor, isn't it? I intended to stop in New England." By this time I was so completely exhausted that I made no further effort to rid me of my load, and travelled home at a moderate jog, paying no attention whatever to it, got into the house, threw off both bonnet and shawl, and out flew my tormentor, and putting both arms around my neck, began to kiss me immoderately, and express so much love it completely bewildered me. Since then it has slept in my bed. eaten from my plate, lived with me everywhere, and will tag me through life for all I know. I think I'll wake first, and get out of bed, and leave it; but early or late, it is dressed before me, and sits on the side of the bed looking right into my face with such a comical expression it almost makes me laugh in spite of myself ... (L31)

This flowery depiction of the cold, as Dickinson herself referred to as "vain imaginations" and "flowers of speech" in the same letter, is generally considered as Dickinson's exercise of the fictive metaphoric power of language.<sup>143</sup> Her literary

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<sup>143</sup> Helen McNeil, for example, suggests that this letter mingles reality and metaphors, showing Dickinson's belief in the fiction-making power (66-67). Margaret Homans further remarks that in the letter Dickinson "transforms herself from tempted into tempter" who tempts both herself and Abiah Root with the Satanic temptation of the flowery speech (169).

exercise in letters such as this one, I would further suggest, demonstrates her incorporation of biological with geological imagery that would continue to subvert the inside-outside division in her later poems. Associating her illness with the chilly climate of Switzerland, Dickinson transforms this contagious disease into a tenacious visitor, transmitting bacteria through its transatlantic air travel. Since the cold was presented as a respectable traveller, Dickinson as a hostess felt obliged to suppress her physical discomfort, accommodating this curious creature in return for its civility and respectability, its looks of “independence and prosperity in business”. Controversially, this “respectable” encounter is also a highly erotic and sensuous one.<sup>144</sup> This gentleman caller visitor climbed on her back, kissed her, shared her food and bed, and eventually made her recommend it to her friend for it was “worth the having”. Global circumnavigation, airy and bodily circulation and social and sexual exchange are played out intricately in this cartographic imagination. Hitchcock explains in *The Religion of Geology* that the exchange of bodily fluid or movement is also a global phenomenon:

[E]very impression which man makes by his words, or his movements, upon the air, the waters, or the solid earth, will produce a series of changes in each of those elements which will never end. The word which is now going out of my mouth causes pulsations or waves in the air, and these, though invisible to human eyes, expand in every direction until they have passed around the whole globe, and produced a change in the whole atmosphere ... (411)

Dickinson's comic depiction offers a glimpse of her worldview similar to Hitchcock's telegraphic reading of the universe as being fluid, circulating, and interconnected. This illness as a gentleman caller is both cosmopolitan and comically insular in his relentless insistence on New England hospitality. Its behaviour is both decorous and physically aggressive. Its manner of travel is both atmospheric and microscopic. With a simple illness, Dickinson presents a multi-layered mode of travel, ranging from the domestic and the bodily into the atmospheric and global interchange.

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<sup>144</sup> In *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson*, John Cody considers this description of the cold in the letter as an expression of Dickinson's sexual anxiety (175-180).

Dickinson's poems of visiting, hosting or waiting to meet are full of such cosmic motions. Her domestic landscape is expanded into a global projection and then contracted into a microscopic examination of one's interiority, both physically and emotionally. Besides the physical discomfort, shown in her letter about the illness, she also portrays psychological torment through her global imagination. In "If you were coming in the Fall" (Fr356), which Inder Nath Kher suggests to express the "self-destroying and self-fulfilling" process of love (149), the speaker's waiting is placed in the contexts of both colonial and planetary transportations. Her emotional crisis is shaped by her world projection:

If you were coming in the Fall,  
I'd brush the Summer by  
With half a smile, and half a spurn,  
As Housewives do, a Fly.

If I could see you in a year,  
I'd wind the months in balls -  
And put them each in separate Drawers,  
For fear the numbers fuse -

If only Centuries, delayed,  
I'd count them on my Hand,  
Subtracting, till my fingers dropped  
Into Van Dieman's Land.

If certain, when this life was out -  
That your's and mine, should be -  
I'd toss it yonder, like a Rind,  
And take Eternity -

But, now, uncertain of the length  
Of this, that is between,  
It goads me, like the Goblin Bee -  
That will not state - it's sting.

From domesticities to frontiers, from sweater knitting to life taking, the poem shows a wide range of locations in motion. Domestic settings interweave with the outback wilderness, delineating the complexity of the speaker's emotional landscape. Drawers

and eternity are juxtaposed to suggest a space of infinity in its paradoxical confinement. This feeling of imprisonment is further expressed in the reference to the penal colony in Australia, in which the speaker labours like a convict for centuries of waiting.<sup>145</sup> Since Van Dieman's Land, or Tasmania since 1856, was a former British colony for penal transportation, it was emblematic of violence, the anxiety of exiles and shadows of death.<sup>146</sup> Instead of mapping and exploring unknown lands, however, the speaker almost risks losing her life in this subterranean existence of counting and labouring. As Paul Giles remarks, “Dickinson in this poem represents Van Diemen's Land as a gothic epiphenomenon of the transition from domestic to metaphysical, a sign of the uncomfortable metaphorical passage between homely romance and the vast orbits of the heavens” (2011 16). From being a docile housewife, the speaker turns herself into a convict or a pioneer who suffers the hardship of exile or polar voyages. Addendum to this global imagination is the poem's evocation of a haunting alien being inside in the last stanza. The speaker is not only imprisoned but also haunted and chased by a fictitious “Goblin bee”. From a housewife to a convict, from a pioneer to a Gothic victim, the sense of imprisonment is deepened through the topographic vacillation between the calmness of a respectable suburban landscape to the wilderness of crime, hardship and imprisonment, both within and without.

Alexandra Socarides argues that “If you were coming in the Fall,” “is filled with the sentimental and domestic images usually associated with a woman waiting”. For Socarides, such a situation “is treated with a certain degree of levity” by Dickinson (43). However, I would suggest here that the suppressed longing and its implicit violence in her poem seems to also take on a scope wider than conventions of

<sup>145</sup> Cynthia Griffin Wolff points out that this evocation of Van Dieman's Land in the poem might refer to a punning riddle popular in Dickinson's time, a jest that corresponds with the voice “of a child at play” in the third stanza: “The riddler would extend her hand, palm down, and one by one curl each finger under; the fingers were intended to represent people, and the riddler would demand to know where these disappearing folk had gone. The answer was 'Van Dieman's Land' – i.e., 'down under,' the slang expression for Australia” (377). I would add that this voice of childlike playfulness that Wolff suggests here would also highlight the poignancy of the dark reality of people's disappearance “down under”.

<sup>146</sup> Paul Giles suggests that the reference to Van Dieman's Land in the poem can be compared with Edgar Allen Poe's fictional account of the Antarctic expeditions in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), in which the author pays tribute to pioneers of Pacific explorations (2011 16 & 19).

sentimentalism have allowed. In particular, her poem could find resonance in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853). In the story, the puritan heroine waits for her lover's return from the West Indies also in the fall, when a November storm happens to take place at sea. In particular, the image of the housewife-speaker in Dickinson's poem echoes Brontë's depiction of two opposing characters, Lucy Snow and Madame Beck, in her novel. Madame Beck, the Catholic headmistress of the school, is a relentless usurper of other people: "she perfectly knew the quality of the tools she used, and while she would not scruple to handle the dirtiest for a dirty occasion – flinging this sort from her like refuse rind, after the orange has been duly squeezed – I have known her fastidious in seeking pure metal for clean uses" (139). Brontë's characterization resembles the skilful housewife in Dickinson's poem who would toss her own life yonder "like a Rind" to take eternity. Observing the bourgeois behaviour of the headmaster, Lucy Snow responds with equal indifference, an attitude similar to that of Dickinson's housewife-speaker who brushes the summer by "With half a smile, and half a spurn": "interest was the master-key of Madame's nature – the mainspring of her motives – the alpha and omega of her life. I have seen her feelings appealed to, and I have smiled in half-pity, half-scorn at the appellants" (139). The instrumental calculation of Madame Beck, and the scornfulness of Lucy Snow as well as her unrequited passion in Brontë's novel are images adopted in Dickinson's poem and revised into an almost mythical journey of pining, suffering, suspending and waiting.

Matching Brontë's *Villette* in its plot, language, or even its scale, "If you were coming in the Fall," foregrounds a parallel between a micro-universe of domestic and social violence and a macro one of colonial adventure and planetary speculation. As Camille Paglia comments, Dickinson is one of the first female writers to renounce genteel manners of the bourgeois culture (633-34). In a manner similar to Brontë's novel, Dickinson's poem pushes the borderline of bourgeois morality to the brink of criminality, exposing the tremendousness of her emotion that no space can contain. Furthermore, through her compound vision of home and eternity, Van Dieman's Land abroad and the Goblin's sting inside, the poem transforms the uncertainty of waiting

into an apotheosizing process. The housewife speaker becomes almost a martyr, sacrificing her life to goblins for the inexplicable experiences of guessing and waiting. The poem juxtaposes the outside and the inside, the domestic and the cosmic, the colonial and the emotional to create a dramatic monologue on an epic scale. Her speaker is a hostess, a goddess, a prisoner, and also a martyr in a universe of unpredictable outcomes.

“If you were coming in the Fall,” presents an intense relationship between oneself and the world. In contrast to her theme of interior turmoil, her poem presents a vigilance and responsiveness towards a universe of uncertain elements. As shown earlier in this chapter, “The Crickets sang,” reveals a mysterious universe to Dickinson for its lingering and unstable itinerary:

The Twilight stood, as Strangers do  
With Hat in Hand, polite and new  
To stay as if, or go -

In a similar way, her waiting poem depicts a twilight zone of speculation and hesitation for an unknown visitor. Her choice of the season, the autumn, further embodies such a twilight season of a year that does not haringer for the speaker the spring prefigured by Shelley's west wind, but reveals the lack of confirmation. Christopher Benfey observes that “Dickinson will often use the word ‘meet’ in epistemological contexts, where to meet something or someone is to face it, to question it, to be touched or moved by it” (1984 86). Not to meet, alternatively, is equally charged with social and cosmic significance. The intensity of emotional seclusion and entrapment in her poem is paradoxically presented through the worldliness of her hostess-speaker.

In some poems, Dickinson's hostess persona comes closest to her self-representation as a queen-like recluse.<sup>147</sup> This self-fashioning in both her poems and her life is also conducted through her juxtaposition of the local and the domestic with the social and

<sup>147</sup> Samuel Bowles, for example, nicknamed Dickinson the “Queen recluse”, and Mabel Todd knew Dickinson as “the Myth” (Sewall xxiv; 216).

the cosmic. Her “The Soul selects her own Society -” (Fr409A), for example, turns the process of seclusion into almost a public auction by performing the invisibility of the soul:

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

Unmoved - she notes the Chariots - pausing -  
 At her low Gate -  
 Unmoved - an Emperor be kneeling  
 Upon her Mat -

I've known her - from an ample nation -  
 Choose One -  
 Then - close the Valves of her attention -  
 Like Stone -

As Suzanne Juhasz notes, conventional ideas about power are “reversed” here (15). The soul is not just a passive receiver, but also a keen perceiver in the poem. “Select”, “shut”, “present”, “note”, “choose” and “close” all indicate processes of choice-making in response to a worshipping crowd. By keeping her vigilance, noting the chariots and imperial visitors, the soul maintains her awareness of such a courting and passing world. Her seclusion thus reveals a certain degree of performativity. The soul not only has her hand-picked “Society” to wait on her, but she also turns herself into a statue-like figure to be adored. As an invisible hostess, the soul faces her “ample nation” with an equal level of knowingness.

Camille Paglia comments on “The Soul selects her own Society -” that “the inflexible heart of metal spigots” embodies “a tomb-monument of the self” (656). However, the poem also shows the subtle response of the soul to the “kneeling” and “pausing” suitors. Echoing the steely retreating mountain and the kneeling speaker in “Ah, Tenerife!” discussed in the third chapter, the soul and her suitors in this poem are also performing their rituals of mutual enshrinement. Her process of choosing discloses a more reflexive and duplicative relationship with the outside world, of

which she is aware and mirrors in a similarly inflexible gesture. Since the immovability of the soul can only be manifested through the persistence of the kneeling emperor, the exercise of her will power becomes an indeterminate process of exposition, justification, and negotiation that requires the co-operation of the outside world, including the speaker who observes and reports the story of the retreating soul. Paul Crumbley thus remarks that the poem can be read “as the efforts of a conformist speaker to understand the Queen's illocality” (1997 130). The soul's withdrawal seems to be beyond comprehension. Nevertheless, this retreating gesture of the queen might also be read as a representation of the essential human condition. Cynthia Griffin Wolff regards the voice of the soul as “the sculptured delineation of the speaker”, arguing that the poem is about a universal situation – “an interaction between 'self' and 'other'”; the voice is adult, socialized and “recognizably human and patently sane” (199-200). I would suggest further that the seclusion of the soul is also emblematic of human perception as limited and incomplete. One can only be vigilant and discreet. Like the queen who discerns provincially in “The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -”, the soul sees provincially. Facing an ample nation, one can only choose one.

“The Soul selects her own Society -” registers an Emersonian notion of self-reliance as well as a conscious deviation from the Whitmanesque embrace of a cosmopolitan America. It shows how perception is exercised through a performative process of selection, projection, duplication and exclusion for Dickinson. The observing speaker presents this dialogic process of choosing, choosing not, and not choosing, revealing a more dynamic relation between the soul and the audiences, including the speaker, the pleading crowd, and the readers. The speaker's reportage explicates, and to some extent justifies, the queenly withdrawal. It delineates the soul's retreat as recognition of restricted human perception, and an appreciation of self-assertion, instead of an espousal of seclusion or provincialism. The soul is a hostess of the world not by having the whole view, but by choosing one out of many. Her rejection of the divine majority becomes an alternative gesture of democracy, a David-against-Goliath battle for justice. Hence the poem argues for the soul's decision, since a queen, like every

commoner, has to discern and see provincially.

As discussed in the third chapter, travel fashion of her time informs a desire to fill in the geographical blankness through visual dominance. Dickinson's poems seem to conscientiously leave the human projection of the world blank. Instead of receiving all societies, her hostess speaker chooses one visitor and remains invisible to the rest of the world. What she seeks is spatial intimacy rather than visual dominance, and her poems of visitation and reception reveal such a dynamic poetic space. "The Soul that hath a Guest," (Fr592A), for example, delineates a poetic quest not by travelling, but by staying at home:

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

And Courtesy forbids  
A Host's departure - when  
Opon Himself - be visiting  
The Emperor of Men -

Jane Donahue Eberwein points out that quite a few poems of Dickinson about mysterious guests "suggest divine visitation"; nevertheless, the imagery Dickinson uses to express "her shifting relationships with God deviated often from traditional Calvinist language" (1987 182). Indeed, Dickinson shifts the locus of empowerment here from the imperial viewer to her reception of an imperial guest. Having this "Diviner Crowd" at home becomes an alternative way of visiting the world. The hierarchy between the hostess and the visitor is further subverted, when the hostess paradoxically becomes the servant of this royal guest out of "Courtesy". By going beyond the respectable appearance of social decorum and hospitality, these hostess poems of Dickinson either confront and question conventional perception, or defend one's choice of life as well as negotiate with the outside world. The domestic and interior landscape in her poems is reshaped and redefined through her hostess-speaker's intense interaction with these visitors, either by meeting or not meeting.

**“Knew a Particle – of Space's/ Vast Society”: The Air and the Consciousness**

The pronounced provinciality in Dickinson's poems is most radically undermined when her callers and visitors are air travellers. In these poems, the imprint of ownership and identity is inscribed and then radically erased. One's position and identity lack fixation and specification. In “Alone, I cannot be -” (Fr303), for example, the definition of home is destabilized when the speaker is transformed from a hostess to a visitor of nature:

Alone, I cannot be -  
 For Hosts - do visit me -  
 Recordless Company -  
 Who baffle Key -

They have no Robes, nor Names -  
 No Almanacs - nor Climes -  
 But general Homes  
 Like Gnomes -

Their Coming, may be known  
 By Couriers within -  
 Their going - is not -  
 For they've never gone -

Jane Donahue Eberwein notes that poems in fascicle 12 including this one celebrate “the power of imagination liberated through art to overcome impotence and loneliness” (1987 75). I would argue that here the poem might express a more physical experience than simply the speaker's imaginary escapism. The liberating power of art seems to be more closely linked with Dickinson's awareness of the position of humanity in nature. “Almanacs” and “Climes” indicate the atmospheric existence of these unknown visitors who permeate nature. Calling these unknown visitors “Hosts” and their houses “General Homes”, the poem further reveals the identity of the speaker as a visitor of nature, as well as a temporary lodger of the earth. In “Intellect”, Emerson claims that humans are capable of imposing order upon nature: “Nature shows all things formed and bound. The intellect pierces the form, over-leaps the wall, detects intrinsic likeness between remote things, and reduces all

things into a few principles” (1857 296). Dickinson's poem, conversely, turns nature into the real host of the world.

In her discussion of Dickinson's wind imagery, Mary Loeffelholz describes the air visitor as Evan Carton's so-called a “receptive quester” that “does not carry off the female speaker” – that goes nowhere and possesses nothing (125). As Loeffelholz explains, “wind and speaker do not divide up along the lines of a passive/active, male/female, soul/body, supernatural/natural Platonic opposition.” (127). I would add one more category to Dickinson's obviation of dualism – man and nature. As shown earlier in the chapter, Dickinson depicts nature as both a stranger and a neighbour who “does not knock, and yet does not intrude” (L587). The hierarchical division between man and nature is further erased in the poem, turning human into a guest of the planet. From visiting to staying, the “Recordless Company” are truly at home in their “general Homes” on earth, leaving the speaker vigilant and yet wondering. The poem thus exercises a drastic erasure of human imprint in this liquidated and reversible relationship between the host and the guest, man and nature.

Nancy Mayer notes that “in a Dickinson poem we seem to have arrived in the midst of the telling, so we are left with a remnant of incident and a strong aftershock of emotion, but no marks of ownership” (2008 1). I would suggest further that by emphasizing the notion of neighbouring instead of owning, Dickinson's poems convey moments of intimacy and interaction that transcend the boundaries of human-nature hierarchy and ownership. The world becomes her neighbour, her caller, her divine guest and her host at the same time. Dickinson elucidates this fluid relation in “He was my host - he was my guest,” (Fr1754):

He was my host - he was my guest,  
I never to this day  
If I invited him could tell,  
Or he invited me.

So infinite our intercourse  
So intimate, indeed,

Analysis as capsule seemed  
To keeper of the seed.

Inder Nath Kher considers the encounter between “I” and the “other” in poems such as this one suggests inner dialogues between the poet and the solitary self (261-63). I would argue that this relation between oneself and the unknown other goes beyond the realm of the speaker's self or imagination. Emerson uses a similar metaphor at the beginning of “Intellect” to describe the sowing of thought's seeds:

Go, speed the stars of Thought  
On to their shining goals; –  
The sower scatters broad his seed,  
The wheat thou strew'st be souls (1857 293)

This intercourse between oneself and the world is not only a mental, but also a physical encounter for Emerson. He elaborates this organic development of the mind further by emphasizing this fusing relation between the receiving and the perceiving mind, self and knowledge:

[T]he intellect dissolves fire, gravity, laws, method, and the subtlest unnamed relations of nature, in its resistless menstruum ... How can we speak of the action of the mind under any divisions ... since it melts will into perception, knowledge into act? Each becomes the other. Itself alone is. Its vision is not like the vision of the eye, but is union with the things known. (1857 295-96)

Dickinson's imperial host-guest seems to personify Emerson's notion of the intellect. This royal presence in her poems is also “resistless” and “Each becomes the other”. However, the vision of unification between one's mind and the external world in Emerson's essay remains separate in Dickinson's poems. “Conscious am I in my Chamber -” (Fr773B), for example, turns this Emersonian intellect into another air-like existence, stressing an understanding of mutual differences rather than union:

Conscious am I in my Chamber -  
Of a shapeless friend -

He doth not attest by Posture -  
Nor confirm - by Word -

Neither Place - need I present Him -  
Fitter Courtesy  
Hospitable intuition  
Of His Company -

Presence - is His furthest license -  
Neither He to Me  
Nor Myself to Him - by Accent -  
Forfeit Probity -

Weariness of Him, were quainter  
Than Monotony  
Knew a Particle - of Space's  
Vast Society -

Neither if He visit Other -  
Do He dwell - or Nay - know I -  
But Instinct esteem Him  
Immortality -

Being a “Particle” of “Space's/ Vast Society”, the shapeless visitor in Dickinson's poem is similar to the airy visitant in Emily Brontë's “The Visionary” (1845). Dickinson's divine visitor also reminds one of the last stanza in Emily Brontë's “No coward soul is mine” (1846), a poem Higginson read in Dickinson's funeral (Moon 231):

There is not room for Death  
Nor atom that his might could render void  
Since thou art Being and Breath  
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

This invisible visitor of Dickinson, like this “Being and Breath” of Emily Brontë, a writer Dickinson hugely admired, is both immortal and indestructible in its most physical, “atomic” sense.<sup>148</sup> It also resembles the “Atom”, or the spiritual existence

<sup>148</sup> Mary Loeffelholz recognizes the influence of Emily Brontë's poems about mysterious visitors such as “The Prisoner” and “The Visionary” on Dickinson, while noting that Dickinson “moves away from the always-given binary terms of Emily Brontë's dramatic lyrics” (121). Michael Moon focuses on the influences of Emily Brontë's “stoic discourse” in poems such as “No coward soul is mine” on Dickinson (242-47).

depicted in her another poem “Of all the Souls that stand create -” (Fr664), in which the atomic presence of immortality is preferred by the speaker than “all the lists of Clay”. Mary Loeffelholz refers to Cristanne Miller's analogy between “Atom” and “Adam”, pointing out that in “Of all the Souls that stand create -” Dickinson's “mysterious Atom” is “a necessary third term, a deconstructive muse” that substitutes Adam and God (62). By doing so, Loeffelholz states, Dickinson “elects herself out of the Father's bargain of redemption” (62). The same can be applied to “Conscious am I in my Chamber -”, in which the immortal visitor is also a particle resurrected from the clay, or the mortal body. The atomic being is a shapeless but sensible and unobtrusive “presence”, a “necessary third term” that negotiates between Emerson's seer and the seen, enabling the “Probity” of both the hostess-speaker and the visitor to remain intact.

In his *The Religion of Geology*, Hitchcock states that “every particle of air thus set in motion could be traced through all its changes, with as much precision as the astronomer can point out the path of the heavenly bodies” (412). Dickinson's “Conscious am I in my Chamber -”, in a similar way, draws one's attention to the microscopic existence of this shapeless friend. Suzanne Juhasz asserts that this unknown guest is “a metaphor for an aspect of self or mind” (157). I would argue that this visitation of the omnipresent being not only indicates a spiritual experience but also permeates the universe with a fluid particle presence. This invisible but physical interaction between oneself and the infinite thus pushes one's understanding of encounter and intercourse to the brink of transgression, when this shapeless presence can be both inside and outside any concrete or bodily confinement, suggesting extreme spatial and physical intimacy. The particle existence of this visitor, sensed only through one's intuition, helps one imagine “Space's/ Vast Society”. Inder Nath Kher comments on the poem that “the tangibility of the all-inclusive landscape is a constant reality in the human consciousness which cannot be shown in terms of an external topography” (60). I would suggest that this “all-inclusive landscape” for Dickinson might not just exist in the human consciousness; instead, this “fluid” version of Dickinson's landscape is intimately connected with the

external world. Her shapeless friend reminds one of these gnome-like creatures in “Alone, I cannot be -”, and the invisible doubling in “I tried to think a lonelier Thing”. He is also like the pernicious visitor in Dickinson's letter about the cold, or the host in “He was my host - he was my guest” who morphs into the air, the body and the thought of the speaker.

Dickinson's poems about elusive natural phenomena are indicative of her perception of a universe composed of numerous floating atoms, a society of immortality that is both metaphysical and physical, microscopic and universal. Her “A South Wind - has a pathos” (Fr883) highlights such an intensely “saturated” relationship between nature and man, the land and the air:

A South Wind - has a pathos  
Of individual Voice -  
As One detect on Landings  
An Emigrant's address -

A Hint of Ports - and Peoples -  
And much not understood -  
The fairer - for the farness -  
And for the foreignhood -

Christine Gerhardt remarks that words like “address”, “Emigrant” and “foreignhood” present “a culturally and naturally located, 'landed' imagination” (2006 70). Jed Deppman further points out that the speaker projects onto the wind and emigrant “feelings of homelessness and nostalgia”, sympathizing with their “supposed exilic consciousness”. “Instead of trying to speak *for*” them, Deppman argues, “the speaker speaks *like* them” (2008 46-7). Indeed, “Wind” and “Voices” in the poem both point towards a contact of a more sensory and elusive nature, which can only be detected and hinted. For Dickinson, one's sense of place seems to be intricately interwoven with one's sense of space. In a poem discussed in the third chapter, “In many and reportless places”, the joy of encountering reportless places can only be “inhaled” instead of being recorded or searched for. In a similar manner, the south wind in the poem evokes imaginary encounters in experiential ways that are simultaneously

hemispheric and atmospheric.

For Dickinson, air manifests an ultimate form of travel. She might not be like Emerson, who turns into a transparent eyeball and a “particle” of God, being submerged in nature,<sup>149</sup> but she finds in nature numerous particles that pay her visits in an equally intimate way. “A South Wind - has a pathos”, “Conscious am I in my Chamber,” and “Alone, I cannot be -” all present such an atmospheric interconnectedness through her perception of a fluid and floating universe. Her place-sense or space-sense in this case, plays an important part in her poetic imagination, not because of its fixation, but because of its relativity, reversibility and reflexivity. Her poems practice Kenneth White's geo-poetics, as discussed in this chapter, by espousing hypersensitivity towards the invisible and seemingly intangible presence. This shapeless friend in space is the ultimate imperial guest in her poems. In addition, the atomic presence also manifests an electrically-charged universe which I have discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The telegraphic quality of the air materializes both spiritual and natural communication. Hence her version of human consciousness is literally an indestructible and ubiquitous matter that permeates the air. A number of her poems discussed in the second chapter use this airy and contagious presence to describe the connection between the human thought and the divine. “That Massacre of Air” in “Their Barricade against the Sky” and “Vast Prairies of Air” in “My period had come for Prayer -”, for example, both treat the air as a substance that either weighs the traumas of the Mexican-American War or contains the omnipresence of God. Poems of the Auroral light, such as “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” and “I've known a Heaven, like a Tent -”, make the skyscape a significant locus to encounter the natural sublime and the unknown. The poppy cloud in “It was a quiet seeming Day -” further turns the air into a medium that conveys premonitions about environmental disasters.

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<sup>149</sup> As Patrick J. Keane points out, Emerson replaced “particle” in the original edition and the 1849 reprinting with “parcel” for an 1856 printing of *Nature*, which was restored later (2005 101).

The air, with its intangible but ubiquitous existence, becomes a suitable subject for Dickinson to explore the correspondence between the spiritual and the physical, the earthly and the heavenly. Jerusha Hull McCormack remarks that “the new technology of the telegraph translated the movements of the spirit into something more material, more readily imagined” (594). The air, with its telegraphic quality, serves exactly such a cosmic interface for Dickinson to probe into both physical and spiritual realms. In “Publication - is the Auction” (Fr788),<sup>150</sup> the air embodies the transmission of the human spirit:

Thought belong to Him who gave it -  
 Then - to Him Who bear  
 It's Corporeal illustration - Sell  
 The Royal Air -

In the Parcel - Be the Merchant  
 Of the Heavenly Grace -  
 But reduce no Human Spirit  
 To Disgrace of Price -

Inder Nath Kher asserts that here Dickinson does not like to profane art with publicity (129). James R. Guthrie also notes “the 'Royal Air,' or heavenly grace” might refer to poems and poets here – “an invisible whole” that invalidates the notions of both fame and ownership (139). James McIntosh further points out that the poet becomes the “earthly vehicle” of “Thought” given by the Creator (51). I would add that this heavenly, religious or spiritual transmission, depicted in the poem, might be based on Dickinson's understanding of the air as a suitable physical medium. As indicated in “The Royal Air”, the human mind is both secular and sacred, corporeal and heavenly. In particular, this “royal” quality of the air in Dickinson's poem echoes the use of royal metaphors in Thoreau and Emerson to celebrate the mind. In *Walden*, Thoreau extols books and authors to be the aristocracy of the society: “Books, the oldest and the best, stand naturally and rightfully on the

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<sup>150</sup> The poem is often associated with Dickinson's letter to Higginson about publication and fame: “I smile when you suggest that I delay 'to publish' – that being foreign to my thought as Firmament to Fin – If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her – if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase – and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me – then – My Barefoot-Rank is better” (L 265).

shelves of every cottage. They have no cause of their own to plead, but while they enlighten and sustain the reader his common sense will not refuse them. Their authors are a natural and irresistible aristocracy in every society, and, more than kings or emperors, exert an influence on mankind. (100-101) Emerson also endows poets with the honour of nobility in “The Poet”: “The poet ... is a sovereign, and stands on the centre ... the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right” (2001 185). Dickinson shares this Transcendental belief in the superiority of human thought. Her poetry, as Lyndall Gordon remarks, “speaks more widely to the challenge of imaginative endeavour: how to lift work in the direction of the ‘royals’” (81). However, her royal aspiration also shows her acute awareness of the more physical and planetary dimension of human spirit. Her “Royal Air” embodies a transmissible, elastic, contagious and reflexive presence in human consciousness, which, as Hitchcock states, has a significant impact upon the universe. Hitchcock elucidates the principle of mental reaction in the universe: “man makes an impression, wide beyond our present knowledge, upon the universe, material and mental; and it ought to make us feel that our lightest thoughts and feeblest volitions may reach the outer limit of intellectual life, and its consequences meet us in distant worlds, and far down the tract of eternity” (486). As Camille Paglia remarks, Dickinson “uses metaphors more literally than anyone else in major literature” (637). Thoreau’s “natural” right of thought becomes literal, and more physical in her poems. Compared with Emerson’s poet as a sovereign and an emperor, Dickinson’s “Royal Air” is more pliant, permeable, and interactive. Instead of standing on the centre, her hostess conducts her “monarchy of perception”, as the title of Domhnall Mitchell’s book *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception* suggests, from a peripheral position by becoming a visitor and a guest of nature. While staying at home, the poet finds connection with the cosmic world through her vigorously telegraphic thinking.

In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate states that “When we truly inhabit the world, we are at home in it. True inhabiting necessitates a willingness to look at and listen to the world. It is a letting go of the self which brings the discovery of a deeper self”

(155). Dickinson's poems express such a willingness to be close to the world by looking at an alternative aspect of nature – the air. By doing so, her spatial imagination revises the conventional perception of the division between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, humans and nature. Her topophilia, as explored in the first chapter, and her geo-poetical practice, as shown in this chapter, can be taken as her poetic ambition to account for both spiritual and physical alienation; these gestures steer her poems away from a pessimistic outlook of modernism. However, her method of inhabiting the world is not through “letting go the self”. She is reluctant to forego her vigilance. She once wrote to Susan that “in a life that stopped guessing you and I should not feel at home.” Her spatial imagination informs the profoundly communicative while circumspect nature of her poems.

To some extent, Dickinson, very much like her hostess-speakers in these poems, is consistently seeking sympathetic ears. As her sister Lavinia commented, Dickinson was “always watching for the rewarding person to come” (qtd. in Bingham 414). Her watchfulness and her sensitivity toward the reduction of human spirit to “Disgrace of Price”, paradoxically disclose her poetic attempt to respond to, and to be recognized by, the outside world, if not through conventionally defined means, such as printing or the marketplace. As Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz point out, “In telling Thomas Wentworth Higginson that she did not “print” her work, she did not quite say in her own voice that she did not publish it; and she distributed at least one-third of her poems in her letters” (2008 5). Dickinson's poems of spatial imagination seem to convey a consistent yearning to be close to, and to be involved in the outside world. Although she consciously shunned from the crowd or publicity, her poems suggest that she was still searching for a more suitable manner and a more effective method of communication. As her speaker in “This is my letter to the World” asserts, “Sweet - countrymen - / Judge tenderly - of Me” (Fr519). Her pleading speaker is expecting the world to look back and “judge” her work. As quoted in the introduction, the poet states that “Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can't stop for that! *My* business is to love” (L269). Both her poems and letters address “the World” and “the whole United States”,

suggesting how her personal life is intricately interwoven within the public or even cosmic sphere.

As this thesis has attempted to show, Dickinson's spatial imagination plays a crucial role in understanding her deep engagement with and critical response to the outside world. Her spiritual concerns are also profoundly rooted in the social, national, global and planetary contexts of her time. The intensity and immediacy of her poems are conveyed through the physical and geographical experience of individuals in a world of extreme mobility. From her early valentine medley to her later poems of loss and grief, her poems reveal a consistent interest in the topic of travel, which helps the poet to stay not only beside but also outside her immediate context to circumnavigate a world of possibilities. In particular, her poetic mapping accentuates relativity of perspectives and limitation of perception, showing how the visual dominance that characterizes the exploratory narratives, transcendental philosophy, and Enlightenment discourses of her time can be revised and reversed. Dickinson is both a private and lyrical poet, as well as continuously engaged in the cosmopolitan and the cosmic. Her poetic exploration points to a strenuous quest for a planetary vision, a vision that helps position her beyond the social and physical constraint of her provincial environment.

Furthermore, Dickinson positions herself at the margin of both her textual space and the physical world, developing a world view that is shaped by peripheral glimpses rather than transcendental panorama. Her depiction of a deistic nature echoes the Emersonian embrace of God through nature, but the elasticity and reversibility of her poetic perception revises the Transcendental prospect into a more interactive mode of seeing. Her poems thus offer alternative viewing experiences, distinctly different from the Romanticist and Transcendentalist writers of her time. She explores heaven,

nature and the human mind, and is equally baffled by their immensity and incomprehensibility. To represent nature, in particular, is for her an act of human inscription. It implies an imposition of visual hierarchy and a semiotic intrusion upon nature, resembling Wallace Stevens' jar in the centre of the wilderness. Therefore, she consistently adopts the notion of mapping to expose the optical restriction of human vision in a universe of constant movement and rotation. Choosing to guess rather than to see, as she states in "Before I got my eye put out -" (Fr336), symbolizes not only a reaction against human and presumably hierarchical imposition upon nature and the unknown other, but also an assertion for her own visual autonomy.

This distrust of visual dominance informs her topographic or even topophilic conduction of poetic journeys for spatial intimacy. In his discussion of Victorian literature, Jonathan Bate comments that "The Victorians had a proud sense of their own 'progress', but they also worried profoundly about their loss of 'place'" (13). In a similar way, Dickinson's poems also express such a concern in the process of modernization. Although her attitude towards technology and science seems positive, her spatial imagination, especially her notion of mapping, is indicative of her deep anxiety about human progress and modernity. Through a constant adjustment of her position and perspective, her poems express a sense of insecurity and urgency that undermines the social and intellectual complacency of her time. The yearning gaze of her speaker does not envisage a sanguine future that exploration and expansionism entail. Instead, her poetic mapping of heaven, nature and the human mind presents the limitation of progress and modernity. Her "The Loneliness One dare not sound -" (Fr877) epitomizes this intense uncertainty about a world of loss and death in her seemingly most lyrical voice:

The Loneliness One dare not sound -  
 And would as soon surmise  
 As in its Grave go plumbing  
 To ascertain the size -

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

The Horror not to be surveyed -  
 But skirted in the Dark -  
 With Consciousness suspended -  
 And Being under Lock -

I fear me this - is Loneliness -  
 The Maker of the soul  
 Its Caverns and its Corridors  
 Illuminate - or seal -

As Shira Wolosky remarks, “[W]here poems are most personal in terms of Dickinson’s suffering that they are also most culturally engaged. For the problem of suffering is essentially the problem of history” (2002 177). In an era when military expeditions and capitalistic expansionism defined the western foundation of progress and modernity, her poems responded by addressing and revising the empirical process of mapping, revealing the unseen and unmapped both from within and without. Her poems delineate what Gary Lee Stonum calls “skirting mastery” (149), through which the poet circumnavigates the shore of the unknown, of otherness and of immortality to measure a world that is both conflicting and interrelated. By locating her poems in a cosmic world of fluidity and instability, Dickinson becomes one of the most daring, though oblique, truth-tellers of her time.

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