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Meetings (10.30am - 3rd Sunday)
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EMILY DICKINSON'S VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Joan Kirkby, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

Editors Note,

Another single-subject issue, a paper on Emily Dickinson which I've been sitting on for several years. It was written by Joan Kirkby at about the time she went off to carry out further research in the USA. On that occasion, in late 1997, she was accompanied by Margot who went along as her travelling companion. Joan gave me these papers before she left and I think the reason for this long delay is that there is really too much to squeeze into our 50c. postal format. I have finally decided to risk it. I know many of you are fellow Dickinson fans and I'm sure you'll find this commentary on the background to Emily's work as fascinating as I do.

This Nowletter is the first one I've delivered to email subscribers via the website. I will send an email note to the list whenever a new Nowletter is available. It will carry a list of contents and details of how to link up to the current edition and the Nowletter archive. I have written a note about the website and why I've put it up which I'll include in next month's issue. Thanks to Simon Mann for his aid in designing the site, making it work and forcing me to stop 'polishing' and get on with it. If anyone wants to explore you'll find it at <http://users.bigpond.net.au/capacitie>

I will take the opportunity to include my favourite Emily Dickinson poem by way of a link between this month's edition and the purpose of this publication. Can we claim the Nowletter to be a 'homely gift' – certainly 'hindered Words' captures the difficulties of describing most of what we try to talk about here:

*By homely gift and hindered Words
The human heart is told
Of Nothing –
"Nothing" is the force
That renovates the World*

Two new books by readers. *Nobody Home* by Jan Kerschott was the number two best seller after Eckhart Tolle's latest at Watkins Bookshop, London for a while and – just out – Richard Lang's *Look for Yourself*. I have had to postpone reviews of these books due to space pressure in this issue but plan to include in June. In the meantime see: <http://users.skynet.be/inspiration/nobodyhome/> for Jan's book and for Richard: <http://www.headless.org/English/main.html>

The Nowletter appears between 10 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. Contributions from readers are considered the most valuable content so please think about letting me have your thoughts, experiences, discoveries and any responses to what you read here.

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See page 13 for notices of gatherings plus Sydney talk and Dialogue on Wed 2 July.

Joan Kirkby is a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Critical and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University. Her research and teaching interests include 'Diversity and Challenge: Issues in Contemporary Australian Literatures and Cultures', 'Reading U.S. Culture', 'Psychoanalysis and Culture'. She is the author of a book entitled *Emily Dickinson* published in the Women Writers series by MacMillan 1991. (A quick check did not turn up a local source but Amazon have copies available) and in 2002 she produced a radio national program on Emily called 'Nimble Believing' with Thomas More ('Care of the Soul' guy) plus other U.S. scholars. Joan is currently working on a large project on Emily Dickinson's reading of 19thC religious and philosophical debates as framed in the New England periodicals which came to the Dickinson household.

Emily Dickinson's Varieties of Religious Experience by Joan Kirkby

(The reference key is as follows: 'L' identifies the source as an Emily Dickinson letter, the '#' identifies one of her poems. Both volumes are listed in the bibliography at the end of the paper. Numbers in brackets are the page numbers of the book referred to, details of which can also be found in the bibliography.)

In April 1862 Emily Dickinson wrote of her family, 'They are religious - except me - and address an Eclipse, every morning - whom they call their "Father." (L261)

The Bible she regarded as 'an antique Volume...'

*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...(#1545)*

In a similar vein she wrote of Heaven: Of Heaven above the firmest proof

*We fundamental know
Except for its marauding Hand
It had been Heaven below. (#1205)*

It was simply as she wrote to her friend Elizabeth Holland, that God's paradise was 'superfluous':

If roses had not faded, and frosts had never come, and one had not fallen here and there whom I could not waken, there were no need of other Heaven than the one below - and if God had been here this summer, and seen the things that I have seen - I guess that He would think His paradise superfluous. Don't tell Him, for the world, though, for after all He's said about it, I should like to see what He was building for us, with no hammer, and no stone, and no journeyman either.

And yet Dickinson is a writer whose work is consistently religious in that curious brand of philosophical theology which characterises 19th century New England religious experience - not the institutional branch nor systematic theology but what William James calls personal religion - pure and simple: 'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.' (421)

Religion, whatever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life, so why not say that any total reaction upon life is a religion? Total reactions are different from casual reactions, and total attitudes are different from usual or professional attitudes. To get at them you must go behind the foreground of existence and reach down to that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence ... (45)

'If religion is to mean anything definite for us', he writes, 'it seems to me that we ought to take it as meaning ' this added dimension of emotion, this enthusiastic temper of espousal ... this new reach of freedom ... (54); rapturousness; what

Havelock Ellis refers to as ' a joyful expansion of the whole soul...a joyful expansion or aspiration of the whole soul;' the entire field of the soul's liberation from oppressive moods' , ' even the momentary expansion of the soul in laughter' (54) ' Any habitual and regulated admiration is worthy to be called a religion' (cited from J.R. Seeley, 75).

It is the effect of his book to continually expand our idea of the religious: ' Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse.' (cited from Professor Leuba, 382). A shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards ' yes, yes,' and away from ' no' ,

There is a ' disappearance of all fear from one' s life, the quite indescribable and inexplicable feeling of an inner security' (cited from C.H. Hilty, 218). He cites Thoreau's sense of infinite and unaccountable friendliness: ' Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me' (218).

The transition from tenseness, self-responsibility, and worry, to equanimity, receptivity and peace, is the most wonderful of all those shiftings of inner equilibrium, those changes of the personal centre of energy ... [which] comes about not by doing, but by simply relaxing and throwing the burden down. This abandonment of self-responsibility seems to be the fundamental act in specifically religious, as distinct from moral practice. It antedates theologies and is independent of philosophies (229)

He adopts Frederic Myer' s definition of prayer as 'that attitude of open and earnest expectancy by which we endeavour to draw in as much spiritual life as possible' ' If we then ask to whom to pray, the answer (strangely enough) must be that does not matter. The prayer is not indeed a purely subjective thing; it means a real increase in intensity of absorption of spiritual power or grace - and grace...flows in from the infinite spiritual world when we make ourselves open to it.' (354) The point, James says, is that by cultivating the continuous sense of our connection with the power that made things as they are, we are tempered more towards for their reception. (361) We cannot, he writes, avoid the conclusion that in religion we have a department of human nature with unusually close relations to the transmarginal or subliminal region... In persons deep in the religious life ... the door into this region seems unusually wide open ... (366)

For James it is primarily the higher faculties of our own hidden mind which are operative in this instance; he cites another Amherst philosopher Xenos Clark, who like Emily died young at Amherst in the '80s, ' ordinary philosophy is like a hound hunting his own trail. The more he hunts the farther he has to go, and his nose never catches up with his heels, because it is forever ahead of them The truth is that we travel on a journey that was accomplished before we set out: and the real end of philosophy is accomplished, not when we arrive at, but when we remain in, our destination - being already there'. (299)

In terms relevant to Dickinson he notes that the time inevitably comes in the religious life when the craving for inner unification is developed to this degree, the subject may well find the outer world too full of shocks to dwell in, and can unify his life and maintain his absorption of consciousness in spiritual things only by withdrawing from it. There is a need of simply dropping out whatever jars.

Throughout his study, James emphasises:

when a religion has become an orthodoxy, its day of inwardness is over: the spring is dry The basenesses so commonly charged to religion' s account are thus, almost all of them, not chargeable at all to religion proper, but rather religion' s wicked practical partner, the spirit of corporate dominion...the spirit of dogmatic dominion... the passion for laying down the law in the form of an absolutely closed-in theoretic system... I beseech you never to confound the phenomena of corporate psychology with those manifestations of the purely interior life which are the exclusive object of our study. (263)

It is obvious from what has preceded that I take William James wonderful book, The Varieties of Religious Experience, as the summation of an era - the era that belonged also to Emily Dickinson. The title of his work might well be the title for Dickinson' s work as well. Certainly the New England cultural tradition in which Dickinson lived valued the intellectual and the contemplative life; Dickinson is perhaps the one American poet to live out the Emersonian project:

Keep the intellect sacred. Revere it. Give all to it. Its oracles countervail all. Attention is its acceptable prayer. Sit low and wait long...Go sit with the Hermit in you, who knows more than you do.

Dickinson's choice of a contemplative life and her seclusion were the positive expression of a cultural form, albeit one more commonly undertaken by men. As a notoriously reclusive personality, Dickinson has been assumed to have

worked in isolation from her contemporary intellectual milieu. However, I believe that it can be demonstrated that Dickinson's writing represents her contribution to nineteenth century philosophical and religious debate and currently I am engaged in a project which relates her work to its immediate intellectual environment; this involves a study of Dickinson's reading both in the volumes in the Dickinson family's extensive library now housed at the Houghton Library at Harvard and the John Hay Library at Brown University - and in nineteenth century periodicals to which the Dickinsons subscribed or had access - The Springfield Republican (Weekly and Daily); The Atlantic Monthly; Scribner's; Harper's; The Christian Examiner. The project involves two wonderful research assistants following the various religious debates recorded on a weekly, sometimes daily basis, in contemporary periodicals.

Obviously I do not have the time to tell you about all the material we have unearthed thus far, but I will tell you about my particular finds in Dickinson's library on my 1994 research trip to Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. I am particularly excited by these discoveries as I was the first scholar to look at these books since they left the Dickinson Homestead - perhaps since Dickinson herself used them.

The books to which I will briefly refer are Thomas Upham's Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life, Hubbard Winslow's Elements of Intellectual Philosophy, Henry Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World, and A. P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism. -I was particularly excited by these books as they all have pencil markings by Emily Dickinson. The librarians all warn that there are no known markings by Emily - and certainly the volumes in the family library were shared around ~ but after working with the library for some time I am convinced that I can discern Emily's idiosyncratic markings; the only other scholars to have worked extensively with the library - Jack Capps and Judith Farr corroborate this.

1. Thomas Upham's Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life, designed iparticularly for the consideration of those who are seeking assurance of faith and perfect love (New York, 1848) belonged to Emily's brother Austin but the pencil markings throughout the book are those characteristic of Emily. The marked passages in this text primarily concern excerpts from a letter entitled "The Life of Faith: a Letter found in the Study of the late Rev. Mr. Belcher of New England" (probably Samuel Belcher of Newbury, Mass) , being an answer to the question, ' HOW TO LIVE IN THIS WORLD, SO AS TO LIVE IN HEAVEN' and excerpts from the writings of Madame de Guyon.

Firstly From The Life of Faith, How to Live in This World, these words reminiscent of so many of Emily's phrases and preoccupations. (I was the smallest in the house, I took the lowest room.)

I make best way in a low gale. A high spirit in a high sail together will be dangerous, and therefore I prepare to live low. I desire not much and pray against it. My study is my calling; so much as tends that way (without distraction) I am bound to plead for, and more I desire not. By my secluded retirements I have the advantage to observe how every day's occasions insensibly wear off the heart from God ... which they who live in care and cumbers cannot be sensible of. I have seemed to see a need of everything God gives me, and want nothing that he denies me I find so much to do continually with my calling and my heart, that I have no time to puzzle myself with peradventures and futurities (93)... keep close to God, and then, a little of the creature will go a great way. Take time for duties in private; crowd not religion in a corner of the day. There is a Dutch proverb, 'Nothing is got by thieving, nor lost by praying.' Spend no time anxiously in forehand contrivances for this world, they never succeed.

2. Page 387, Maxims XI~XII, of Madame de Guyon in a chapter entitled ' On the True Idea of Interior Annihilation or Nothingness', are marked:

XI Our spiritual strength will be nearly in proportion to the absence of self-dependence and self-confidence. When we are weak in ourselves, we shall not fail, if we apply to the right source for help, to be found strong in the Lord.

Madame Guyon, speaking of certain temptations to which she had been exposed, says, I then comprehend what power a soul has which is entirely annihilated.

"In these last times", she says, "I can hardly speak at all of my dispositions. It is because my state has become simple and without variations. It is a profound annihilation; I find nothing in myself to which I can give a name; (that is, no feelings so specific and remarkable, separate from this simplicity and this loss of self ... as to enable me to describe them.) All I know is, that God is infinitely holy, righteous, good, and happy." "All good is in him. As to myself, I am a mere NOTHING. To me every condition seems equal. All is lost in his immensity, like a drop of water in the sea ... In this divine immensity the soul sees itself no more." But when

the wheels are all in position, and there is no friction, the action may be one of tremendous power, and yet it is so easy and quiet as to be hardly perceptible. And such is the true kingdom of God in the soul. It comes and exists with power, but with great simplicity. There is nothing in it, in itself considered, which is calculated to attract and secure worldly observation. It is mighty... but inwardly silent...

2. Hubbard Winslow, in a book entitled Elements of Intellectual Philosophy, (Boston, 1850) which was reviewed at length in the Springfield Daily Republican to which Dickinson subscribed, demonstrates in Chapter 5 THE IMMORTALITY OF THE HUMAN MIND. Winslow points out that no man can prove that the mind is not immortal, arguing:

If the mind is pure spirit, then the dissolution of the body cannot destroy it. Even supposing the mind material, it is not necessarily mortal. The dissolution of the body is only a physical change. It is not an annihilation, but only a change of organic combinations. Death is a process, in which every thing corporeal continues to exist. The very decay of the body, then, bears testimony, not to the destruction, but to the continuance of the undying spirit.

He continues:

It is a law of science that whatever is will continue to be, unless an adequate cause from without operate to destroy it. On this law philosophy raises an argument for what is called the mind' s natural immortality. Reduced to a syllogism it is this: The human mind exists. Whatever exists will not cease to exist, unless some adequate cause destroy it. The dissolution of the body is not a cause adequate to destroy the mind; therefore the mind will continue to exist after the body perishes. (57)

The Rubicon is passed; - we are on the other side of death - the King of terrors is vanquished. Furthermore, the power and the graspings of the human mind argue for its immortality: The human mind expatiates in illimitable space and duration. The mighty reaches of man' s thoughts, are out of all proportion to the little time and space in which his body lives and are themselves proofs of the immortality of his mind ... it is scarcely possible for us to believe that a mind, which seems equally capacious of what is infinite in space and time, should be only a creature, whose brief existence is measurable by a few units of space and a few moments of eternity. In its rapid continued expansion, the mind conscious of its capacity for a higher sphere feels even now that it is advancing to a goal more distant and more cheering than the tomb. Its energies increase and multiply under the encumbrance of age; and even when man' s heart is turning into bone and his joint into marble his mind can soar to its highest flight, and seize with its firmest grasp ... The legitimate inference is, that when no longer subject to interruptions from physical causes it will steadily grow forever ... Let the ever expanding circles of eternity continue to move round, and we at length reach the point, where the attainments of that mind leave those which Gabriel has now made, in almost sightless distance an immortal mind, forever speeding its way, on the wings of eternity, towards the infinite perfections of Jehovah.

3. Henry Drummond's book, Natural Law in the Spiritual World (New York 1884) is another of those books which seem to stand as the encapsulation of an epoch in finding not just analogy but identity between the natural world and the spiritual world (See also Hitchcock' Theology of Geology, Huntington' Christian Loving and Believing). I will never forget first coming across the sentence of Dickinson' s which reads *I was thinking, today - as I noticed, that the "Supernatural," was only the Natural, disclosed* - (L280) I still find it engaging; it speaks worlds. It is in essence the subject of Drummond' s very long book. Drummond speaks of his privilege for some years of addressing regularly two very different audiences on two very different themes:

On week days I have lectured to a class of students on the Natural sciences, and on Sundays to an audience consisting for the most part of working men on subjects of a moral and religious character. The two fountains of knowledge slowly began to overflow, and finally their waters met and mingled. The great change was in the compartment which held the Religion ... the crystals of former doctrine were dissolved ... the subject matter religion had taken on the method of expression of Science, and I discovered myself enunciating Spiritual law in the exact terms of Biology and Physics (vi-vii)

He looks forward to a scientific theology which will unite the two worlds:

What is required, he continues, to draw Science and Religion together again - for they began the centuries hand in hand - is the disclosure of the naturalness of the supernatural. Then, and not until then, will men see how true it is, that to be loyal to all of nature, they must be loyal to the part defined as spiritual ... And even as the

contribution of Science to Religion is the vindication of the naturalness of the Supernatural, so the gift of Religion to Science is the demonstration of the supernaturalness of the Natural. Thus, as the Supernatural becomes slowly natural, will also the Natural become slowly Supernatural, until in the impersonal authority of Law men everywhere recognize the Authority of God.

Indeed, he continues, 'It will be the splendid task of the theology of the future (as it already had been of that of Emily Dickinson) to take off the mask and disclose to a waning scepticism the naturalness of the supernatural. (52)

... Spiritual Life is not something outside ourselves. The idea is not that Christ is in heaven and that we can stretch out some mysterious faculty and deal with Him there. Vegetable life is not contained in a reservoir somewhere in the skies and measured out spasmodically at certain seasons. The Life is in every plant and tree, inside its own substance and tissue, and continues there until it dies ... The localisation of Life in the individual is precisely the point where Vitality differs from other forces of nature, such as magnetism and electricity ... Life is permanently fixed and rooted in the organism... Life is not one of the homeless forces which promiscuously inhabit space, or which can be gathered like electricity from the clouds ... Life is definite and resident; and spiritual Life is not a visit from a force, but a resident tenant in the soul.

The position that we have been led to take up is not that the Spiritual Laws are analogous to the Natural Laws, but that they are the same laws.

4. I was fascinated to discover that in the year before her death Dickinson had apparently been reading A. P. Sinnett, Esoteric Buddhism, Boston 1885, E. Dickinson written in pencil in inside cover. What seemed to have interested her was the link between the material and immaterial worlds - Sinnett' s emphasis that the finer principles themselves are material and molecular in their constitution, though composed of a higher order of matter than the physical senses can take note of.

The evolution of man is not a process carried out on this planet alone. It is a result to which many worlds in different conditions of material and spiritual development have contributed. (The following sentence is marked:) For there is a manifest irrationality in the common-place notion that man' s existence is divided into a material beginning, lasting sixty or seventy years and a spiritual remainder lasting forever. (76) The irrationality amounts to absurdity when it is alleged that the acts of the sixty or seventy years - the blundering, helpless acts of helpless human life - are permitted by the perfect justice of an all wise Providence Nor is it less extravagant to imagine that apart from the question of justice, the life beyond the grave should be exempt from the law of change, progress, and improvement, which every analogy of nature points to as probably running through all the various existences of the universe. But once abandon the idea of a uniform, unvarying, unprogressive life beyond the grave, one admits the idea of change and process in that life, and we admit the conception of change and process through successive worlds-This is not hypothesis at all for occult science, but a fact, ascertained and verified beyond the reach of doubt or contradiction. (76)

Also noted in the volume was the fact that Sinnett reports, **THAT IN ESOTERIC BUDDHISM, SALVATION IS OBTAINABLE BY DEVOUT PRACTICES IRRESPECTIVE OF KNOWLEDGE OF ETERNAL TRUTH.**

Spirituality, then, is not devout aspiration; it is the highest kind of intellection, that which takes cognizance of the workings of Nature by direct assimilation of the mind with her higher principles. It is by a steady pursuit of and desire for real spiritual truth, not by an idle, however well meaning acquiescence in the fashionable dogmas of the nearest church, that men launch their souls into the subjective state prepared to imbibe real knowledge from the latent omniscience of their own sixth principles ... This doctrine presents a bloodless and innocent record and has thus been really productive of blameless lives throughout its whole existence. (244)

... the only thing of importance at present is to cultivate those tendencies in mankind which may launch as many Egos as possible upon such a Karmic path that the growth of their spirituality in future births will be promoted. Certainly it is the fixed conviction of esoteric teachers of the adept co-workers with Buddha - that the very process of cultivating such spirituality will immensely reduce the sum of even transitory human sorrow. And the happiness of mankind, even in any one generation only, is by no means a matter on which esoteric science looks with indifference. (240)

So Nirvana (a sublime state of conscious rest in omniscience) is truly the keynote of Esoteric Buddhism ... The great end of the whole stupendous evolution of humanity is to cultivate human souls so that they shall be ultimately fit for that as yet inconceivable condition ... (241)

Sinnett goes on to refer to ' that sum tota of all consciousness, which esoteric metaphysics treat as absolute consciousness, which is non-consciousness:

(marked) ' These paradoxical expressions are simply counters representing ideas that the human mind is not qualified to apprehend and it is a waste of time to haggle over them.' (260)

No such conception (the notion of a personal God) enters into the great esoteric doctrine of Nature, of which this volume has furnished an imperfect sketch What the adept really says on this head is, "The universe is boundless, and it is a stultification of thought to talk of any hypothesis setting in beyond the boundless, - on the other sides of the limits of the limitless.

This last sentence which is doubly scored even sounds like Dickinson who wrote in one of the prose fragments:
' THOUGH THERE IS NO COURSE, THERE IS BOUNDLESSNESS.'

Conclusion

By way of beginning to suggest the varieties of Dickinson' s knowledge of religious experience I have focused o just four volumes from the family library that are now housed at Brown University; in a sense it is an arbitrary sampling; I could have easily focused on her collection of Emerson' s essays, the Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, the writings of Bettina Brentano, F. D. Huntington' s Christian Believing and Iying, Edward Hitchcock' s Religious Lecturers on Peculiar Phenomenon of the Four Seasons, all of which are at the Houghton - or I could have focused on the various debates represented in the Christian Examiner as to whether God' s truth was to be revealed through the Word or through Nature, etc. The point is that each of these sources is richly suggestive of the plenitude of religious debate in nineteenth century New England.

Of the books discussed here we have seen Reverend Belcher' s determination to live low and to find within the four walls of his study his calling, Madam Guyon' s sense of power in a soul which is entirely annihilated all is lost in this divine immensity in which the soul sees itself no more; Hubbard Winslow' s demonstrations of the immortality of the mind in its illimitable prospectiveness; Henry Drummond' s affirmation like Dickinson' s that the supernatural is but the natural disclosed; and Alfred Sinnett' s articulation of the middle way of the Buddha. All of these texts bear the pencil markings of Dickinson; all of the sentiments occur again and again within her work, but then as she herself wrote:

It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God. (L471)

I will end by quoting my favourite Dickinson lines:

The Red Leaves take the Green Leaves place, and the Landscape yields. We go to sleep with the Peach in our Hands and wake with the Stone, but the Stone is the pledge of Summers to come - (L520)

FURTHER NOTES FROM SINNETT

The author of this volume cites his credentials as one who knows something of the way the spiritual aspirations of the world are silently influenced by those whose work lies in the department of Nature. (34) Esoteric Buddhism, he writes, is a secret doctrine, a mine of entirely trustworthy knowledge from which all religions and philosophies have derived whatever they possess of truth. (26) The metaphysical question that first preoccupies him is whether force and matter are different or identical: ' Enough for the moment to state that occult science regards them as identical, and that it contemplates no principle in Nature as wholly immaterial.'

In this way, though no conceptions of the universe, of man' s destiny, or of Nature generally, are more spiritual than those of occult science; that science is wholly free from the logical error of attributing material results to immaterial causes. The esoteric doctrine is thus really the missing link between materialism and spirituality. The clue to the mystery involved lies of course in the fact, directly cognizable by occult experts, that matter exists in other states besides those which are cognizable by the five senses. ...We cannot get a correct conception of the present place of man in Nature if we make the mistake of regarding him as a fully perfected being already. (71) ... It has been said that the finer principles themselves even are material and molecular in their constitution, though composed of a higher order of matter than the physical senses can take note of. (73) ... The esoteric doctrine finds itself under no obligation to keep its science and religion in separate water-tight compartments. (75)

What Dickinson has underscored in the above passages is the link established between the material and immaterial worlds - a similar motif occurs in the markings which follow:

With regard to the soul surviving after death, ' The system of worlds is a circuit round which all individual spiritual entities have alike to pass; and that passage constitutes the evolution of man. For it must be realized that the evolution of man is a process still going on, and by no means yet complete. (78)

All is ascent and progress (81). For the spiritual monad or entity, which has worked its way all round the cycle of evolution ... begins its next cycle at the next higher stage and is thus still accomplishing progress as it passes from world Z back again to world A. Many times does it circle in this way, right round the system... In the scale of spiritual perfection it is constantly ascending. It is for want of realizing this idea that speculation, concerned with physical evolution is so constantly finding itself stopped by dead walls. It is searching for its missing links in a world where it can never find them now, for they were but required for a temporary purpose and have passed away. (82)

Thus is evolution accomplished, as regards its essential impulse, by a spiral progress through the worlds. (85)

In a chapter entitled ' The Progress of Humanity' , Sinnett begins with these words: ~~The~~ ever-recurring and ever-threatened conflict between intellect and spirituality is the phenomenon now to be examined:

Broadly speaking, so far Western philosophy has had no opportunity of appreciating spirituality; it has not been made acquainted with the range of the inner faculties of man; it has merely groped blindly in the direction of a belief that such inner faculties existed; and (this next is marked) Kant himself the greatest modern exponent of that idea, does little more than contend that there is such a faculty as intuition, - if only we knew how to work with it. (191)

Sinnett speaks of man' s choice of good or evil ' to be immortal in good one must identify one' s self with God; to be immortal in evil, with Satan - these are the two poles of the world of souls; between these two poles vegetate and die without remembrance the useless portion of mankind.

The objection which physical intelligence will bring against this view is that the mind can cognize nothing except by observation of phenomena and reasoning thereon. This is the mistake, - it can; and the existence of occult science is the highest proof thereof. (last sentence double scored in margin) (197)

The first achievement is to evolve free will, and the next to perpetuate that free will by inducing it to unite itself with the final purpose of nature, which is good... (201) But if the person during his objective life absolutely develops no affinities for material existence, starts his soul at death with all its attractions tending one way in the direction of spirituality, and none at all drawing it back to objective life, it does not come back; it mounts into a condition of spirituality corresponding to the intensity of the attractions or affinities in that direction, and the other thread of connection is cut off (204-205)

All that words can convey is that Nirvana is a sublime state of conscious rest in omniscience. It would be ludicrous ... to turn to the various discussions...as to whether Nirvana does or does not mean annihilation.(236)

In a passage echoing James, Sinnett observes, that in esoteric Buddhism, SALVATION IS OBTAINABLE BY DEVOUT PRACTICES IRRESPECTIVE OF KNOWLEDGE OF ETERNAL TRUTH. This doctrine writes Sinnett presents a bloodless and innocent record and has thus been really productive of blameless lives throughout its whole existence. (244)

In the Chapter The Universe, Sinnett notes that the process in Nature to which it refers is of course the alternative succession of activity and response that is observable at every step of the great ascent from the infinitely small to the infinitely great.(246)

The one eternal, imperishable thing in the universe, which universal prelates themselves pass over without destroying is that which may be regarded indifferently as space duration, matter or motion not as something having these four attributes, but something which is these four things ... The representatives of occult science never occupy themselves at all with any conception remotely resembling the God of churches and creeds. (254) They cannot say, let there be paradise throughout space, let all men be born wise and good; they can only

work through the principle of evolution, and they cannot deny to any man who is invested with the potentiality of development ... the right to do evil, if he prefers that to good. Nor can they prevent evil, if done, from producing suffering. The seventh principle, undefinable, incomprehensible for us at the present stages of enlightenment, is of course the only God recognized by esoteric knowledge, and no personification of this can be otherwise than symbolical.

And, like Dickinson, Sinnett privileges the union of science with religion as ' the bridge by which the most acute and cautious pursuers of experimental knowledge may cross over to the most enthusiastic devotee, by means of which the most enthusiastic devotee may return to earth and yet keep heaven still around him.' (262) Buddhism, he writes, and this sentence is marked, takes as its ultimate fact the existence of the material world, of conscious beings living with it. (284)

The whole Kosmos - earth and heavens and hells - is always tending to renovation or destruction, is always in a course of change, a series of revolutions or of cycles, of which the beginning and the end alike are unknowable and unknown. To this universal law of composition and dissolution men and gods form no exception; the unity of forces which constitute a sentient being must sooner or later be dissolved, and it is only through ignorance and delusion that such a being indulges in the dream that it is a separable and self-existent entity. (or as Dickinson put it, Dilapidation' s processes are organized decays.) The individual continuity of an intermittent life, interrupted and renewed at regular intervals and varied with passages through a purer condition of existence. No exterior power can destroy the fruit of a man' s deed that they must work out their full effect to the bitter end. That which inhabits it, that which feels joy or sorrow, is the old Ego - walled off by forgetfulness from its last set of adventures on earth, it is true, but reaping their fruit nevertheless - the same ' I am I' as before.

There have been many interesting and sensitive articles on Dickinson' s relation to particular figures in the mystical tradition – St. Teresa of Avila, Richard Rolle, Calvin, Edward Taylor - and all are valuable - but the aim of our project is to see the manifold traditions that made up Dickinson' s varieties of religious experience. (Others: spiritualism, Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, German romanticism, psychism, and the evolution of various theories of the mind in religion, philosophy and psychology which ultimately fed into the development of psychoanalysis - Freud, Jung, Lacan, Bataille, and Kristeva style.)

Dickinson Reading

No one who works on Dickinson can fail to be struck by the extraordinary quality of her mind and its unerring take on the issues she addresses. In the mid 1980s, when I was preparing the book on Dickinson for the Macmillan Women Writers Series, I found myself wanting to search out the sources and triggers of her thought – her culturally specific intellectual formation. What were the contemporary debates with which she was engaged? When at the age of fourteen she extolled her "big studies" at Amherst Academy -- "They are Mental Philosophy, Geology, Latin, and Botany. How large they sound, don' t they?" (L6)- I wondered about the particular nature of those studies. What was Mental Philosophy? What exactly did she study? What did she read? I knew intriguing things: for example, that Edward Hitchcock, President of Amherst College, was a Professor of Theology and Geology. But how did this particular convergence of ideas come to be? What did she find in her textbooks and the books in her family library? The pages of The Springfield Republican edited by Samuel Bowles? The Hampshire and Franklin Express? The Atlantic Monthly? Harper' s and Scribner' s?

Since 1992 with the aid of a series of Australian Research Council grants, I have been working my way through the family library in the collections at the Houghton Library at Harvard and the John Hay Library at Brown University in Providence Rhode Island. My Research Assistant and I have worked through The Atlantic Monthly, Scribner' s and The Springfield Republican and are half way through The Hampshire and Franklin Express and Harper' s The study of Dickinson' s reading demonstrates that she was actively engaged with her contemporary milieu and that her writing represents a dialogue with nineteenth century debate -- providing unique insight into the interaction of texts with their contexts. It is increasingly obvious that she was not only for all time, but of her age, in Sewall' s words, "She comes to us increasingly as the summation of an era" (Sewall 671).

Close work with the periodicals and the library has suggested a very intimate relationship between Dickinson' s poetic texts and the texts of her culture – demonstrating that a text does not exist in a vacuum but is always generated in dynamic relation to other texts. Kristeva credits Bakhtin as being one of the first to replace the idea of "the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is always generated in dynamic relation to another structure." For Bakhtin the literary word represents "an intersection" of other texts, "a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (who may simply be the writer as reader of other texts), and the contemporary

or earlier cultural context. "A writer participates in history through " a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to other texts or structures." Bakhtin' s insight is that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." Dialogue is "a writing where one reads the other" (Kristeva, Desire in Language, 64-68).

Even the most private self-utterances of our inner speech are, for Bakhtin, "socially oriented and "completely dialogic, totally saturated with the evaluations of the possible listener or audience." For, he writes, "as soon as we begin meditating about some question, as soon as we start to think it over carefully, our inner speech ... immediately assumes the form of questions and answers, assertions and subsequent denials, or to put it more simply, our speech. . . takes the form of a dialogue" (Shukman, Bakhtin School Papers, 118-9). Bakhtin warns the historian of literature against "turning the literary milieu into an absolutely enclosed and self-sufficient world" for, he writes, "the uniqueness of a category, or rather a milieu, can only be based on the interaction of this category, both in its whole and in the form of each element, with all other categories in the unity of social life" (89). The literary text is valuable precisely because of its dynamic relation with its context – the text is important because in its dialogue with other texts, in its "reading," of them, it has the capacity to articulate new forms, which in turn have an effect on that context. The following examples from The Springfield Republican, the family library, and the Hampshire and Franklin Express illuminate Dickinson' s intellectual context and project.

THE SPRINGFIELD REPUBLICAN

The Dickinson library represented by holdings at the Houghton and John Hay libraries is almost certainly not intact – it remained in the poet' s home for over sixty years after her death before being left to the Houghton; volumes rejected by the Houghton were then returned to the Evergreens, where they remained until 1994, when they were moved to the John Hay Library. Therefore, it has been essential to follow up the "Notices of publication" and "Book Reviews" in the newspapers and journals subscribed to by the family. The Springfield Republican has been a particularly rich source. In addition to poems and articles of interest, we have compiled a bibliography of books published and reviewed during the poet' s lifetime. The list includes books of general interest, both fictional (including volumes of poetry) and non-fictional covering topics such as writing and language; religion and theology, both orthodox and fringe, including spiritual manifestations (e.g. rappings), sermons, accounts of religious revivals; geology and the natural sciences; psychology and "phrenology"; women' s issues and early feminist movements. The compilation of this list has established a number of trends that are illuminating in regard to Dickinson' s theological and philosophical concerns, her sense of herself as a writer, particularly a woman writer, attitudes to language and poetry and publication expectations. Of particular interest are the number of books showing the religious and theological uncertainty of the times, debates which, given the varieties of Dickinson' s own religious beliefs, have a bearing on our understanding of Dickinson' s poems of a mystical, spiritual or religious nature.

By way of example, in the 1850s there emerges a debate between those who believe in the authority" of divinely revealed truth in the Scriptures (the "Logos" or "Word"), and those who would turn to "Nature", as to a book or teacher, for divine instruction. Following the 1849 publication of Edward Hitchcock' Religious Lectures on the Phenomena in the Four Seasons which argues that the "study of natural history is essential to the argument for God" there appeared in 1850 notices and reviews of: Alexander von Humbolt' Cosmos: A Sketch of a physical description of the Universe which argues that "The reading of God in his works stands next, in point of profit, to reading Him in his Word, and there is no study better calculated to enlarge, elevate and purify the mind than that of the physical machinery whose operations are around, above, beneath and in us" (3.14.50); Alexander Carson' The Knowledge of Jesus. the Most Excellent of the Sciences in which "The author regards the revelations of God in his Word and works as harmonious", but privileges "The Gospel Alone"; Hugh Millers The Footprints of the Creator which demonstrates that "the truths of Geology, which were once received with distrust by Christian Science, are become a portion of Christian Science" (11.4.50); Robert Hunt' The Poetry of Science or Studies of the Physical Phenomena of Nature which illustrates that "those scientific facts which bear directly on natural phenomena ... have a value superior to their mere economic applications in their power of exalting the mind to contemplation" (11.4.50).

In 1856 Rev. Dr. James McGosh and Dr. George Dickie' Typical forms and Special Ends in Creation is reviewed as "a book of the highest order" which belongs to "a field of literature comparatively new – a field where God in Nature and God in Revelation meet, and are reconciled, in that wonderful harmony which raises and establishes the faith of the Christian, and converts to the Christian faith the naturalist (4.29.56). These works are part of the context in which Dickinson conducted her own investigations of nature, language and the divine.

THE LIBRARY

The philosophical works circulating in Amherst are another part of Dickinson' s context. To take a few examples:

1) Passages in Thomas Upham' Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life (1848) offer a new twist on the "diminutive" stance of several of Dickinson' s poems. In a letter found in the study of the late Rev. Mr. Belcher of New England, are these words in answer to the question, "How to live in this world, so as to live in Heaven": "I make best way in a low gale. A high spirit in a high sail together will be dangerous, and therefore I prepare to live low ... My study is my calling" (93). The same volume includes excerpts from Madam de Guyon "On the True Idea of Interior Annihilation or Nothingness" including these lines: I then comprehend what power a soul has which is entirely annihilate & (387) and I am a mere NOTHING. To me every condition seems equal. All is lost in his immensity, like a drop of water in the sea ... In this immensity the soul sees itself no more" (360).

2) Henry Drummond' Natural Law in the Spiritual World (1884) is devoted to an extensive consideration of the idea Dickinson encapsulates so brilliantly in L280: I was thinking, today -- as I noticed, that the "Supernatural" was only the Natural, disclosed – Drummond writes:

What is required to draw Science and Religion together – is the disclosure of the naturalness of the supernatural ... even as the contribution of Science to Religion is the vindication of the naturalness of the Supernatural, so the gift of Religion to Science is the demonstration of the Supernaturalness of the Natural. (xxiii)

3) In Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind (1848), Thomas Brown explores "the whole art of philosophizing -- the art of inquiring assiduously, without knowing what we are inquiring about" (64). His discussions of the nature of consciousness and the intervention of the problem of language in relation to the successive states of mind that constitute consciousness and our convictions of identity have resonances with Dickinson' s own explorations of the mind, language and consciousness.

4) A book by Amherst College Professor Joseph Haven, Mental Philosophy: including the Intellect, Sensibilities and Will, was recommended on the front page of the Hampshire and Franklin Express (Oct. 30, 1837). In the book Haven states that mental philosophy has for its object "to ascertain the facts and laws of mental operation" (15) and he maintains that "the phenomena of our own minds, the data of our own consciousness" are the peak of human study. All other studies, whether of the mineral, the plant, the insect, the animal, the body of man in "their curious and wonderful organizations," are "inferior in dignity and worth to the spirit that dwells within, and is the true lord of this fair castle and this wide and beautiful domain." The mind is "the divinity within" and the science of mind the science of divinity itself. (22) Moreover, the study of mind has this advantage: "In psychology the observer has within himself the essential elements of the science which he explores; the data which he seeks, are the data of his own consciousness; the science which he constructs is the science of himself" (19). Haven' s affirmation of the study of the mind as the peak of human study and "the science of divinity itself" has obvious resonances with Dickinson' s view of the mind and her sense of the importance of the data of consciousness, which could be studied as readily alone in Amherst as anywhere in the world.

HAMPSHIRE AND FRANKLIN EXPRESS

Bakhtin' s idea of dialogism was dramatically realised for me in working with the Hampshire and Franklin Express, for this local paper to which the Dickinsons subscribed consists of the same intersection of lofty ideas and delight in the immediate that characterizes Dickinson' s poems. There are essays on reading, enlarging the mind, writers and writing religious revivals, women' s rights conventions, the high death rate of women in the Amherst district. There are also notices of meetings ("Meetings with Literary Men," "Meetings of the Society of Religious Inquiry") and lectures on diverse topics (Anthony Burns and Frederick Douglas on "Abolition," James Boyden on "Is Man a Free Agent," Anne Dickinson on "The Wrongs Endured by Working Women", Horace Greely on "The Self-made Man," Professor Hitchcock on "The Habitability of Other Worlds," Professor Warner on "The Study of the Mind," Professor Fowler on "Human Language and Self Culture"), as well as regular columns on Amherst Academy and Amherst College. There are also notices regarding local matters; for instance (from the Jones Library Index): Charles Adams has large pears this year, Mary Ann Albee charges Anson Albee with adultery, B. Allen has purchased fifty shade trees to set out on the common, Mary Elizabeth Casey has run away and H. C. Nash to whom she is indentured will not be responsible for her debts, Solomon Eastman has a hen that laid seventy six eggs in eighty days, Mattie Hastings has rescued the young son of Dr. Edward Hitchcock from the pond on the common, Mary Hitchcock' s night blooming cæus are in bloom, bees are laying in honey under the eaves of C. Fisk' s house in South Amherst, the daughter of Rev. Hooker has drowned herself in the Connecticut River, R. B. Hubbard wishes to purchase a pair of oxen and sell three suffolk grade pigs, Charles Hutchinson advertises skates at a price that makes skating cheaper than standing still, Edward Morgan wins a prize for memorizing two thousand seven hundred and thirty-four Bible verses, the water in the fountain in the common has frozen and is a beautiful sight, the cherry trees are in bloom and the birds are returning – the orioles have arrived but the bobolinks are not yet here.

There is a regular column entitled "Amherst Matters" in which "Matters" might be a verb as well as a noun. The Hampshire and Franklin Express declares itself to be devoted to the local interests of the people of Hampshire and Franklin County; its aims are the advancement of prosperity and the general welfare of the community and moral and intellectual improvement. In the 1840s there are items such as Channing' s "The Company of Books" (May 14, 1846) which argues that "this intercourse with superior minds" is in the reach of all and "makes us heirs of the spiritual life of past ages": In the best books, great men talk to us, give us their most precious thoughts and pour their souls into ours." "EDUCATION – TO BE UNIVERSAL" (January 2, 1846) argues that "Every man may gain such knowledge of truth in physical, mental and moral science as to understand his relations and employ himself usefully on the theatre of life": "And when we think what mind is – how largely it can expand – how deeply it can penetrate – how it can gather knowledge everywhere – and ascending even to God, and enlarging itself by knowledge divine – how can we leave our faculties uncultivated and undirected according to the manifest end of their creation." "TO YOUNG MEN" (August 6, 1846) argues that the mind gains strength by exertion and you should "have your book always at hand and devote to it every leisure momen": "Elihu Burritt had to work for a living; but he carried his book to the forge, and mingled the sparks of intellect with those of the glowing iron."

"A Scrap from a Newspaper" (March 20, 1846) asserts that the mind is "a well that has no bottom" and that "reading and study are the food of thought, and to draw up new thoughts from the well that has no bottom, that well must be continually fed by living springs." "What is Mind (August 14, 1857) states:

The immortal mind – What is it, who can tell us? ... We may as well attempt to number the stars which gem the blue vault of heaven or the sand which lies upon the sea shore as to fathom the depths of the mind or measure how wonderful the powers of the intellect, for it is an emanation from God himself... Knowledge is its native element, and into its exhaustless depths it plunges with inexpressible delight, seeking to quench its burning thirst and satisfy its hungry cravings.... Then let it spread its buoyant ethereal wings and soar through boundless regions of the universe and let it freely bathe in the pure invigorating fount of knowledge ...

This same front page also has columns on "Women' s Rights", "Hardy Ornamental Trees", "The Harvest", and the "Origins of Meteoric Stones".

The Hampshire and Franklin Express was also a newspaper committed to poetry, particularly local poetry, which almost invariably occupies pride of place on the front page of the four-page newspaper. The themes are for the most part death and the seasons, but there are some interesting surprises. A poem entitled "Nobody" is so striking that it is difficult not to think of Dickinson' s poem "I' m Nobody, Who are you? as being written in dialogue with it. Poems like "An Hour with the Dead" and "Wrong. Not the Dead" lest "*they rise in their might/ And terrors confound thee in visions of night*" have that wry Gothic delight that we find in Dickinson (minus her wit and brilliance of course). Other poems commemorate particular deaths: poems like "Dirge for a Child," "The Dying Student of Williston Seminary," "On the Recent Death of a Fellow Student."

A number of bride poems which appeared in the late 1840s and early 1850s provide a specific context in which to read Dickinson's poems about brides warning us against exclusively biographical or religious readings of these poems. These poems include: "The Bride," "The Unwilling Bride," "The Bride's Departure," "The Home Angel," "Love, Honor and Obey," "Resignation," "A Woman's Question." Dickinson's "bride sequence" must inevitably be read in the context of their genre - amply evidenced in the pages of the Hampshire and Franklin Express. Her bridal texts are in part a response to these other texts, her dialogue with an extant cultural form. There are scores of such pre-texts and inter-texts that resonate with Dickinson's poems in the pages of the Hampshire and Franklin Express.

While I am not immune to the Dickinson mystique, both the romantic cult of the poet and the New Critical orthodoxy gave us a smaller and less rigorous Dickinson, paradoxically marginalizing and minimalizing the significance of artistic practice rather than seeing it as an engagement with the preoccupations of an age.

Joan Kirkby

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