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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

EMILY DICKINSON'S SEXUAL PERSONAE

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

SUMMARY

Synopsis

The purpose of the research in this thesis, *Emily Dickinson's Sexual Personae*, is to investigate how and why Emily Dickinson utilises a variety of sexual personae in her poetry.

The research focuses on how each chosen sexual persona functions in Dickinson's poetry – what the specific sexual persona is (lesbian, sadist, etc), how it functions, and what each persona allows Dickinson to articulate, as pertaining to thoughts, ideas and questions about sexual and/or taboo subjects.

Personae as a mode of expression is analysed, as are the possible reasons for Dickinson's choices of personae.

Research

The first chapter focuses on the function of the sexual persona in Dickinson's poetry, suggesting that Dickinson was inspired to use personae in ways made familiar by Robert Browning, Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue, but how she then moved persona deployment beyond historical or literary models into taboo sexual territory.

Each of the subsequent seven chapters of the thesis focuses on an analysis of the function of a particular sexual persona deployed by Dickinson in her poetry.

Divisions

These sexual personae identified in Dickinson's poetry include the male heterosexual, the female heterosexual, the lesbian, the autoeroticist, the sadist, the masochist and the necrophile.

Method

The thesis is a re-reading of Emily Dickinson's poetry, with new readings and interpretations of the poems and new insights into Dickinson's organisation of

her poems. Each chapter of the thesis provides new conclusions regarding Dickinson's literary project.

Contribution to knowledge

The thesis continues work started by others in the 1970s on Emily Dickinson's use of personae in her poetry. The thesis focus is on sexual personae as a method of articulating the taboo; an area of Dickinson study that has been neglected or ignored.

Emily Dickinson's Sexual Persona

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September 2016

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, which I submit for examination in consideration of the award of a degree of Master of Philosophy, is my own personal research, work and effort.

I have not already obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of this work.

Furthermore, I have taken all reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and, to the best of my knowledge, does not breach copyright law, and has not been taken from other sources except where such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text.

Signed:

Student Number:

Date: 18/09/2016

Emily Dickinson's Sexual Persona

by R J Dent

Methodology and Critical Perspective

This thesis focuses on seven types of sexual personae deployed by Emily Dickinson in her poetry. The seven types of sexual personae are the heterosexual female, the heterosexual male, the lesbian, the autoeroticist, the masochist, the sadist and the necrophile.

Because many of Dickinson's poems are concerned with gender changes, taboo sex, or challenges to contemporaneous attitudes to women, to gender and to sexuality, the critical apparatus used in this thesis to analyse Dickinson's poetry will be a number of strands of Queer Theory, specifically Michel Foucault's theories regarding sexuality, mostly from his study of the Victorians in the first volume of his trilogy, *The History of Sexuality* (1970-). *The Will to Knowledge* (1970), in particular, Foucault's 'Repressive Hypothesis', with which he analyses the 'medicalization of the sexually peculiar' (Foucault, 1990, 44); a hypothesis which is particularly useful for analysing Dickinson's poetry.

In her book, *Emily Dickinson*, Joan Kirkby suggests that Emily Dickinson's poems 'are transgressive poems of great energy which explore taboo states usually excluded from consideration' (Kirkby, 1991, 87). Dickinson's choices of sexual personae (the heterosexual female, the heterosexual male, the lesbian, the autoeroticist, the masochist, the sadist and the necrophile) seem to support Kirkby's contention.

In *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia goes even further than Kirkby by suggesting that 'Emily Dickinson is the female Sade, and her poems are the prison dreams of a self-incarcerated, sadomasochistic imaginalist' (Paglia, 1990, 624). By her own admission, Paglia's analytical 'method is a form of sensationalism' (Paglia, 1990, xiii), which she has deployed to make her point that:

Dickinson's many voices are sexual personae. They fall into her two major modes, the Sadean and Wordsworthian. The sentimental poems are feminine personae, representing a primary response to nature, glad and trusting... She accepts femininity but denies femaleness.... Dickinson's sadomasochistic metaphors are a technique of self-hermaphrodization... an emptying out of female internality. (Paglia, 1990, 639-640)

It is at this point that this thesis rejects Paglia's notion of Dickinson having only 'two major modes' of poetic expression; Dickinson deploys at least seven sexual personae and a similar number of non-sexual personae. This thesis also refutes Paglia's notion of the 'Sadean' poems being male and the 'Wordsworthian' poems being female: some of Dickinson's most Sadean poems are conveyed via a female persona: 'She dealt her pretty words like blades' (J479/F458) being one notable example. Paglia's contention that Dickinson is 'a male genius' is acknowledged to be the piece of declamatory and 'sensationalist' hyperbole that Paglia intends it to be, with the caveat that

Paglia's thesis is one of biological determinism, in which she (Paglia) suggests that Dickinson is raging against an essential femininity which she loathes. Camille Paglia's conclusions concerning Dickinson include the claim that:

In her hidden inner life, this shy Victorian spinster was a male genius and visionary sadist, a fictive sexual persona of towering force. (Paglia, 1990, 673)

It is at this point that this thesis diverges from Paglia's biographical reconstruction of Emily Dickinson being a 'male genius' or even a 'shy... male... sadist...' (Paglia, 1990, 673). The above statement by Paglia is one of the many biographical fallacies regarding Emily Dickinson. Similar claims can be found in almost every book about Emily Dickinson's poetry. Very few books or essays on Emily Dickinson's poetry are free from biographical speculation. Many key critical texts are guilty of this, even some of those used to support points made in this thesis.

Since 1955, the year Emily Dickinson's *The Complete Poems* was published, a very small number of Emily Dickinson's critics continue to make the seemingly obvious point that Dickinson uses personae as a device for conveying her poetry. That each of these critics (Todd in 1973, Phillips in 1988, Paglia in 1990, Mitchell in 2000, and Juhasz in 2005) feels compelled to make (or remake) this specific point, suggests that Dickinson's utilisation of this particular device is far from obvious.

Paglia's claim that Emily Dickinson was a 'shy... male... sadist' is obviously a piece of inaccurate speculative biography, as is Marianne Noble's claim that 'For Emily Dickinson the pleasures of writing poetry are in large measure masochistic' (Noble, 2000, 190). Gilbert and Gubar speculate that Dickinson kept herself in 'agoraphobic imprisonment in her father's household, along with a concomitant exclusion from the passionate drama of adult sexuality' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 595); whereas Ted Hughes speculates that 'the key event' in Dickinson's life 'was a great and final disappointment in her love for some particular man' (Hughes, 1979, 11).

It is because of such purely speculative, and often contradictory, claims as quoted above that this thesis eschews any attempt at biographical readings of Dickinson's poetry. The 1775 poems in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955) are works of fiction, and not autobiography, and any attempt to assess aspects of a life from metaphoric discourse would be a project of speculation, rather than a thesis of detailed analysis. As Domhnall Mitchell cautions:

one needs to be careful about confusing the author with her rhetorical performances... her work often involves a dramatization of psychic and social possibilities that should not be literally translated as representing her exact views. (Mitchell, 2000, 90)

Despite the marked differences in Kirkby's, Noble's and Paglia's rhetoric, each critic appears to be agreeing on the extreme or 'transgressive' nature of Dickinson's poetry, and that some of Dickinson's poems are

concerned with 'taboo' or 'somasochistic' subject matter. Because of this, Dickinson's place in a pantheon of writers of transgressive literature will be examined, as many of Dickinson's poems contain extreme or taboo sexual imagery. She utilises a whole range of transgressive sexual personae in order to write from the perspective of the sadist, the masochist, the autoeroticist, the lesbian, the necrophile, and the voyeur, amongst others.

In 1862, Dickinson sent some poems to a journal editor for an opinion on them, and she included a letter in which she immediately distances herself and her life from her poems and emphasises the fictional nature of her 'Verse'. Dickinson insists that the 'I' in her poems: 'does not mean – me – but a supposed person' (Dickinson, 1958, 404).

As Cynthia Griffin Wolff points out about Emily Dickinson's *The Complete Poems* (1955):

This is, by no stretch of the imagination, a body of poetry that might be construed as a series of lyrics spoken by many different people. Disparate as these many Voices are, somehow they all appear to issue from the same 'self'... The summoning of one or another Voice in a given poem, then, is not an unconscious emotive reflection of Emily Dickinson's mood at the moment of creation. Rather, each different Voice is a calculated tactic, an attempt to touch her readers and engage them intimately with the poetry. Each voice has its advantages; each its limitations. A poet self-conscious in her craft, she calculated this element as carefully as every other. (Wolff, 1986, 178)

Dickinson's deployment of personae then, according to Wolff, is 'a calculated tactic', and her adoption of temporary gendered masks is an example of 'gender as performance' (Butler, 1990, 90).

This thesis is also ahistorical, with its focus being on new readings and new interpretations of Emily Dickinson's poetic personae poems; readings that eschew biographical and historical readings of Dickinson's poetry, which is, in essence, a collection of 1,775 metaphorical discourses, written over a period of thirty-six years, between 1850 and 1886. However, purely for contextual purposes (mainly because Dickinson mentions contemporary (Victorian) poets she admires), this thesis follows on from the work of Carroll Smith Rosenberg, Daniel Walker Howe, Janet Mason, Camille Paglia, Helen McNeil, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Thomas J. Schlereth and situates Emily Dickinson as a member of an American 'Victorian bourgeois family' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 198), and as a 'Victorian American' writer (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 115), living in 'Victorian New England' (Mason, 2017). As such, Dickinson, although inspired by English Victorian writers, is markedly different from them with her 'Victorian American attitudes' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 115).

This particular distinction needs to be made, as scholars of nineteenth-century culture (such as Daniel Walker Howe) have pointed to significant differences between English Victorianism and American Victorianism, even down to the start and finish dates of the eras. The duration of English Victorianism is throughout Queen Victoria's reign – that is, from 1837-1901;

the duration of American Victorianism is generally held by American scholars to be from 1875-1910, although Schlereth posits that 'Victorian America... ended not at the English monarch's death in 1901 but with the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914' (Schlereth, 1991, xii).

American Victorianism was an offshoot of the period and lifestyle that developed in the United States after the American Civil War (1861-1865), chiefly in well-established regions such as New England. The terms 'American Victorian' (McNeil, 1986, 3) and 'Victorian American' (Schlereth, 1992, 249) are used throughout this thesis to describe Emily Dickinson, as it reflects the significant British cultural influence on the United States, on New England, on the Dickinson family, and on Emily Dickinson herself, whose literary heroes and models were English poets and novelists, many of who were her Victorian contemporaries.

Sexual Personae

Emily Dickinson's use of personae in her poetry is well documented – by a number of scholars and critics – and by Dickinson herself. In an 1862 letter (Letter 268) to her literary advisor, Thomas Higginson, in the first year of their correspondence, Dickinson wrote: 'When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse, it does not mean – me – but a supposed person.' (Dickinson, 1958, 404).

Higginson was the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* and was a well-known and successful man of letters, yet Dickinson quite obviously felt that it was necessary that the six poems she sent him were accompanied by a letter stating that she was using personae in her poems. She states quite clearly that the word 'I' in her poems should not be interpreted to 'mean' her personally, but instead refers to a fictional creation, 'a supposed person'; a persona or, as soon becomes obvious, a whole range of personae. This may seem a simple and obvious point, but it is nonetheless a crucial one which needs to be underlined because much current criticism still analyses Dickinson's poetry by ascribing autobiographical meaning to her fictional works.

In 1853, Emily Dickinson had been writing poetry for over three years and had already started using personae in her poetry. That year she wrote (Letter 107) to Susan Gilbert, her friend (and later, her sister-in-law) to explain to 'Susie' her willingness to use multiple male and female personae:

I'm so amused at my own ubiquity that I hardly know what to say... by strange metamorphosis I'm just from Michigan, and am Mattie and Minnie and Lizzie... Why, dear Susie, it must'nt (*sic*) scare you if I loom up from Hindoostan, or drop from an Appenine, or peer at you suddenly from the hollow of a tree, calling myself King Charles, Sancho Panzer, or Herod, King of the Jews – I suppose it is all the same. (Dickinson, 1958, 228-9).

Dickinson claims that through a process of 'strange metamorphosis' she has been able to become a variety of male ('King Charles, Sancho Panzer, or Herod') or female ('Mattie and Minnie and Lizzie') others; that using personae enables her to be anyone from (or in) any geographical location ('from Michigan'; 'from Hindoostan'; 'from an Appenine' mountain; or 'from the hollow of a tree').

Dickinson also sees fit to inform her friend of her penchant for using personae in her poetry: 'Susie, it must'nt scare you...' Here Dickinson is cautioning Susie, one of her first readers, on how Dickinson's willingness to make use of multiple personae could unsettle her friend with its strangeness and unfamiliarity. Again, Dickinson has felt it necessary to explain that it would not be her autobiographical self in her poems, but a constructed, fictional male or female persona. This suggests that the notion of the use of personae in poetry was not a readily-accepted convention; certainly not one familiar to either Thomas Higginson or Susan Gilbert, who were entrenched in the

'Jacksonian, and later, Victorian' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 46) era they lived and worked in.

For Dickinson, utilising a whole host of different sexual (and therefore differently-gendered) personae means she is able, in her poetry, to switch gender at will. This technique is a simple poetic strategy that enables her to use her poetry to explore a number of themes and subjects that she considered important.

Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance, a theory she espouses in *Gender Trouble* (1990), is applicable to Emily Dickinson's poems in which Dickinson 'performs' a multitude of gendered personae. Butler's contention that 'gender is a performance' (Butler, 1990, 190), is a useful theory which provides a reliable way of reading or re-reading Dickinson's poems.

In 1991, Joan Kirkby still felt the need, despite Dickinson studies having been ongoing for over twenty years, to remind readers that Dickinson used 'countless' persona in her poems. Kirkby states:

In the poems and letters Dickinson adopts the persona of countless 'supposed persons', boy, wife, corpse, etc.; the 'I' in any given poem is simply the speaker of that particular poem. Her delight in assuming other selves is related to her idea that life itself is a fiction. (Kirkby, 1991, 40).

Similarly, Robert Weisbuch states that 'Dickinson's multitude of personae' are 'constantly contradicting one another in tone as well as "opinion"' (Weisbuch, 1975, 59). This contradiction of 'tone as well as "opinion"' can be seen in the 'multitude' of sexual personae that Dickinson chooses to mediate her poetry through, some of which would have been considered shocking or taboo had Dickinson published her poetry in her own lifetime.

At the time that Emily Dickinson was at her most creative and productive (the 1860s), Robert Browning was using personae in his poetry and he found himself remarkably successful as a result of this strategy. His literary reputation rests on the poems published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatis Personae* (1864) and *The Ring and the Book* (1868).

Emily Dickinson was a great admirer of Browning's poetry, and she was very familiar with (and clearly learned from) his uses of personae. 'For poets – I have... Browning' (Dickinson, 1958, 404), she wrote to Thomas Higginson, her literary advisor, in 1862, making her allegiances (and influences) clear, eighteen years after Browning published *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), the collection that included 'My Last Duchess', which is possibly his most well-known personae poem.

By using a 'multitude of personae' or 'supposed' persons, Dickinson is deploying a similar poetic technique to the one utilized by Jules Laforgue; the implementation of 'the ironic 'I'', which introduces a layer of self-critical irony to a fictional first person ('I') narrator. One implication of Dickinson's use of this ironic distancing technique is that the poems cannot accurately be read as autobiographical. It also allows Dickinson to write about anything at all, from any perspective she chooses. As Thomas Emerson Todd (one of the first critics to identify Dickinson's use of personae) states:

Emily Dickinson's use of the persona is a key technique in her poetry... Throughout her life she continually assumed a variety of dramatic poses to express different moods and to develop experiences from her reading or her life into imaginative forms that often bear little resemblance to actual events... Emily Dickinson generally used a first-person narrator... When we understand that the 'I' in these poems is frequently treated as characters are handled by a dramatist, we see that she could set forth ideas not necessarily her own and thus could deal with a realm of experience beyond her own restricted Amherst world. (Todd, 1973, xiii-xiv).

Todd here cautions Dickinson's readers to refrain from making biographical assumptions about Emily Dickinson from her poetry; her poetry being one of the fictional 'forms that often bear little resemblance to actual events'.

That Emily Dickinson writes to explore many different types of sex, sexuality, gender, and sexual acts in 'Victorian America' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 15) is evident from a cursory glance at her *oeuvre*. That she also uses her poetry to 'set forth ideas not necessarily her own', and as a vehicle for exploring the pathologized and/or criminalized aspects of sexuality that the 'sexologists' of the era (Freud, Krafft-Ebing, Ellis,) identified and taxonomized, is perhaps not so obvious and needs elucidation.

As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg points out, the era that Emily Dickinson was working in was 'Victorian American', with clearly defined 'Victorian American attitudes' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 115). Victorian America, like Victorian England, was patriarchal, and:

the new bourgeois men of the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s formulated the Cult of True Womanhood, which prescribed a female role bounded by kitchen and nursery, overlaid with piety and purity, and crowned with subservience. (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 13.)

Emily Dickinson's work often questions 'the Cult of True Womanhood'. To this end, she frequently writes about taboo sex in a coded form; in short, Dickinson utilizes a 'countless' range of sexual personae to present her explorations. For any writer, a persona is an artifice, but one which is necessary for the creation of certain types of literature.

For Emily Dickinson, the use of sexual personae – and the resulting descriptions of what these personae describe and do – produces art which not only questions and explores several 'American Victorian' (McNeil, 1986, 3) assumptions about the role of sexuality and gender within a poetic tradition, but also attempts to transgress and challenge that poetic tradition, as well as to suggest that one role of poetry is to act as a vehicle for the self-fashioning and self-defining of the identity (literary, sexual and social) of the poet.

The following pages of this thesis are concerned with identifying, analyzing and evaluating Emily Dickinson's use in her poetry of the personae of the heterosexual male, the heterosexual female, the lesbian, the

autoeroticist, the masochist, the sadist and the necrophile. A close reading of the poems reveals that the utterances and the described heterosexual, lesbian, autoerotic, masochistic, sadistic and necrophiliac acts of these personae are very closely linked to the creation of not only poetry, but also of the poet – a poet whose ‘sexual cause’ was what Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), calls ‘the demand for sexual freedom, but also for the knowledge to be gained from sex and the right to speak about it’ (Foucault, 1998, 6).

Early in her writing career, Dickinson took to utilising poetic masks or personae. The term persona denotes the ‘I’ who speaks in a poem; the speaker or voice of a literary work; the one who is doing the talking. Rather than the poem representing the voice of the author, as in much lyric poetry, the speaker in Dickinson’s persona poems is a fictional (and often anonymous) character with whom she does not necessarily identify. This poetic strategy allows Dickinson to be satiric, forthright, candid or ironic, not only about the subject of the poems, but about the poems’ speaker.

Personae Theory

The concept of the literary persona derives from the Classical period, when Roman and Greek actors wore clay masks with very large mouth holes through which the actor’s voice could resound. *Persona* is an Italian noun that derives from the Latin word for ‘mask’ or ‘character’, which is in turn derived from the Etruscan word *phersu*. In popular etymology the word is derived from the Latin word *per*, meaning ‘through’, and *sonare* meaning ‘to sound’, meaning something along the lines of ‘something through which the actor speaks’; the specific something, in this case, being a mask.

The poetic persona was initially used in Roman satire, particularly by Juvenal, then later by Geoffrey Chaucer and Alexander Pope, and later still by a number of Victorian poets, including Jules Laforgue, Robert Browning, Charles Baudelaire, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. In the twentieth century, it was used to great effect by the Modernists, particularly T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Robert Lowell.

According to Robert C. Elliott, in *The Literary Persona*:

[T]he word *persona* had been picked up, an indirect result, it seems likely, of use by Ezra Pound... During these same years [1916-1926] Yeats wrote often of masks, for him the very source of creative energy, and Carl Jung used the words *persona* and *mask* as central terms in his psychoanalytic theories.

Given this authoritative stimulus and given also what was becoming an obsessive preoccupation of the age with questions about the self, it is not surprising that by the late 1940s the word *persona* had entered definitively into the language of critical discourse. (Elliott, 1982, 8)

Fifteen years after the word *persona* had 'entered definitively into the language of critical discourse', Emily Dickinson's *The Complete Poems*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, was published, thereby making over a thousand previously unpublished poems of Dickinson's available to poetry readers for the first time. Johnson claims to have restored Dickinson's punctuation and line breaks and promises, in his introduction to present Dickinson's poems 'with no editorial tinkering' (Johnson, 1955, x).

Carl Jung claims that:

Masks, as we know, are actually used... as a means of enhancing or changing the personality... The term *persona* is really a very appropriate expression for this, for originally it meant the mask once worn by actors to indicate the role they played. (Jung, 1972, 150-7).

And Ezra Pound explains how:

In the 'search for oneself', in the search for 'sincere self-expression,' one gropes, one finds some seeming veracity. One says 'I am' this, that, or the other, and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing.

I began this search for the real in a book called *Personae*, casting off, as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem. (Pound, 1970, 85).

Pound's notion of *personae* being 'complete masks of the self' implies that rather than the poem representing the voice of the poet, as in much lyric poetry, the speaker in a *persona* poem is usually a historical or a made-up character with whom the poet may or may not completely identify. This strategy allows the poet to be honest or dishonest, satiric or ironic, or even sarcastic, not only with regards to the subject of the poem, but also about the poem's speaker, although sometimes the poet may appear to share the sentiments expressed by the poem's *persona*, which can make for an interesting ambiguity. Put simply, the adoption of a *persona* results in a poetic first person that speaks in situated monologue.

A *persona* can therefore be understood as the organizing consciousness of a poetic narrative. This clearly differentiates the *persona* from any of the poem's characters, even the major or well-developed ones. Furthermore, if the interpretation of a poem (a poem being a form of fiction) is taken to be fundamentally the process of deciphering an author's personal feelings about various subjects – an attempt to understand the mind of the author – then literary criticism degenerates into pseudo-psychoanalysis, or a biographical fallacy, leaving little room for consideration of the poems themselves as works of fiction.

Finally, and for similar reasons, the narrator-as-*persona* allows for greater interpretive latitude, and thus arguably richer interpretive possibilities, than a more strictly author-centred approach would provide. The wearing of masks, regardless of the psychologically complex motives for doing so, has the effect of depersonalizing the poet: the *persona* hides the person, although it

may reveal aspects of the unmasked self. This can be seen as a contribution to a larger poetics of impersonality that is quintessentially modernist.

From a psycho-analytical perspective, the psychological persona serves a similar function to the literary persona. According to Carl Jung:

The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (Jung, 1972, 305).

Robert Browning

Robert Browning utilises a variety of masks or personae in his 1842 poetry collection, *Dramatic Lyrics*. For Browning, the poetic persona was crucial to the development of poetry, so much so that in 1864, Browning titled one of his books *Dramatis Personae*. The narrative persona Browning uses is usually a historical figure placed in a situation that reveals to the reader some aspect of his or her personality. Instead of speeches that are intended for others' ears, most of the poems are in the form of soliloquies.

An example of Robert Browning's use of a well-known persona is 'My Last Duchess' (Browning, 1999, 358), in which Browning adopts the 'mask' or persona of the Duke of Ferrara. In 'My Last Duchess', Browning's utilisation of the Duke's persona provides the Duke with the opportunity to explain his reasons for killing the Duchess – and to detail the motivation for his murderous act from his own particular – and psychopathically subjective – point of view. The poem 'My Last Duchess' is set during the late Italian Renaissance. The speaker (the Duke of Ferrara) is giving the emissary of the family of his prospective new wife a tour of the artworks in his home. He pulls aside a curtain to reveal a painting of a woman, explaining that it is a portrait of his late wife; he invites his guest to sit and look at the painting. As they look at the portrait of the late Duchess, the Duke describes her happy, cheerful and flirtatious nature, which had displeased him. He says, 'She had a heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad...' (Browning, 1999, 358). He goes on to say that his complaint of her was that 'twas not her husband's presence only' that made her happy. Eventually, he says, 'I gave commands; then all smiles stopped together' (Browning, 1999, 358). The Duke now keeps her painting hidden behind a curtain that only he is allowed to draw back, suggesting that now (although dead) she only smiles for him. This particular use of personae was of interest to Emily Dickinson, as was the method of personae use espoused by Charles Baudelaire.

Charles Baudelaire and the *flâneur*

In Victorian Paris, Charles Baudelaire rebelled against Victorian bourgeois mores through the use of the provocation of sexual explicitness and the shock of blasphemy to confront the French bourgeoisie with the faults and hypocrisy of middle-class life. In many of the poems in his seminal collection, *Les Fleurs*

du Mal (*The Flowers of Evil* – 1857), Baudelaire takes on the poetic persona of the dandy and the *flâneur*.

Decadent artists consistently challenged bourgeois hypocrisy; they challenged the insistence that art be useful or didactic, and they challenged the notion that the individual had to lead a productive and useful life. For the Decadents, art, which exists merely for pleasure, reconciles the futility of existence through the Decadent artist's antagonistic relationship with bourgeois capitalist society. Charles Baudelaire's conception of the idle and purposeless life of the dandy and the *flâneur*, each as individuals, who consciously place themselves outside the norms of bourgeois society by negating the purpose of city living, is influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's depiction of the modern city's underside. After advertising his soon-to-be-published collection as *Les Lesbiennes* (*The Lesbians*), Baudelaire's collection of poems was ultimately published as *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857).

Charles Baudelaire challenged bourgeois society with his hedonistic, eccentric life as an unconventional, bohemian social misfit. The image of Baudelaire that emerges from his work, and from biographies of his life, is one of a man who enjoyed his status as an outsider to bourgeois society. Baudelaire's dandy is a figure who deliberately adopts the status of the social pariah in order to confront and shock bourgeois society on its own territory. The dandy is a persona that Baudelaire carefully adopts – that of a figure placed antagonistically within society as a reaction to 'the rising tide of democracy, which... reduces everything to the same level' (Baudelaire, 1974, 422). The self-centred dandy dedicates his life to personal grooming and to fashion, lives idly and hedonistically and is at odds with bourgeois society due to his selfish rejection of productivity and usefulness. There is another aspect to the Baudelairean dandy: the figure of the *flâneur*. The Baudelairean *flâneur* is a dandy who negates the purpose of city life by idly and purposelessly walking the streets of a major city (in Baudelaire's case, Paris).

Baudelaire depicts the seamy and criminal underside of the modern urban city in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857); Culler notes that city life is not usually presented by Baudelaire as a place of 'modern inventions, commerce, and progress' (Culler, 1993, xxviii), but rather as a dangerous and mysterious place. The supposedly rational bourgeois values of progress and development are contradicted by Baudelaire's depiction of the irrational aspects of urban life. Also, Baudelaire appears to glamorize vice and crime, in an attempt to make it desirable. In the poem 'The Rag-Picker's Wine', for instance, Baudelaire conflates the life of a poet and that of a drunkard:

A ragged man appears, shaking his head,
Stumbling against the walls, like a poet,
And uncaring of laughter, picks subjects
He loves to expound on... (Baudelaire, 2008, 109)

Baudelaire's drunkard is 'uncaring of laughter' at his inebriation – and therefore shares Baudelaire's *flâneur's* rebellious and nonchalant demeanour. Also, in the poem 'The Game', which portrays gambling and prostitution in a seedy establishment with a 'filthy ceiling', the poem's speaker is 'cold, impotent,

alone', 'envying every other man's lust' for gambling at 'the green baize tables' and the lust for the syphilitic 'ancient whores' who offer 'a false paradise/where blood is poisoned...' (Baudelaire, 2008, 98). Baudelaire's narrator, therefore, enviously portrays crime and vice tinged with death as something attractive and desirable and, in doing so, rejects bourgeois insistence on moralizing art by depicting vice and crime as glamorous and desirable activities.

Baudelaire's voyeuristic gaze is, by necessity, an outward gaze; his flâneur and his drunkard poetic personae look at (or rather observe) the cityscape and the citizens. Emily Dickinson's gaze is also voyeuristic, but a gaze looking 'inward to an imaginal interior' (Reed, 1999, 81), since her personae are not interested in any exterior landscape; instead they gaze into an uncharted interior realm; 'a deeper region of herself – a mapless dominion' (Howe, 1985, 111) or what Dickinson referred to as a 'Torrid Zone' and as 'Art's inner Summer' (Dickinson, 1958, 882).

There are numerous affinities between Dickinson and Baudelaire. Living on opposite sides of the Atlantic, one an urban Bohemian poet, the other a New England spinster, Charles Baudelaire and Emily Dickinson at first glance may seem to share little more than a taste for certain poetic topoi – both poets are fond of the vast landscape and of the journey into imaginary territories in faraway lands. A closer inspection, however, reveals that their poetry proved tremendously fruitful for the next generation of poets in their respective national traditions. Both poets have a flair for the symbolic and for violent ruptures with convention, both embrace irony and relish mocking authority. More importantly, they share an interest in the mystical, difficult contemplation of the immensity of the universe: both poets are fond of meditating on the meaning of the human being when faced with the absolute. They both study death in its various forms: the myriad metamorphoses of the living self as much as the ultimate dissolution of the body and the release of the soul into death's nothingness.

Inner space

Emily Dickinson's 'total inwardness' (Ruland and Bradbury, 1992, 173) is 'a universe of inward meditation and drama' that has 'no clear social form' (Ruland and Bradbury, 1992, 173). In other words, Emily Dickinson's poetry does not correspond to an outer reality – rather it depicts an inner imaginative world, for Dickinson is an 'inner cartographer' (Reed, 1995, 117), who maps a sexualised imaginative terrain that is located within 'the inner world of the psyche' (Ballard, 2004, 314). She then populates that '*inner space*' (Ballard, 1997, 197) with sexual beings.

Dickinson's specific literary strategy is what Fred White refers to as her 'dramatic rendering, whereby characters – personae – speak in their own disparate voices, thereby creating a richer and more complex work of art' (White, 1992, 93).

Dickinson's letters reveal a poet fully engaged in the process of crafting a series of literary personae. Indeed, Dickinson insisted on the distinction between her poetry and her life. Dickinson's utilisation of personae then is a vastly different project to Browning's: his personae are literary and/or

historical individuals, whereas Dickinson's personae are unnamed sexual beings. Sometimes she identifies a created character as the speaker – but in the absence of a specific attribution, the term persona is applied in a neutral sense, since it should not be automatically assumed that a work of fiction directly reflects the personal experiences or views of the poet. Dickinson's stated use of a purely fictional, 'Representative', or 'supposed' persona precludes a biographical reading of her poems and enables Dickinson to give expression to things she may prefer not to have attributed to her own person.

In her poems, Dickinson adopts a variety of 'supposed persons', including a little girl, a queen, a bride, a bridegroom, a wife, a dying woman, a nun, a boy, and a bee. Though almost one hundred and fifty of her poems begin with the pronoun 'I', the speaker, as Dickinson insisted 'does not mean – me' and as Dickinson has stated, is a fictional persona, therefore the poems cannot – and probably should not – be read as autobiography.

The multiple uses of sexual personae in Emily Dickinson's poetry – and in her letters, many of which take the form of poetry in prose or 'letter-poems' (McGann, 1996, 203) – can be seen to be pioneering in that she has assumed 'manifold sexualities' (Foucault, 1998, 47) and utilised the 'thousand masks' (Nietzsche, 1973, 157) of all of the various sexual personae that are available in the works of her literary precursors and contemporaries in order to 'make the Counterfeit look real' (Letter 667). Dickinson's writing is the 'transformation of sex into discourse' (Foucault, 1998, 36); a discourse in which the assembled thoughts are written from the psychological perspectives of the organising sexual personae, thereby creating a uniquely personal form of poetry – one that not only extends and adds to the potential creative uses of different types of personae, but which also returns those personae to the realms of the literary, albeit in a very different form from which they were first taken.

Decadent transgression

In words that could easily be describing Dickinson's sexual personae, Michel Foucault writes that Victorian sexual beings are:

wise beyond their years, precocious little girls, ambiguous schoolboys, dubious servants and educators, cruel or maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses... (Foucault, 1998, 40)

Each one of Emily Dickinson's sexual personae – with the possible exception of the male and female heterosexual – a specific persona (be it the masochist, the lesbian, the masturbator, the voyeur, the sadist, or the necrophile) is chosen from the ranks of the taboo – that is the pathologized and the often criminalized Victorian sexual types.

Dickinson was writing her poetry at a time (the 1860s) when psychoanalysis and medicine were beginning to taxonomise sex and sexuality. Writers of literature were turning to medical and scientific journals for detail and inspiration. In the United States, Edgar Allen Poe wrote stories containing

contemporary scientific data, as did Jules Verne in France and H.G. Wells in England.

From a feminist perspective, it can be seen that several of Dickinson's sexual personae – in particular her version of the heterosexual male, the heterosexual female, and the lesbian – have been appropriated from the fiction of women writers – Rachilde, George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, to name only the most influential.

In other poems, the more extreme personae of the autoeroticist, the sadist, the masochist and the necrophile are personae which Dickinson has appropriated from the fiction or poetry of male writers – Poe, Sade, Baudelaire, Sacher-Masoch and Swinburne, to name but a few authors who challenged the complexity of Victorian sexual ideology. Liberated from their original patriarchal sources by Dickinson, these formerly male personae – and the resultant personae-based themes – have been incorporated into a female poetic canon which readily switches from one gendered persona to another, which is in stark contrast to the way the sources of her borrowed personae are utilised by their previous authors.

Dickinson's lyric voice can be compared to the terms used by Rachilde to describe the 'song of a strange love neither male nor female but from which sprang all voluptuousness' (Rachilde, 2004, 45). The importance that the use of these multiple poetic personae held for Dickinson is revealed in one of her poems, in which she refers to the various personae she uses as 'Those fair – fictitious People' (J499/F369). Her artistic search to find a reliable method of conveying a variety of voices/personae/narrative points of view was expressed very clearly in an early poem in which she states: 'I... wished a way might be... to subdivide' (J655/F464). For Dickinson, the need to subdivide in order to speak openly of the flesh culminates in her ability to produce a multiplicity of sexual personae, each with its own gendered and distinct narrative voice. Dickinson clearly embraced the idea that poets could use *personae* or masks to voice thoughts on society, on sexuality, on relationships, on any subject at all, no matter how extreme – thoughts that may or may not be the poet's own thoughts – rather than speaking directly, personally.

The various types of 'supposed' person, 'fictitious People', or subdividing sexual personae of Dickinson's which will be looked at in the following pages are those of the heterosexual man, the heterosexual woman, the lesbian, the autoeroticist, the masochist, the sadist and the necrophile: personae that have been chosen because they represent Dickinson's initially unpublished literary contribution to – and therefore her response to and involvement with – the beginnings of the nineteenth century *fin de siècle* decadent/aesthetic tradition, the literary movement which had its practitioners and adherents in France, England and Russia, as well as in America, and which is known for its challenge to sexual and artistic stereotypes.

In her work, Dickinson combines the decadent literary manner, which incorporates the use of the outer trappings of decadence: exotic locations, roses, sex, wine, silks, exotic locations, rich colours – particularly purple – blood and the occult, with various decadent stylistic techniques such as the use of unusual diction, bizarre or foreign words, the juxtaposing of two or

more conflicting thoughts within one line, often with a pause – expressed by Dickinson as a dash – in between, as well as her frequent habit of placing a verb at the start of a line in order to splinter the syntax.

In his introduction to *A Selection of Emily Dickinson's Verse* (1979), Ted Hughes notes that Dickinson's individual poetic voice manifests itself in a 'barrage of extravagant intensities and imagery and epigrams' (Hughes, 1979, xii) all of which are for the most part punctuated by 'eccentric dashes' (Hughes, 1979, xi). These 'eccentric dashes', along with the other literary devices, are however 'an integral part of her method and style' (Hughes, 1979, xi). These techniques often appear initially to deliberately threaten the overall integrity of a poem by breaking down its thematic unity into separate units, but this is simply poetic misdirection by Dickinson; she actually uses the structure of the overall form to reconstruct it into a new unity.

Dickinson also uses a number of other notably decadent stylistic traits, such as expressing an idealistic yearning by using naturalistic detail, or combining the traditional with the modern in a way that would have been shocking to a nineteenth-century audience, had her poems been published without editorial tampering. One particular example of this is the way that many decadents wrote sonnets – the traditional form for expressing courtly love – which contained either blasphemous or carnal themes. Dickinson wrote no sonnets, but she did use the rhyming quatrain structure popular in hymns to write about sex and sexuality; thereby mixing the sacred with the profane. This 'Decadent erudition' (Paglia, 1990, 638) is – due to it being 'the unconventional utterance of daring thoughts' (Higginson, 1964, 10) – a form of literary subversion or transgression. Indeed, there is a case to be made for Emily Dickinson to be considered – along with Sade, Baudelaire and Wilde – as an early proponent of transgressive fiction, a form of writing in which Dickinson articulates transgressive fantasies and ideas of sexuality and sex.

Browning gave his poems titles in order to alert his readers to the poem's persona; Dickinson, by refusing to give her poems titles, and therefore refusing to identify the poem's specific persona, forces her readers to identify the poem's persona from the context of the poem, which provides a more modern take on the literary/poetic persona than is immediately obvious.

Non-publication as a strategy

Also significant is the fact that Dickinson had no interest in publishing her poetry or in being a professional poet. She had a range of other ideas regarding the creation, the writing and the dissemination of her poetry. She also had specific ideas as to the aesthetic function of her poetry.

After twelve years of writing poetry seriously, Emily Dickinson sent six of her poems to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, asking if he thought her 'Verse' was 'alive' (Dickinson, 1958, 403). Higginson advised Dickinson to 'delay' to publish. In a subsequent letter to him, Dickinson goes out of her way to assure Higginson: 'I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish" – that being foreign to my thought' (Dickinson, 1958, 408). Emily Dickinson then refused to publish any poetry collections in her lifetime.

From this letter and from the subsequent lack of publication of her work until after her death, it is impossible to determine Dickinson's real thoughts on being advised not to publish. Her response refuting any interest in publishing her poetry may have been genuine; it may have been a deliberate strategy of withdrawal, employed to give the impression she was not upset or hurt by Higginson's interdict.

Contrarily, in March 1876, Helen Hunt Jackson wrote imploring Dickinson to 'sing aloud', that is, to make her poetry more widely available than Dickinson was currently allowing it to be, due to Dickinson only circulating her work by sending single poems to friends.

I have a little manuscript volume with a few of your verses in it – and I read them very often – You are a great poet – and it is wrong to the day you live in, that you will not sing aloud. When you are what men call dead, you will be sorry you were so stingy. (qtd in Dickinson, 1958, 545)

In March, 1883, publisher Thomas Niles wrote to Dickinson offering to return a book of poems by the Brontë sisters that Dickinson had sent him; instead, he offered to publish a collection of Dickinson's poems:

My dear Miss Dickinson... If I may presume to say so, I will instead take a M.S. collection of your poems, that is, if you want to give them to the world through the medium of a publisher. (qtd in Dickinson, 1958, 769)

As Thomas H. Johnson notes: 'ED made no response to this request for a manuscript collection of her poems'. (qtd in Dickinson, 1958, 769)

Dickinson's refusal to respond to Niles's request indicates a total lack of interest in mainstream publication, which suggests that her poetic project has other purposes. A number of possible reasons exist for her decision.

Firstly, Dickinson's family were independently wealthy and Dickinson had no need to publish her writing in collections, in order to sell copies to make a living, as her contemporary, Louisa May Alcott had to, when her family suffered financial difficulties.

Also, Dickinson was very aware of the problems of censorship (and censure) that Walt Whitman, her contemporary, had to contend with after he had published *Leaves of Grass* (1855). In order to avoid a similar response to her own poetry, much of which was far more sexually explicit than Whitman's poetry, and was more akin to what is now known as transgressive fiction, Dickinson simply chose to remain unpublished.

Transgressive fiction is fiction that challenges, subverts, criticises or assaults social mores, conventions, rules and laws. Examples of renowned and/or infamous works of transgressive fiction include Petronius's *The Satyricon* (1AD); Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (2AD); most of the fictional output of the Marquis de Sade, particularly *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795); *Juliette* (1801), *120 Days of Sodom* (1904); Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1851); Le Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1874); Maurice Rollinat's *Les Névroses* (1883); Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892); Kate

Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899); D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (1928); Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934); Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955); Allan Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956); William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959); Hubert Selby Jr.'s *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964); Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972); J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973); Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993).

The above-named works by their respective authors have shocked, upset, outraged, nauseated, provoked, incensed, sickened, or angered many readers – not only the readers the works were first introduced to upon publication, but also many subsequent readers. Some of the works (and their authors) were prosecuted for promoting indecency, blasphemy or immorality – or because the work was considered to contain material that could deprave or corrupt the reader.

The above works have also influenced and inspired many artists, thinkers, writers, and musicians. To take one example, the work of William S. Burroughs has inspired many artists; noted admirers of Burroughs's work include the rock critic Lester Bangs, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the authors J.G. Ballard, Peter Ackroyd, Angela Carter, Jean Genet, William Gibson, Alan Moore, Kathy Acker and Ken Kesey. He is also cited as a major influence by many musicians, including Roger Waters, David Bowie, Patti Smith, Genesis P-Orridge, Ian Curtis, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Tom Waits and Kurt Cobain.

Similarly, Emily Dickinson's transgressive poetry has influenced a whole range of artists, including Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich, amongst others.

To include Dickinson's poems and letters in a tradition of transgressive fiction is to emphasize Dickinson's aesthetic deployment of taboo subjects for specific purposes. Dickinson's utilisation of the taboo subjects enumerated by Suzanne Juhasz: 'Lesbianism! Autoeroticism! Necrophilia! Cross-dressing! Masochism!' is simply an aspect of what Juhasz, quoting Judith Butler, refers to as Dickinson's 'Polymorphous Perversity' (Butler, Juhasz, 2005, 24).

As an artist, Emily Dickinson created sexual personae that would have been considered by her contemporaries to be perverse sexual subjects. Non-publication meant that these sexual personae poems were never scrutinized by a public readership, unlike Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1955), which also contained poems with sexual personae which were considered so sexually perverse that Whitman was derided by many critics because of the collection's explicit sexual imagery. Conversely, non-publication meant Dickinson's poems were never censored or censored. Her transgressive artistic output did not cause controversy.

On the dichotomy between on being an artist and on being a citizen, David Cronenberg states:

Society and art exist uneasily together; that's always been the case... As an artist, one is not a citizen of society. An artist is bound to explore every aspect of human experience, the darkest corners – not necessarily – but if that is where one is led, that's where one must go. You cannot worry about what the structure of your own particular segment of

society considers bad behaviour, good behaviour; good exploration, bad exploration. So, at the time you're being an artist, you're not a citizen. You don't have the social responsibility of a citizen. You have, in fact, no social responsibility whatsoever... But as an artist the responsibility is to allow yourself complete freedom. That's your function, what you're here for. (Cronenberg, 1996, 53)

Cronenberg's point about the artist being 'bound to explore every aspect of human experience' resonates in the sexual personae poetry of Emily Dickinson. Emily Dickinson was a strong-willed and serious artist in an American 'Victorian bourgeois family' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 198) that was renowned for doing what it wanted, when it wanted. Emily Dickinson had, as has been noted by her first editor, 'the independence characteristic of the Dickinsons, who paid little heed to other people's rules' (Johnson, 1986, xii). She was writing her transgressive poetry and letters at a time when 'the strong social and reforming temper of the times' (Marcus, 1970, 2) seemed to be firmly in place as the dominant ideology.

And yet, as Foucault points out: 'Nineteenth-century 'bourgeois' society... was a society of blatant and fragmented perversion' (Foucault, 1998, 47). This 'blatant and fragmented perversion' is evident in the 'veritable flood' (Marcus, 1966, xvi) of contemporaneous works of pornography, and in the proliferation of non-fiction texts that Foucault labels 'Scientia Sexualis' (Foucault, 1978, 51), which are pseudo-scientific studies of sexuality. Sexually explicit imagery was not so evident in serious literature, particularly in lyric poetry; very few serious poets used perverse or taboo or sexually explicit metaphors in their poems. There were one or two exceptions; as mentioned above, Walt Whitman included explicit sexual imagery in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), and Charles Baudelaire included themes of lesbianism, drug taking and necrophilia in his collection, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). Algernon Swinburne had similar themes and images to Baudelaire in his *Poems and Ballads* (1866). Whitman was dismissed from his job because of the content of some of his poems, Baudelaire was prosecuted for obscenity and blasphemy, and Swinburne was publicly castigated. Dickinson, working at the artistic intersection where pornography and 'Scientia Sexualis' texts meet, often wrote poems that were models of coded artistic discourse that appeared to be devoid of any sexual content. To understand the actual sexual meaning of much serious literature, it was necessary to discover the code's matrix and then use it to decode the work.

In many of her erotic poems and letters, Emily Dickinson uses a coded artistic discourse that seems to deny any overt sexual content. However, some of her other poems are not coded and are, in fact, blatant in their explicit sexuality.

By using subjects and themes that transgressed and subverted serious literary tastes in an era when the 'policing of sex' (Foucault, 1998, 25) was the societal norm, Emily Dickinson (one of nineteenth-century bourgeois society's more prominent citizens) can be seen to be using a number of poetic personae to 'ask anything' (McNeil, 1984, 32), including questions of a philosophical, social, psychological, theological and sexual nature. This type of

questioning was not considered to be the usual role of nineteenth-century lyric poetry, for so long derided as being inferior to narrative and dramatic poetry, and Dickinson's method was therefore a technique for 'extending the canon' (Murray, 1989, 1); a technique which added a new epistemological dimension to the field of lyric poetry. It is in this way that Dickinson presents the poet as 'The Teacher of Wisdom' (Wilde, 1988, 867), a knowledge-giving or wisdom-sharing poet-teacher; a role given credence for many by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Transcendentalist philosopher and poet, who was writing at the same time as Dickinson and whose works Dickinson admired and quoted from in her letters and poetry.

Dickinson's canon frequently juxtaposes poems of violence and cruelty with those of lush sentimentality. This indicates that the poems represent a further philosophical intention, namely that of formally and thematically attempting to resolve the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy examined by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Nietzsche presents the division as necessarily irresolvable for the sake of the continuation and furtherance of art, but this is clearly not the case for Dickinson, for whom the Dionysian principle – out of necessity – contains elements of the Apollonian, just as the Apollonian contains elements of the Dionysian out of the same necessity. Dickinson's attempt to transcend these distinctions and emphasise their non-conflicting unity becomes apparent when considering Dickinson's deliberate ensconcing of macabre images of the 'horrifying and ruthless' (Paglia, 1990, 624) within the metrical cadences of church hymns.

According to Helene Cixous's gender theory propounded in 'Sorties', Dickinson can be considered one of:

those uncertain, poetic persons who have not let themselves be reduced to dummies programmed to pitiless repression of the homosexual element. Men or women: beings who are complex, mobile, open. Accepting of the other sex as a component makes them much richer, more various, stronger, and – to the extent that they are mobile – very fragile. It is only in this condition that (they) invent. Thinkers, artists, those who create new values, 'philosophers' in the mad Nietzschean manner, inventors and wreckers of concepts and forms, those who change life cannot help but be stirred by anomalies – complementary or contradictory. (Cixous, 1994, 147)

Foucault, however, sees all people as sexual subjects, shaped by the discourses of the era they live in. For Emily Dickinson, the social hierarchical system within which she was living was primarily that of the bourgeois American Victorian Puritan Whig patriarchy, with Dickinson as a female poet actively questioning aspects of this hierarchy. In Victorian society then, 'sexuality itself had come to be regarded as problematical' (Marcus, 1966, 264), but as Foucault demonstrates, what happened was that the 'sexually peculiar' was simply subject to 'medicalization' (Foucault, 1990, 44), and that which was deemed 'problematical' was simply psycho-pathologized.

To judge from the sexual content of her poetry, and her celebratory tone when writing about sex, Emily Dickinson did not consider sex to be

problematical. However she chose to write about sexuality (and particularly taboo sexuality) in a metaphorical, coded language that allowed explicitness.

The role Emily Dickinson chose as a poet and letter writer is another persona, or constructed fiction, which gives the appearance of being a reality, but as with all other personae, is able to be dismantled, and is therefore transient. Reinforcement of this notion of transience can be found in the fact that most of Dickinson's poems were not published at the time of being written, which would have been when they would have been at their most potent. However, posthumous publication has meant that although Dickinson's poems failed to emancipate sex and sexuality during her lifetime, they have posthumously contributed to modifying the 'economy within reality' of poetry, as well as helping to 'subvert law that governs it, and change its future' (Foucault, 1998, 8). This is due in part to the fact that the subversive power encoded within Dickinson's poems is still evident – as is constantly being pointed out by editors, biographers and critics – and is made explicit by the rather obvious fact that many of the subjects and themes which Dickinson dealt with still remain taboo even in the twenty-first century, as can be seen by the present dearth of scholarly material dealing with the necrophile and necrophilia in literature.

As Helen McNeil points out, there has always been a general tendency to dismiss Emily Dickinson as 'an old maid American Victorian recluse poet', which can only have the effect of making her considerable poetic achievements 'look limited' (McNeil, 1986, 3). This negative attitude even extends to the comments of other poets, with John Crowe Ransom stating that for many, 'the most satisfying image' of Emily Dickinson would be one in which she was presented 'as a kind of Cinderella' (Ransom, 1977, 31). In a damning review of Dickinson's poetry in *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 1892, poet and novelist Thomas Bailey Aldrich describes Dickinson as 'an eccentric, dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village' (Aldrich, 1964, 55-56). He concludes his review with a sarcastic comment that attempts to imitate Dickinson's poetic style: 'her[...] – versicles are fatal' (Aldrich, 1964, 55).

Fortunately, developments in philosophy – in particular the socio-historical works of Michel Foucault, which analyse the reasons for the exclusion and repression of many individuals and social groups from the 'mainstream' social hierarchy – have meant that the writings which would normally have constituted the 'silenced voice' (Park, 1992, 111) of a writer such as Dickinson can be re-evaluated on their own terms, rather than according to some ideological schema which tailors them to serve a particular – usually currently fashionable – political purpose.

As Foucault observes in *The Will to Knowledge*, the Victorian scientific community was 'more servile with respect to the powers of order than amenable to the requirements of truth' and in its 'discourse on sex... it declared... strange pleasures... would eventually result in nothing short of death: that of individuals, generations, the species itself' (Foucault, 1998, 54).

Dickinson's poetry, particularly those poems that have a sexual content or theme, is one aspect of her concerted revolt against 'Victorian American attitudes' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 182) to gender and sexuality. Dickinson's

work can be understood as being involved in a process of emancipation and increasing sexual freedom and adds an interesting revolutionary element to the history of sexuality in the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A revolt against 'Victorian American' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 182) sexual values is clearly one of Dickinson's main projects.

Dickinson's 1850 letter to Jane Humphrey (Letter 35) is one of the most anthologised, analysed, and criticised letters in the Dickinson canon. In that letter, Dickinson writes:

I have dared to do strange things – bold things, and have asked no advice from any – I have heeded beautiful tempters, yet do not think I am wrong. (Dickinson, 1958, 95)

Typically, Dickinson does not disclose the nature of the 'strange things – bold things' she has done with those 'beautiful tempters' – at no point does she state whether they are sexual 'things' or literary 'things' or 'things' of another sort entirely. However, other parts of the same letter indicate the possibly perverse sexual nature of those 'many, and curious things':

I would whisper to you in the evening of many, and curious things – and by the lamps eternal read your thoughts and response in your face, and find what you thought about me, and what I have done, and am doing... I could make you tremble for me, and be very much afraid, and wonder how things would end – (Dickinson, 1958, 95)

According to Judith Farr, 'Even in the 1850s, such amorous tones to another woman would have provoked remark' (Farr, 1992, 104). Letter 35, written when Emily Dickinson was twenty-five, gives an indication of Dickinson's rebellious attitude to late nineteenth century American Victorian sexual mores, and her interest in using her writing to explore forbidden and 'curious things'.

Late nineteenth-century American Victorianism was a surprisingly functional means of organizing sexual relations for the American middle class. As has been shown by Foucault's and Marcus's work on Victorian sexuality, the prevalent image of Victorianism's repressive stance towards sexuality was not necessarily true, as it 'rests upon a mass of unargued, unexamined and largely unconscious assumptions' (Marcus, 1966, 1).

In her poetry, Emily Dickinson uses a range of sexual masks and voices, personae and perspectives, including '[v]oyeurism, vampirism, necrophilia, lesbianism, sadomasochism, sexual surrealism' (Paglia, 1990, 671) to question, explore and articulate aspects of Victorian American life, specifically, sexuality and attitudes to sexuality. Paglia concludes with the observation: 'Amherst's Madame de Sade still waits for her readers to know her' (Paglia, 1990, 671).

The Lesbian

Lesbian sexuality in Victorian America

Emily Dickinson's utilisation and deployment of a lesbian persona have been analysed and explicated by a number of critics and scholars. Some critics (Judith Farr, Lillian Faderman, Terry Castle) have labelled Emily Dickinson's poetry 'lesbian poetry'. Others (Janet Mason, Marta Nell Smith) have argued that Dickinson was herself a lesbian. When analysing Emily Dickinson's late nineteenth-century utilisation of a literary lesbian persona, it is necessary to consider "Victorian American attitudes' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 115) to lesbianism. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg claims that

the late nineteenth-century's... sexologists, by insisting that conventional sexuality (heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive, quintessentially bourgeois, as Michel Foucault reminds us) constituted the apex of human sexual evolution, made heterosexuality both essential to and symbolic of social order. Within their evolutionary model, all other forms of sexuality (non-reproductive, fetishistic, homosexual,) become organically 'unnatural,' atavistic, degenerate – symbols of social disorder. (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 40)

Regardless of any supposition or speculation pertaining to Dickinson's sexual preferences, for the presentation of some of her poems, Dickinson deliberately chose to use a lesbian persona; a persona that would, in the years she was writing, have been regarded as 'unnatural', 'atavistic' or 'degenerate'.

The primary argument of this chapter is that while some of Emily Dickinson's writing is indeed 'lesbian' writing, it can only be considered as such because it has been filtered by Dickinson through a series of carefully-constructed lesbian masks or personae. As with her other sexual personae, Dickinson's deliberate use of such fictional lesbian personae for aesthetic purposes complicates the autobiographical element in her work to such an extent that it makes redundant (and irrelevant) any biographical claims regarding her possible lesbianism.

Judith Butler claims that 'gender is performance' (Butler, 1990, 190) and that there are 'various acts of gender' (Butler, 1990, 190), by which she seems to be suggesting that there are no fixed or stable gender identities, only 'various acts' or modes of gender 'performance' or presentation which is manifested in discourse. According to Butler, it is therefore impossible to make such distinctions as 'lesbian' or 'heterosexual', since all social categories are denaturalized and reduced to discourse.

This is one of the central tenets of this thesis; that Dickinson appropriates genders for her sexual personae in order to have them perform short pieces of metaphorical discourse, that is, that she 'genders' her persona in each poem. Dickinson often refuses to overtly identify the gender of that persona, leaving it for the reader to establish the persona's gender and the gendered persona's concomitant message or messages.

In 1973, Monique Wittig's survey of lesbian literature resulted in her concluding:

Lesbianism... is a theme which cannot even be described as taboo, for it has no real existence in the history of literature. The lesbians, for their part, are silent... When one has read the poems of Sappho, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, the poems of Sylvia Plath and Anais Nin, *Le Batarde* by Violette Leduc, one has read everything. (Wittig, 1973, ix)

Wittig's conclusion is necessarily hyperbolic in order to make her point about there being a dearth of lesbian-themed literature at the time; however, by 1973, the lesbian-themed works of Gertrude Stein, Rita Mae Brown, Djuna Barnes, Mary Renault, Jane Bowles and Jane Rule had all been published and were being read.

The main principles for judging literary works as lesbian are necessarily flexible and include both poetry and prose written by lesbians, and writing which explores and celebrates lesbian eroticism and sexuality from a variety of (lesbian and non-lesbian; male and female) perspectives.

'Lesbian' is a term that refers to eroticized emotional attachment as well as to carnal sexual experience. As lesbian fiction editor Margaret Reynolds points out, 'lesbian writing... is writing which exhibits, within the confines of the text itself, something which makes it distinctly about, or for, or out of lesbian experience' (Reynolds, 1994, xxxii).

Since Sappho, lesbianism has been a major theme and/or subject in literature; it has also been written about by a variety of male writers, including Plato, Ludovico Ariosto, William Shakespeare, Charles Baudelaire, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Algernon Swinburne, and Pierre Louÿs, all of whom have contributed greatly to lesbian literature – and all of whose lesbian writing is analysed in this chapter. Charles Baudelaire considered lesbians to be so important that his seminal poetry collection was initially advertised prior to publication as *Les Lesbiennes (The Lesbians)*, and its title was changed only days before its 1857 publication to *The Flowers of Evil*.

Emily Dickinson readily asserts the purely fictional nature of all of her chosen personae in her 'Representative' use of a variety of 'supposed' (that is, literary or fictional) personae, including the lesbian personae that will be examined and analysed in this chapter. Dickinson adopts and discards sexual personae at will. She sometimes uses different sexual personae for different versions of the same poem, as can be seen in poem J494/F277. In poem J494 (Version 1/F277c), published in 1890, Dickinson carefully and deliberately adopts a heterosexual persona when she writes:

Going to Him! Happy letter!
Tell Him...
Tell Him – Night finished – before we finished –
And the Old Clock kept neighing 'Day'
And you – got sleepy –
And begged to be ended –
What would it hinder so – to – say? (J494 (Version 1/F277c))

In poem J494 (Version 2/F277b), not published until 1955 by Johnson and until 1996 (in a slightly revised version) by Franklin, Dickinson writes:

Going – to – Her!
Happy – Letter! Tell Her...
Tell Her – Day – finished – before we – finished –
And the old Clock kept neighing – 'Day'!
And you – got sleepy –
And begged to be ended –
What could – it hinder so – to say? (J494 (Version2/F277b))

Poem J494 (Version 1/F277c) lends itself to an obvious heterosexual interpretation. J494 (Version 2/F277b) however, has been read and interpreted by a number of critics as being a lesbian poem, or at least a poem that can be read as lesbian-themed. Apart from the obvious gender differences, poem J494 (Version 2/F277b) differs in a number of other significant ways from J494 (Version 1/F277c); Dickinson alters the first line to 'Going to Her!' and repositions 'Happy letter' on to the second line, so that lines one and two end with the word 'Her'; Dickinson also substitutes 'Day' for 'Night', thereby positing a binary opposite that emphasises the gender shift evident in the pronoun change. Dickinson's contrasting lines: 'Night finished – before we finished' and 'Day – finished – before we – finished' posit different times of the day for different-gendered sexual activity – in this instance, heterosexual sex is at 'Night' and lesbian sex is during the 'Day'. The lines 'And you – got sleepy – / And begged to be ended –' are also deliberately ambiguous, with the word 'ended' meaning either finished, as in brought to orgasm, or 'ended' as meaning curtailed due to tiredness. Dickinson's use of the verb 'begged' is also interesting as it suggests an element of subservience or passivity on the part of the one doing the begging, as well as suggesting the importunate appetite of the speaker. It also suggests an element of sexual teasing.

The above poems are examples of Dickinson's willingness to emphasise the importance (or perhaps the lack of importance) of gender; each version of poem J494/F277 reveals a restlessly experimental poet; one who is wholly at ease with adopting and discarding a variety of sexual personae. Dickinson utilises a lesbian persona for several of her poems and, using that persona, she has written several 'lesbian' poems; some explicit, some erotic, and some in disguised or coded form.

The poems are all subject to Emily Dickinson's aesthetic control. The personae are merely aspects of seven different types of gendered voices, with each voice delivering information about a fictional something or someone via metaphoric discourse.

The literary outsider

Although Emily Dickinson was a successor to Sappho, an avid reader of Shakespeare and of the *King James Bible*, and a contemporary of Christina

Rossetti, Rachilde, Baudelaire, Coleridge and Swinburne, what is noticeable about her contribution to lesbian literature is that not only is the manifest sexual content of much of Dickinson's lesbian writing erotically-charged, but that it has a number of analogous metaphorical levels of meaning, as well as a purely sensuous one. The sexual acts described by Dickinson's lesbian personae function in some of her texts as metaphors for the physical and aesthetic act of writing itself.

As a woman writer of serious, original and challenging poetry during a time when American literature was mostly being written by men (Poe, Whitman, Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson), Emily Dickinson frequently uses her lesbian persona to comment on the creative literary process.

In poem J494 (Version 2)/F277b), Dickinson writes:

Going – to – Her!
Happy – Letter! Tell Her –
Tell Her – the page I never wrote!
Tell Her, I only said – the Syntax –
And left the Verb and the Pronoun – out!
Tell Her just how the fingers – hurried –
Then – how they – stammered – slow – slow –
And then – you wished you had eyes – in your pages –
So you could see – what moved – them – so – (J494 (Version2)/F277b)

Here, Dickinson clearly draws parallels between physical lesbian sex and the act of writing. The lesbian speaker/writer identifies the type of writing as a 'Letter', but the form it is presented in is clearly a poem. Dickinson's lesbian has altered the genre of the writing, just as Dickinson has altered (from one version of the poem to another) the gender of the speaking/writing persona in an act of genre/gender hybridization. In the lines: 'Tell Her, I only said – the Syntax – / And left the Verb and the Pronoun – out!' Dickinson's lesbian can be seen to be articulating the 'left... out', or the unspoken/unwritten: the 'Verb' being the sex act, and the 'Pronoun' being the name of 'Her', the person involved in the sex act – as the lesbian explains how 'fingers – hurried' and 'stammered – slow – slow'. Here Dickinson is demonstrating how it is possible to simultaneously write/speak and to not write/speak in a poem/'Letter' about lesbian sex; the whole poem becomes a metaphor for the creation of writing and a comment on the sensuality of the aesthetic process.

The lesbian persona also serves, in some of Dickinson's poems, as a metaphor for the alienation and exclusion of the female poet (Emily Dickinson) from the male-dominated mainstream of American Victorian literary society. Poem J441/F519 contains even more deliberate genre and gender ambiguity than poem J494 (Version 2)/F277(b). In it, Dickinson has her lesbian state:

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me...
Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see –
For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –

Judge tenderly – of Me (J441/F519)

Again, Dickinson uses the term 'Letter' to describe what is, quite clearly, a poem. Dickinson's lesbian also genders the poem, for it is a text that contains 'Her Message'. The first two lines state that the correspondence is non-reciprocal, with the lesbian speaker being identified as the one who does all of the writing, and the recipient being identified as the one who 'never wrote' back to the writer. This posits the act of writing and the act of sex as both unreciprocated. The deliberate ambiguity lies in the lines that state: 'Her Message is committed/To Hands I cannot see –' (J441/F519).

Dickinson's lesbian complains that the metaphorical feminized 'Message' is in other 'Hands'. The lesbian's desired 'Her' has 'committed' herself to other 'Hands'; hands that belong to someone else; someone the lesbian writer does not know or 'cannot see'.

The final lines of the poem are:

For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –
Judge tenderly – of me – (J441/F519)

and they have a number of possible meanings. They could mean that the lesbian's 'countrymen' are being asked by the lesbian to 'judge tenderly' the 'Sweet' lesbian 'love' she has 'of Her'; they could mean that the lesbian's 'countrymen' will be unable to do anything but 'judge tenderly' the lesbian's 'love of Her', because everyone agrees that the lesbian's 'Her' is 'Sweet'. However, as with many of Dickinson's poems, there are difficulties regarding typographical nuance. In *Volume 1* of R.W. Franklin's 1998 Variorum Edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Franklin adds a footnote to the poem, stating that in the original manuscript of the poem there is a 'Division' (Franklin 528) signified by a dash) and a line-break between the word 'country' and the word 'men'.

In Dickinson's handwritten manuscript of the poem, published in *Volume 1* of the Franklin-edited *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (1981), these particular lines of the poem are clearly set out as:

Her Message is Committed
To Hands I Cannot see –
For love of Her – Sweet – Country –
Men –
Judge tenderly – of Me
(Transcript of Dickinson's hand-written lines from Dickinson, 1981, 548)

In the above version, the poem's meaning becomes about the lesbian's 'love of Her – Sweet – Country', and the fact that lesbian articulating the 'love' for 'Her' wants 'Men' to (or thinks that 'Men' will) 'Judge' her 'tenderly' because of their own 'love of Her – Sweet – Country'.

The notion of female sexual anatomy geographized as a 'country', with its obliquely implied references to its sexualized topography and exoticism, is a recognizable trope Dickinson has borrowed from a number of poets, including

John Donne, who had his narrator of 'The Good-Morrow' state that he 'suck'd on country pleasures, childishly' (Donne 123), and from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet asks Ophelia, 'Do you think I meant country matters?' (3, 2, 116), when referring to the 'Nothing' that lies 'between maids' legs' (3, 2, 119).

The penultimate line of the poem also includes Dickinson's careful use of the adjective 'Sweet', with its multiple meanings that allude to the taste, the charm and the attractiveness of the 'country'. Moreover, in her yearning toward a sexual relationship with a woman, Dickinson's lesbian represents the archetypal condition of desire itself.

The central thematic question of Dickinson's lesbian texts, then, is whether or not the consolations of art can mitigate the existential despair implicit in the situation imagined by the highly original, highly prolific, but unpublished poet. Ultimately, Dickinson is using the poem as an open 'Letter' to claim that she is being, or will be, judged by 'Men'. These men, the literati of North America (Whitman, Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson) are the men that 'never wrote' to Dickinson. The implied message of 'This is my letter' is one of defiance, but is defiance tinged with regret: 'That never wrote to me'.

On a literal level, however, the very nature of lesbian sexuality is at issue. The lesbian speaker/writer actually conceals a series of discreet but quite specific references to lesbian jealousy and rejection disguised as writing.

The use of fingers ('Hands I cannot see') to stimulate 'Her' vagina ('Her – Sweet – country'), provide finite manifestations of the speaker's ultimate sexual aspiration – absolute physical coalescence – with 'Her', the love object. 'Fingers', asserts Pat Califia, 'are probably put into cunts more often than anything else' (Califia, 1988, 50).

By using this dual genre/gender, letter/poem, writer/speaker method of communication, Emily Dickinson is able to use poetry (albeit in a highly disguised and guarded, coded form) as a form of titillation or arousal for the reader, as Swinburne and Louÿs would also attempt with their own lesbian poetry.

'The American Sappho'

Janet Mason refers to Dickinson as 'The American Sappho' (Mason, 2002, 33), and by taking the poetry of Sappho as a starting point, and following a line of development that runs through the Book of Ruth (*The King James Bible*), through the works of Christina Rossetti, Rachilde and on to Anaïs Nin (to name the female lesbian authors referenced in this chapter), it becomes evident that Emily Dickinson's use of a lesbian persona and themes in her poetry and letters, can be seen as an example of Dickinson working 'within a lesbian tradition' (Reynolds, 1994, xxviii): one which demonstrates her contribution to and involvement with 'a canon of past and present lesbian texts' (Belsey & Moore, 1989, 16). Dickinson's involvement with such an illustrious literary tradition with its long, rich and varied history is indicative of her part in the 'late 19th century fascination with Sapphism', particularly Sapphic literature and Sapphic art (Farr, 1992, 103).

In the U.S. during Emily Dickinson's thirty year writing career (1850-1880), same-sex relationships began to be regarded as problematic, and were then criminalized:

American doctors, following the lead of Europeans, began to define same-sex relationships as perverse, and they debated methods for treating homosexuality as a diseased mental state. (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988, 128)

As a student at Amherst Academy, Dickinson undertook 'the learning of a wide range of subjects from Ancient Classics to Modern Science' (Fitzgibbon, 1984, 8). Dickinson's resultant knowledge of 'Ancient Classics', including the writings of Sappho and Plato, would have provided her with two examples of the lesbian in literature. There is no record of Dickinson's reaction to the poems of Sappho, other than a marked similarity between some of her own lines and sentiments and those of Sappho. Dickinson makes one specific reference to Sappho by name in poem J371/F569, which also mentions Plato:

When Sappho – was a living Girl...
When Plato – was a certainty –
And Sophocles – a man – (J371/F569)

In *The Symposium* (c. 385–370 BC), Plato famously (or infamously) writes about lesbians, stating that: 'Women who are halves of a female whole direct their affections towards women and pay little attention to men; Lesbians belong to this category' (Plato, 1982, 62).

One of Dickinson's lesbian poems could be seen as playfully satirising Plato's comment:

Precious to me – She still shall be...
I know the Whole – obscures the Part –
The fraction – that appeased the Heart... (J727/F751)

However, Emily Dickinson did not merely parody lesbian literary precursors, nor did she imitate other lesbian writers who were contemporaries; she also added her own 'slant' (J1129/F1263) to lesbian poetry, infusing it with a theological element, in some cases explicitly stating that lesbian love was God-given:

Her sweet Weight on my Heart a Night
Had scarcely deigned to lie –
When, stirring, for Belief's delight,
My Bride had slipped away –

If 'twas a Dream – made solid – just
The Heaven to confirm –
Or if Myself were dreamed of Her –
The power to presume –

With Him remain – who unto Me –
Gave – even as to All –
A Fiction superseding Faith –
By so much – as 'twas real – (J518/F611)

The above poem bears a clear resemblance to the following lines by Sappho:

Beautiful women,
my feelings for you
will never falter...

May you sleep on the breast
of your tender companion...

you've come and you
– oh, I was longing for you –
have cooled my heart
which was burning with desire...

You came and I was craving you
My wits were kindled with desire
And you set them aflame (Sappho, 1999, 45)

In the above poems, Dickinson and Sappho nominally appear to share a lesbian sensibility – although, as with her other personae, it is a sensibility that, for Dickinson, is a performance. Sappho famously originated the Sapphic stanza with three lines of eleven syllables, followed by a final line of five syllables. This form has been notably imitated by Catullus, Swinburne and Hardy. Emily Dickinson simultaneously replicates and subverts Sappho's model in some of her poems, as can be seen in J1473/F1506: 'We talked with each other about each other/Though neither of us spoke –' (J1473/F1506).

The hendecasyllabic first line of the Sapphic stanza has the repetition of 'each other', and then in the second line, Dickinson subverts the form of the Sapphic stanza by making the next line only six syllables long instead of the conventional eleven. The six-syllable second line serves as a denouement; one that explains that the 'talk' between 'each other' is 'about each other', and is a non-verbal form of communication. In this poem, Dickinson presents unspoken conversation as a metaphor for lesbian sex. Because of the marked similarity between Sappho's and Emily Dickinson's writing, Dickinson can be seen to be the embodiment of 'the new Sappho' (Rachilde, 2004, 76) that Rachilde mentions in *Monsieur Venus* (1884), and the 'American Sappho' (Mason, 2002, 33) posited by Janet Mason.

There are several biographical and autobiographical references to Dickinson's being a Bible reader, for she frequently mentions (and quotes from) the Bible in her letters and poems. She once claimed: 'wicked as I am, I read my Bible sometimes' (Letter 185), and as such, she would have been familiar

with the reference to lesbianism and Ruth's declaration of lesbian love in *The Book of Ruth*:

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her...

And Ruth said: Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. (*Ruth*: 14-17)

Apart from imitating or parodying her precursors, some of Dickinson's poems share a lesbian sensibility that is evident in the works of a number of her contemporaries. Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) is a long narrative poem that has been interpreted as an expression of Rossetti's feminist (or proto-feminist) and homosexual politics. Some critics suggest the poem is about feminine sexuality and its relation to Victorian social mores. Dickinson was an avid reader of Rossetti's work, and Rossetti has been described as similar to 'the American poet Emily Dickinson, with whom she shares a sublimated yet potent sensualism' (Castle, 2003, 443).

When Dickinson writes candidly of lesbian orgasm:

...suddenly – my Riches shrank –
A Goblin – drank my Dew –
My Palaces – dropped tenantless –
Myself – was beggared – too...
I clutched at sounds –
I groped at shapes...
I felt the Wilderness roll back
Along my Golden lines... (J430/F388)

it contains echoes of the explicit 'lesbian' scene in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, in which Rossetti writes:

She cried 'Laura', up the garden,
'Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura make much of me...' (Rossetti, 1994, 13)

Emily Dickinson was so inspired by *Goblin Market* and its 'blatantly cunnilingual imagery' (Castle, 2003, 444), that she attempted several

parodies/pastiches of it. In another poem, she parodies Rossetti's opening lines of:

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges...
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries...
All ripe together
In summer weather... (Rossetti, 1994, 1)

Dickinson's parodic version of *Goblin Market* focuses on the healing powers of the forbidden fruit. This can be seen when she writes:

Would you like Summer? Taste of ours –
Spices? Buy – here!
Ill? We have Berries, for the parching...
Even for Death – A Fairy medicine –
But, which is it... (J691/F272)

However, as with other sexually taboo subjects she wrote about, lack of publication gave Emily Dickinson the freedom to be totally candid and forthright when from a lesbian perspective, writing on lesbian subjects, or using lesbian themes, as can be seen in:

Her breast is fit for pearls,
But I was not a 'Diver' –
Her brow is fit for thrones
But I have not a crest.

Her heart is fit for home –
I – a Sparrow – build there
Sweet of twigs and twine
My perennial nest. (J84/F121)

With regards to content, many of Emily Dickinson's poems, letters and letter-poems have all the characteristics of lesbian erotica. In one of her letters (Letter 288) to Susan Gilbert, she writes:

Sweet Sue –
There is no first, or last, in Forever – It is Centre, there, all the time –
To believe – is enough, and the right of supposing...
...though for the Woman whom I prefer, Here is Festival - Where my
Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside...

Take the Key to the Lily, now, and I will lock the Rose – (Dickinson, 1958, 430)

And in letter 94, Dickinson writes:

I have but one thought, Susie, this afternoon of June, and that of you, and I have one prayer, only; dear Susie, that is for you... I would it were so, Susie, and when I look around me and find myself alone, I sigh for you again; little sigh, and vain sigh, which will not bring you home.

I need you more and more, and the great world grows wider, and dear ones fewer and fewer, every day that you stay away – I miss my biggest heart; my own goes wandering round, and calls for Susie – Three weeks – they can't last always... !

I shall grow more and more impatient until that dear day comes, for till now, I have only mourned for you; now I begin to hope for you... You and I will have an hour... when you get home – we must find out... what you and me are coming to!

Now, farewell, Susie... and I add a kiss, shyly, lest there is somebody there! Don't let them see, will you Susie? (Dickinson, 1958, 211)

The type of lesbian writing in letter 94, where one lesbian declares her feelings, desires and love for a sexual partner, can be seen in some of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, particularly in his poem 'Condemned Women: Delphine and Hyppolyta', from *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), in which Hyppolyta says to Delphine:

For when you softly say 'My love' to me,
my mouth moves slowly, wanting your lips near...
The hugest void that I have ever seen

is opening in my soul. It is my heart,
burning like a volcano; a never-
satisfied monster, devouring my flesh;
a raging fury, burning forever.

Let these drawn curtains hide us from the world,
and let our tiredness bring us both some rest.
On your soft bosom let me find peace,
curled up in the necropolis of your breasts. (Baudelaire, 2008, 119-120)

In poem J1568/F1597, Dickinson's female persona articulates a variety of facets of lesbian love:

To see her is a Picture –
To hear her is a Tune –
To know her an Intemperance
As innocent as June –

To know her not – Affliction –
To own her for a Friend
A warmth as near as if the Sun
Were shining in your Hand. (J1568/F1597)

One of the functions of the lesbianism in Algernon Swinburne's poetry is obviously to titillate, and in some ways, this is similar to one of its designs and functions in some of Charles Baudelaire's and Emily Dickinson's lesbian poetry. Swinburne's lesbian poem, *Anactoria* (1866), is a poem which, according to Camille Paglia, 'prove[s] Swinburne's indebtedness to Baudelaire' as 'it is actually... a reworking of Baudelaire's condemned poem, *Delphine and Hyppolyte*' (Paglia, 1990, 472). In the poem, Swinburne uses the persona of a female narrator, in this case, Sappho, to articulate lesbian desires:

Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
Ah that my mouth for muses' milk were fed
On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds have bled!
That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
Thy body were abolished and consumed,
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed! (Swinburne, 1927, 60)

And in *Carmilla*, J. Sheridan Le Fanu also uses the lesbian persona of a female narrator to titillate and to articulate lesbian desire:

I saw a solemn but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady... I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder... she caressed me with her hands and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me toward her, smiling. I felt immediately delightfully soothed... (Le Fanu, 1971, 8)

In Dickinson's poetry, titillation manifests itself in the poet's frequent use of flower imagery to describe female genitals. This is a literary conceit that has been used by many writers, Octave Mirbeau and Anaïs Nin, amongst others.

In *The Torture Garden* (1899), Mirbeau writes explicitly on the use of the flower as a sexual metaphor:

The flower is nothing but a sexual organ... Is anything healthier, stronger and more beautiful than a sexual organ? These marvellous petals, these silks, these velvets, these soft, supple and caressing fabrics – they are the curtains of the alcove, the draperies of the nuptial chamber, the perfumed bed where sexes are united, where they pass their fleeting and immortal life enraptured with love. (Mirbeau, 1997, 159)

Dickinson's lesbian persona's awareness of the use of flower imagery as a sexual metaphor prefigures Mirbeau's and Nin's use of the same metaphor. This awareness is articulated in poem J168/F179, in which Dickinson's lesbian persona states: 'If the foolish call them *'flowers'* –/Need the wiser, *tell?*' (J168/F179).

Here, Dickinson's lesbian persona cautions the 'wiser' reader, who understands that the metaphorised '*flowers*' are actually vaginas, not to reveal (*'tell'*) this to anyone else. Dickinson has helpfully italicised the metaphor and the interdict to alert the reader to their emphasised importance. She has also placed the '*flowers*' metaphor inside quotation marks to further emphasise its aesthetic distance from its actual meaning. In poem J44/F60 Dickinson's lesbian says:

If she had been the Mistletoe
And I had been the Rose –
How gay upon your table
My velvet life to close – (J44/F60)

And in poem J46/F63, she states:

I bring my rose...
Blossom and I –
Her oath and mine –
Will surely come again. (J46/F63)

Dickinson's contemporaries often used euphemistic metaphors in order to freely describe taboo areas of sexuality. In his poem, *Christabel* (1816), Samuel Taylor Coleridge presents lesbian desires and lesbian sex, but only when couched in euphemistic terms:

Her gentle limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her loveliness...
Her silken robe and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side –
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
...yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs...
And lay down by the maiden's side! –
And in her arms the maid she took...
And with low voice and doleful look
These words did say:
In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow...
Thou... found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair:
And didst bring her home with thee in love... (Coleridge, 1997, 237-277)

By the twentieth century, writers were using different techniques and styles to write about sexuality. Some writers were more candid or explicit. Anaïs Nin, for example, would write stories that combined candid descriptions of lesbian sex with some of Dickinson's euphemistic flower/vagina imagery:

My fingers work more quickly, she falls back on the bed, offering her whole sex to me, open and moist, like a camellia, like rose petals, like velvet, satin. It is rosy and new, as if no one had ever touched it. It is like the sex of a young girl. (Nin, 1979, 120)

Emily Dickinson uses different types of euphemistic language in her lesbian poetry for different purposes. For example, when she wishes to write of lesbian oral sex, Dickinson has her lesbian persona state:

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

Inebriate of Air – am I –
And Debauchee of Dew – (J214/F207)

In poem J214/F207, Dickinson uses the noun, 'Debauchee' to define 'a person given to excessive indulgence in sex, alcohol, or drugs' (OED), and the noun, adjective and verb, 'Inebriate' in poem J334/F380, to describe she is far more sexually explicit than Sappho.

Depths of Ruby, undrained,
Hid, Lip, for Thee –
Play it were a Humming Bird –
And just sipped – me. (J334/F380)

The above poem is an example of Dickinson's explicit depictions of lesbian oral sex. Fifteen years after the 1890 posthumous publication of the first collection of Dickinson's poetry, Freud wrote:

Among women... the sexual aims of inverts [lesbians] are various: there seems to be a special preference for contact with the mucous membrane of the mouth. (Freud, 1995, 244)

However, lesbian oral sex was not the only type of lesbian sex Dickinson wrote about. In another poem, Dickinson's lesbian persona presents several aspects of lesbian lovemaking involving 'face', 'hand' and 'tongue' that the narrator claims many would find difficult to believe, or find 'incredulous', if merely hearing (of) it, but which many would believe after witnessing it – and here Dickinson leaves it ambiguous as to whether by 'Who witnesses' she means the witness as an observer of lesbians making love, or the witness as someone who is actually indulging in lesbian lovemaking.

Her face was in a bed of hair,
Like flowers in a plot –
Her hand was whiter than the sperm
That feeds the sacred light.
Her tongue more tender than the tune
That totters in the leaves –
Who hears may be incredulous,
Who witnesses, believes. (J1722/F1755)

Dickinson's inclusion of the word 'sperm' in the third line is ironic, for it is a word used to describe something ultimately male, be it male spermatazoa, or a reference to the male world of whaling and the harvesting of spermacetti. In this instance, 'sperm' is a word that has been inserted into a poem from which males are excluded. Instead Dickinson focuses on the 'face', the 'hand' and the 'tongue' of a 'tender' 'Her'. This particular lesbian persona is describing what is being done to her, for she speaks of 'Her' lover's 'tongue' being: '...more tender than the tune/That totters in the leaves' (J1722/F1755).

Dickinson's lesbian writing, including her depictions of oral, manual and dildoic love-making, is very similar to other examples of erotic writing to be found in Victorian erotica. In *Sub-Umbra or Sport Among the She-Noodles* (1879), first published in the Victorian pornographic magazine, *The Pearl*, the anonymous author writes:

...Polly was the last, and Rosa, clasping her arms firmly round my youngest cousin's buttocks, exclaimed: 'Ah! Ah! You have made me feel so rude, I must suck this little hairless jewel,' as she glued her lips to it, and hid her face almost from sight, as if she would devour Polly's charms there and then. The young girl, flushed with excitement, placed her hands on Rosa's head, as if to keep her there... (Anon, 1995, 208)

In *Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It* (1879), first serialised in *The Pearl*, the narrator, Beatrice, describes a lesbian encounter and the use of fingers as a method of sexual arousal, stimulation and gratification:

She seemed to take a great fancy to me, and the second night I slept with her... I felt my face covered with burning blushes as her hot kisses on my lips, and the searching gropings of her hands in the most private parts of my person, made me all atremble.

'How you shake, dear Beatrice... Where's your hand? here, put it there; can't you feel the hair just beginning to grow on my pussy? Yours will come soon. Rub your finger on my crack, just there,' so she initiated me into the art of frigging in the most tender loving manner...

'Ah! Oh! Rub harder, harder – quicker,' she gasped, as she stiffened her limbs out with a kind of spasmodic shudder, and I felt my finger all wet with something warm and creamy. She covered me with kisses for a moment, and then lay quite still... I whispered, laughing. 'Go on tickling me with your fingers, I begin rather to like it.'

'So you will, dear, soon, and love me for teaching you such a nice game,' she replied, renewing her frigging operations, which gave me great pleasure so that I hardly knew what I was doing, and a most luscious longing sensation came over me. I begged her to shove her fingers right up. 'Oh! Oh! How nice! Further! Harder!' and almost fainted with delight as she at last brought down my first maiden spend. (Anon, 1995, 14-15)

There are a multitude of other readings of Emily Dickinson's lesbian poems. However, her lesbian persona is sometimes as candid as the above example, as can be seen in poem J505/F348, in which she reflects on the joys of lesbian masturbation:

I'd rather be the One...
To dwell – delicious – on –
And wonder how the fingers feel
Whose rare – celestial – stir –
Evokes so sweet a Torment –
Such sumptuous – Despair...
... the Art to stun myself
With Bolts – of Melody! (J505/F348)

However, in some poems, Dickinson appears to be less candid than she is in the above example. In many poems, Dickinson's lesbian persona is extremely euphemistic in her descriptions of lesbian sex. In poem J410/F423, for example, the lesbian persona describes lesbian lovemaking (and orgasm) in terminology that is more suited to the repairing of a damaged musical instrument:

She said her Strings were snapt –
Her Bow – to Atoms blown –
And so to mend her – gave me work
Until another Morn – (J410/F423)

In poem J410/F423, the musical instrument is a violin with 'snapt' strings and with a 'Bow' that has been 'blown' 'to Atoms'. The lesbian speaker feminizes the violin – '*her* Strings', '*Her* Bow' and 'mend *her*', and then claims that the violin forces the lesbian to 'mend *her*' by making her 'work' at instrument repair throughout the night 'Until another Morn'.

As with her use of other sexual personae, Dickinson's utilisation of the lesbian personae enables her to explore a variety of lesbian types and sexual practices. It was her use of euphemism and metaphor that – paradoxically – allowed Dickinson to be far more sexually explicit than most of her contemporaries. Dickinson as a lesbian writer offered (and still offers) more of a challenge to the social mores of the (American, Victorian, patriarchal, heterosexual, white, Anglo-Saxon, Puritan) social hierarchy she lived in, than any of her contemporaries, with the exception of Walt Whitman, ever did to theirs.

In an 1885 letter, Dickinson's lesbian writes openly of her passion and her feelings, but also, simultaneously, manages to state nothing explicit at all:

Jennie – my Jennie Humphrey – I love you well tonight, and for a beam from your brown eyes, I would give a pearl...

How I wish you were mine, as you once were, when I had you in the morning, and when the sun went down, and was sure I should never go to sleep without a moment for you. I try to prize it, Jennie... try to love *more*, and *faster*, and *dearer*... Let us love with all our might, Jennie, for who knows where our hearts go, when this world is done? (Dickinson, 1958, 320)

Feminist critics who have examined Emily Dickinson's letters from a lesbian viewpoint note that her letters move beyond romantic friendship to the blatantly passionate. The main problem with attaching biographical evidence to Emily Dickinson's use of a lesbian persona and her utilisation of lesbian themes and subjects is that her poems and letters to Susan suggest an eroticism that could be fictional, actual, intentional, subconscious, or merely coincidental.

The fact that Dickinson wrote similar letters couched in equally erotically-charged terms to other women suggests that either Dickinson's lesbian persona was promiscuous, or that the lesbian persona she utilised was simply that: an adopted lesbian persona; a sexual persona or mask Dickinson put on to articulate emotions from that particular psychological perspective and from there to express those emotions in a poetic and an epistolary form.

For example, in an 1859 letter to her friend Catherine Anthon, (Letter 209) Dickinson – through her lesbian epistolary persona – recalls evenings the two spent together. She writes: 'I remember you as fires begin... Katie... Those were unnatural evenings. – *Bliss* is unnatural' (Dickinson, 1958, 355).

In the above extract, there is the direct statement that certain aspects of the evenings were 'unnatural' and that those evenings involved '*Bliss*', which Dickinson capitalises and italicises for emphasis and also refers to as 'unnatural'. The repeated use of 'unnatural' also gives the adjective emphasis, but Dickinson's use of 'as fires begin' gives the extract an erotic charge or frisson and reconfigures a potentially negative statement as a positive exclamation.

And then in another letter (Letter 222) to the same recipient, Dickinson writes:

Kate, Distinctly sweet your face stands in its phantom niche – I touch your hand – my cheek to your cheek – I stroke your vanished hair, Why did you enter, sister, since you must depart? Had not its heart been torn enough but *you* must send your shred? Oh! our Condor Kate! Come from your crags again! Oh: Dew upon the bloom fall yet again a summer's night... There is a subject dear – on which we never touch, Ignorance of its pageantries does not deter me... I, too in Daisy mounds possess hid treasure – therefore I guard you more... (Dickinson, 1958, 365)

In the above letter, Dickinson's lesbian epistolary persona alludes to a 'subject' on which she and the recipient 'never touch'. This unmentionable subject involves Dickinson's 'daisy mound' in which is 'hid treasure'; and it involves 'Dew upon the bloom... a summer's night'. Here Dickinson uses her coded language of botanical metaphors. Dickinson's lesbian persona professes 'Ignorance of its pageantries', but this may be mere dissembling, for in the following extract from a letter (Letter 93) Dickinson sent to Susan Gilbert in 1852 – eight years before she wrote to Catherine Anthon, Dickinson's lesbian persona makes a very similarly-worded veiled reference to an unmentionable 'subject' they have remained 'strangely silent upon':

You did not come, Darling, but a bit of Heaven did, or so it seemed to us, as we walked side by side and wondered of that great blessedness which may be our's sometime, is granted now, to some. This union, my dear Susie, by which two lives are one, this sweet and strange adoption wherein we can but look, and are not yet admitted, how it can fill the heart, and make it gang wildly beating, how it will take us one day, and make us all it's own, and we shall not run away from it, but lie still and be happy!

You and I have been strangely silent upon this subject, Susie, we have often touched upon it, and as quickly fled away, as children shut their eyes when the sun is too bright for them. I have always hoped to know if you had no dear fancy, illumining all your life, no one of whom you murmured in the faithful ear of night - and at whose side in fancy, you walked the livelong day; and when you come home, Susie, we must speak of these things. (Dickinson, 1958, 209-10)

In both letters, a serious lesbian relationship is being cryptically referred to. The fact that it is the type of relationship which Dickinson has been 'strangely silent upon'; a relationship upon which both women 'never touch', suggests that the relationships are lesbian, and that Dickinson's lesbian persona is articulating 'love that dare not speak its name' (Douglas, 1928, 11).

Finally, Dickinson deals with the 'sad separation' of lesbian loss, a state she also refers to as 'separation's sorcery' (J1764/F1789) in her poems, letters and letter-poems.

Oh my darling one, how long you wander from me, how weary I grow of waiting and looking, and calling for you; sometimes I shut my eyes, and shut my heart towards you, and try hard to forget you because you grieve me so, but you'll never go away, Oh you never will – say, Susie, promise me again, and I will smile faintly – and take up my little cross again of sad – *sad* separation. (Dickinson, 1958, 175-6)

And in poem J1219/F1274 Dickinson writes:

Now I knew I lost her –
Not that she was gone –
But Remoteness travelled

On her Face and Tongue.

Alien, though adjoining
As a Foreign Race –
Traversed she though pausing
Latitudeless Place.

Elements Unaltered –
Universe the same
But Love's transmigration –
Somehow this had come – (J1219/F1274)

This particular strand or thread of lesbianism exclusivity can be found in many of Dickinson's poems and letters. As the cited examples reveal, Emily Dickinson readily adopts a lesbian persona for the writing of some of her poems, letters and letter-poems. The lesbian persona is simply one sexual persona among many that are utilised by Emily Dickinson for a variety of literary, poetic and aesthetic purposes, just as she utilises many other sexual personae.

The Female Heterosexual

The term 'heterosexual' was first used in C.G. Chaddock's translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892), published six years after Emily Dickinson's death and two years after her first collection of *Poems* (1890) was posthumously published by acquaintances. Prior to Chaddock's translation, there was no specific word to define heterosexuality; the generally accepted view was that heterosexuality was the norm, so no word was considered as necessary or needed to describe it.

In *Masks Outrageous and Austere* (1991), Cheryl Walker claims that 'Emily Dickinson was given to explore sexuality by writing of snakes, bees, and boats mooring' (Walker, 1991, 135). Conversely, Ted Hughes, who uses a whole range of personae in his own poetry, refuses to acknowledge that Dickinson uses personae, and instead he, as many others do, focuses on speculative biography. Hughes makes the assumption that Emily Dickinson herself was heterosexual, in order to hypothesize that 'the key event' in Dickinson's life 'was a great and final disappointment in her love for some particular man' (Hughes, 1991, 11).

Emily Dickinson deploys heterosexual female personae in some of her poetry to articulate concerns, questions and observations about the role of females in American Victorian society. As with her other sexual personae, the heterosexual ones Dickinson uses are fictional – in that they include specific types of heterosexual female (the newly-married bride and the married woman, for example), the perspectives of which are not informed by Emily Dickinson's own personal or biographical experience.

When analysing Emily Dickinson's use of female heterosexual personae, particularly the bride or the married woman, it is probably useful to bear in mind that despite Dickinson's thoughts regarding the notion of marriage and its rituals, requirements and expectations, being comprehensively chronicled in many of her letters and poems, these thoughts and ideas are often contradictory, complex and not always clear.

For example, in poem J1072/F194, she writes:

Title divine, is mine.
The Wife without the Sign...
Betrothed...
Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –
In a Day – (J1072/F194)

In this poem, Dickinson's has utilised a number of metaphors to make her points about being a woman who moves from being 'Born' to being a 'Wife' to being 'Shrouded' in a very short time. Firstly, Dickinson uses the word 'divine' to describe her married 'Title' or status. In poem J1072/F194 she deploys an adjective with several meanings – 'divine' as meaning delightful and wonderful, but also 'divine' as meaning sacred or holy. As a verb, 'divine' also means to deduce or discover.

Dickinson's heterosexual persona then comments on the wedding prenuptials and refers to herself as a 'Wife without the Sign'. The bride's 'Wife without the Sign' claim is open to a variety of interpretations: it could refer to the absence of a wedding ring, which is the accepted symbol or 'Sign' of a married woman; it could refer to the lack of consummation, which is the first (or first officially credited) act of sexual intercourse between two people, either following their marriage to each other or after a prolonged sexual attraction. The definition of consummation usually refers to penile-vaginal sexual penetration. The Wife's claim that she is 'without the Sign' could mean also mean the lack of blood from the rupturing of the bride's hymen, because in Victorian times, a bride's intact hymen was highly valued at marriage in the belief that this was proof of virginity. The implication here is that the bride is 'without the Sign' of blood; that her hymen is still intact, therefore the marriage has not been consummated.

Dickinson's 'Wife' then states that she is 'Born – Bridalled – Shrouded – /In a Day'. Here Dickinson telescopes the events of a woman's life into one wedding day, where, according to Victorian conventions, the 'Wife' is 'Born' to be married; she then gets married or 'Bridalled', after which, she succumbs to a 'Shrouded' death.

'Born' is a verb used by Dickinson at the beginning of the line to indicate that the three-word line itself is a life line, that is, a line depicting a female human life from birth to marriage to death. Dickinson has placed a dash after each of these three words as a visual signifier that there is nothing else for a Victorian female; that each socially-determined stage of life leads inevitably to the next. The implications of the word 'Born –' followed as it is by a dash that leads to the verb 'Bridalled' is a word-pairing that is loaded with significance for a Victorian female.

Dickinson's use of 'Bridalled' is multiplicitous in that it is a Dickinson-created neologism; a verb used to refer to a woman who has become bridal – that is, become a bride. It is also a homophonic pun on 'bridled', which is an adjective which means 'to show one's resentment or anger' (OED), implying that Dickinson's female feels anger about being 'Betrothed'.

'Bridled' is also a homophonic verb for the act of being secured into the device known as the 'branks' (Burford & Shulman, 1994, 52), sometimes referred to as the scold's bridle, sometimes the 'Gossips' Bridle' (Burford & Shulman, 1994, 52). The branks bridle was an instrument of punishment used primarily on women, as a form of torture and public humiliation. The device was an iron muzzle in an iron framework that enclosed the head. A bridle-bit, known as a curb-plate, projected into the mouth and pressed down on top of the tongue. The curb-plate was usually studded with spikes, so that if the offender moved her tongue, it inflicted pain and made speaking impossible. Women who were seen as witches, shrews or gossips were forced to wear the bridle (or branks), locked onto their head. Here Emily Dickinson is using the verb 'Bridalled' to have her 'Wife' persona suggest that being a bride is the same as being controlled, punished and humiliated by a branks.

In their study of the punishment of women, *Of Bridles and Burning*, E.J. Burford and Sandra Shulman claim that:

[t]he wretched woman condemned to wear the branks was paraded through the streets of her village or town, led, like a haltered beast, by a chain around the waist held by a parish or municipal official proclaiming her offence... this parade had [soon] become a procession, with the officials chanting the crime and a group of capering minstrels, or even marching soldiers. No doubt the concept of this punishment was engendered by the belief that public shame and ridicule, or threat of them, would silence a scolding tongue more effectively than imprisonment or a fine. (Burford & Shulman, 1994, 53-4)

'Bridled' also means the past tense verb of having secured a bridle onto a horse; a bridle being a piece of equipment made of metal and leather that is used to secure, control and direct a horse. The bridle includes both the headstall that holds a metal bit that goes into the mouth of a horse, and the reins that are attached to the bit. Emily Dickinson is using the verb 'Bridalled' to suggest that being a bride is the same as being controlled by a bridle, bit and reins.

Dickinson then ends the line with the verb 'Shrouded'. Although 'Shrouded' also suggests 'masked', 'covered' or 'cloaked', the use of 'Shrouded' here appears to be specifically based on the idea of a bride being veiled, that is wearing a ceremonial wedding veil. Dickinson has substituted 'veiled' with the word 'Shrouded', a verb with connotations of a winding sheet used to wrap up and cover a dead body. In this context, 'Shrouded' implies that the wedding 'day' itself might very well be the end of life for the bride.

Emily Dickinson has taken the ideas of being given away as a bride (Born); being married (Bridalled); and being veiled (Shrouded), all 'In a Day' and has subverted them into being 'Born' into a patriarchy; 'Bridalled' into married captivity; and 'Shrouded' in death.

Dickinson's careful choice of words in 'Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –/In a Day –' (J1072/F194) have distinct connotations of predetermined fate, constraint, control, and death, as well as the female's bitterness and anger and resistance to marriage.

There is also a reference to Dickinson's epistolary persona's thoughts on marriage in one of her letters to Susan Gilbert, in which she states:

How dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold, and who gathers pearls every evening; but to the *wife*, Susie, sometimes the *wife forgotten*, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world; you have seen flowers at morning, *satisfied* with the dew, and those same sweet flowers at noon with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun; think you these thirsty blossoms will *now* need naught but – *dew*? No, they will cry for sunlight, and pine for the burning noon, tho' it scorches them, scathes them; they have got through with peace – they know that the man of noon, is *mightier* than the morning and their life is henceforth to him. Oh, Susie, it is dangerous, and it is all too dear, these simple trusting spirits, and the spirits mightier, which we cannot resist! It does so rend me, Susie, the thought of it when it comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up. Susie, you will forgive me my amatory strain – it has been a

very long one, and if this saucy page did not here bind and fetter me, I might have had no end. (Dickinson, 1958, 209-10)

In the above letter, Dickinson epistolary persona carefully distinguishes between 'the bride', 'the plighted maiden' and 'the wife forgotten'. Dickinson refers to these as having 'their heads bowed in anguish'.

Emily Dickinson utilises a number of female heterosexual personae including the little girl; the virgin; the deflowered virgin; the bride; the married woman, the sexually experienced woman; and the sexually active female. With regards to the latter persona, Dickinson gives this particular persona several subtle variations, which include the female who participates in a variety of types of heterosexual sexual activity, including monogamous, group and multi-racial sex acts.

Types of personae

As she does with her male persona, Dickinson starts with a reflection on childhood, in order to present her female persona – in this instance in the female form of the little girl: 'I prayed, at first, a little Girl...' (J576/F546) and: 'I think I was enchanted/When first a sombre Girl – ' (J593/F627).

Dickinson's careful use of the little girl persona is merely a preparatory strategy for her poems that deal with the loss of virginity of her adult females. As with her other personae, Dickinson utilises different types of virgin, in order to make a variety of points about female virginity, the loss of female virginity, and female adult sexual relationships.

A Wife – at Daybreak I shall be...
At Midnight I am but a Maid,
How short it takes to make a Bride...

Softly my Future climbs the Stair,
I fumble at my Childhood's prayer
So soon to be a Child no more – (J461/F185)

In poem J1496/F1529, the apprehensions of the female heterosexual virgin prior to her first sexual experience and the loss of her virginity or 'maidenhood' (as it is referred to in a poem by Dickinson's contemporary, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow) are clearly evident in poem F461/J185. A female heterosexual virgin's feelings of anxiety or anticipation concerning the sexual act (which has been referred to as a 'deflowering' (Tannahill, 1980, 370) – because the term 'to deflower' is sometimes used as a name for the act of vaginal penetration by the virgin's partner, and the clinical term 'defloration' is another way to describe the event) are convincingly conveyed in Dickinson's lines.

In poem J1496/F1529, in what seems to be a dramatic aside, Dickinson questions aspects of the bride's imminent defloration: 'What omnipresence lies in wait/For her to be a Bride (J1496/F1529).

In many of her virgin poems, Dickinson gives her virgin bride persona an opportunity to articulate – and perhaps even challenge – a number of preconceptions about virgin brides.

According to Reay Tannahill, in *Sex in History*:

[b]ridal virginity has been a preoccupation of most societies throughout history, but although it is usually associated with questions of legality and legitimacy there is much to suggest that the specifically sexual aspect was also important, particularly... as... the wedding ceremony incorporated a kind of formalized representation of kidnapping for the purpose of rape... (Tannahill, 1980, 371)

In many of her bride poems, Emily Dickinson's bride persona expresses her feelings about marriage as though her own wedding ceremony has been, or is, a 'formalised representation of kidnapping' or else has been or is a ceremony that is conducted 'for the purpose of rape'.

What Dickinson does in poem J483/F467 is have her sexually active female describe the act of defloration to the about-to-be-deflowered virgin in euphemistic terms based on harvesting orchard fruit, specifically ripe apples: 'He shifts the stem – a little –/To give your Core – a look – ' (J483/F467).

This particular persona – that of a sexually experienced New England woman – is created specifically by Dickinson to describe to a nervous virgin the mechanics of being deflowered – and the specific vocabulary used by that persona imbues the spoken words of advice with a simultaneous sense of detachment and pride. The detachment comes from the dehumanized description – 'the stem', 'your Core' – words used by a New England woman familiar with agriculture, particularly orcharding. The pride is inherent in the use of the orcharding metaphors – for Dickinson's New England was – and still is – famous for its apples. In 1862, Thoreau wrote his 'Wild Apples' essay, which extols the virtues of New England's prized fruit. A recent (2011) advertisement for New England apples by the New England Apple Association claims:

Nothing is fresher or more delicious than a New England apple. The best apples you'll ever taste are grown on New England's rocky soils. Their unique blend of sweet and tart flavors are a product of the region's long, hot summers and crisp fall days. New England apples have outstanding flavor, size and freshness. (NEAA Website)

Dickinson's usual literary practice of equating sexual activity with flora is doubly effective here, for it also includes an oblique biblical reference to fruit as a metaphor for sexual activity. Specifically (and despite reversing the gender pattern) it refers to the *Song of Solomon*, which states: 'Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste' (*Song of Solomon* 2:3).

Dickinson's use of an apple/orcharding metaphor harks back to similar imagery used by Sappho, who also wrote of lost virginity in her poem, 'Lament for a maidenhead':

Lament for a maidenhead

Like a quince-apple
ripening on a top
branch in a tree top (Sappho, 1999, 34)

Continuing with her technique of blending themes from the classics into her poetry, Dickinson's poem J483/F467 is also a reference to the mythical golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperides. Dickinson was familiar with the myth of the Hesperides, for as she mentions in poem J1067/F606: 'The Summers of Hesperides/Are long' (J1067/F606).

In Greek mythology, the Hesperides (Greek: Ἑσπερίδες) are nymphs who tend a blissful garden in a far western corner of the world, located near the Atlas mountains in Tangier, Morocco, at the edge of the encircling world-ocean. They are sometimes called the Western Maidens, the Daughters of Evening, or Erythrai, the 'Sunset Goddesses'; designations which are all linked to their imagined location in the distant west. In addition to their tending of the garden, they were said to have taken great pleasure in singing. The orchard is Hera's orchard and a single tree or a grove of trees bearing immortality-giving golden apples grows there. Hera placed in the garden a never-sleeping, hundred-headed dragon named Ladon, as an additional safeguard. The eleventh Labour of Hercules was to steal the golden apples from the garden.

Much erotic literature details the pain of loss of virginity. Fanny Hill, John Cleland's female narrator in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), describes her defloration or the loss of her 'maidenhead' in the following way:

Charles, already disposed by the evidence of his senses to think my pretences to virginity not entirely apocryphal, smothers me with kisses, begs me, in the name of love, to have a little patience, and that he will be as tender of hurting me as he would be of himself.

Alas! it was enough I knew his pleasure to submit joyfully to him, whatever pain I foresaw it would cost me.

He now resumes his attempts in more form: first, he put one of the pillows under me, to give the blank of his aim a more favourable elevation, and another under my head, in ease of it; then spreading my thighs, and placing himself standing between them, made them rest upon his hips; applying then the point of his machine to the slit, into which he sought entrance: it was so small, he could scarce assure himself of its being rightly pointed. He looks, he feels, and satisfies himself: the driving forward with fury, its prodigious stiffness, thus impacted, wedge-like, breaks the union of those parts, and gained him just the insertion of the tip of it, lip-deep; which being sensible of, he improved his advantage, and following well his stroke, in a straight line, forcibly deepens his penetration; but put me to such intolerable pain, from the separation of the sides of that soft passage by a hard thick body, I could have screamed out; but, as I was unwilling to alarm the house, I held in my breath, and crammed my petticoat, which was turned up over my face, into my mouth, and bit it through in the agony.

At length, the tender texture of that tract giving way to such fierce tearing and rending, he pierced something further into me: and now, outrageous and no longer his own master, but borne headlong away by the fury and over-mettle of that member, now exerting itself with a kind of native rage, he breaks in, carries all before him, and one violent merciless lunge sent it, imbrued, and reeking with virgin blood, up to the very hilt in me: then! then all my resolution deserted me: I screamed out, and fainted away with the sharpness of the pain; and, as he told me afterwards, on his drawing out, when emission was over with him, my thighs were instantly all in a stream of blood that flowed from the wounded torn passage. (Cleland, 1985, 78-79)

John Cleland readily adopts a virgin female persona, whose lengthy and detailed description of her heterosexual defloration by 'Charles' makes it clear that it is a painful, protracted and drawn-out process. Her subsequent psychological attitude, is simultaneously one of 'tenderness to that pain' and an all-encompassing 'sense of pain in the pleasure' For Fanny, there is a great deal of pleasure in 'the sharpness of the pain' of defloration, accompanied by a sense of pride in herself, and admiration for 'Charles, to whom I was now infinitely endeared by this complete triumph over a maidenhead...' (Cleland, 1985, 78-79)

Emily Dickinson follows Cleland's example of adopting the persona of a virgin being deflowered, but she condenses Cleland's lengthy scenario down to four lines:

The Whole of it came not at once –
'T'was Murder by degrees –
A Thrust – and then for Life a chance –
The Bliss to cauterize – (J762/F485)

Using a virgin persona, Dickinson deploys mock-biographical and present tense narrative tropes similar to those used by Cleland. Dickinson also writes of her virgin's heterosexual defloration as a range of contradictory sensations: claiming it to be 'Murder by degrees', but also 'The Bliss', which is used 'to cauterize' the pain.

In another poem, Dickinson's female persona describes the final cessation of the pain that has been caused by the loss of virginity:

It ceased to hurt me, though so slow
I could not feel the anguish go –
But only knew by looking back –
That something – had benumbed the Track – (J584/F421)

In poem J584/F421, Dickinson has her deflowered virgin persona revert to railway imagery (familiar from poem J585/F383) to articulate the 'so slow' cessation of the 'hurt' or pain of the deflowering, with a simultaneous inability to 'feel the anguish go' away, due to the amount of time it is taking for the 'hurt' to fade. The deflowered virgin is claiming that although the 'hurt' has

'ceased', it is still troubling her in the form of mental 'anguish'. Here Dickinson uses the notion of physical 'hurt' and emotional 'anguish' to describe the physical and psychological state of her virgin during and after the act of defloration. The former virgin then states that she 'only knew' that the physical act itself; the 'something', is the reason that her 'Track' feels 'benumbed'.

In poem J599/F515, Dickinson has her deflowered virgin persona articulate the huge pain involved in the loss of her virginity:

There is a pain – so utter –
It swallows substance up –
Then covers the Abyss with Trance –
So Memory can step
Around – across – upon it – (J599/F515)

In this poem, Dickinson has the deflowered virgin mention the specific pain of the sexual act, followed by the post-coital 'Trance', and the inevitable changes that will occur in the virgin's 'Memory' of the defloration, due to the passing of time.

Later, the loss of virginity, or the attainment of womanhood, becomes a prized 'Consummated Bloom' (J962/F822); something that is valued because of the personal difference it has made to the sexual nature of the female. In poem J506/F349, Dickinson articulates

He touched me, so I live to know
That such a day, permitted so,
I groped upon his breast –
It was a boundless place to me...

And now I'm different from before,
As if I breathed superior air – (J506/F349)

In J506/F349, Dickinson's deflowered virgin articulates the pride expressed by John Cleland's virgin. Here Dickinson's virgin expresses her sense of being physically and psychologically 'different from before', a feeling of being 'superior', which the former virgin has been 'permitted' to feel because of her lover's touch.

And then in poem J788/F739, it is the 'Pain' itself, rather than the loss of virginity that is considered as something joyous and of 'merit' to have been endured:

Joy to have merited the Pain –
To merit the Release –
Joy to have perished every step –
To Compass Paradise...
The Depth upon my Soul was notched –
As Floods – on Whites of Wheels – (J788/F739)

In J788/F739, the female reports that it is a 'Joy to have merited the Pain' because 'Pain' is the state that needs to be experienced in order 'To merit the Release'. Here Dickinson has her female claim that 'Pain' causes her to achieve 'Release'. Her female is a masochist, a sexual persona Dickinson uses repeatedly in her poetry. The use of 'merit' and 'merited' is also significant, in that merit implies deserve, and here Dickinson's masochist is claiming that she deserved 'the Pain', just as she deserved the subsequent sexual 'Release' that 'the Pain' provided.

The female then claims it is a 'Joy to have perished every step'; the word 'perished' meaning to have died in a series of small steps or phases, in order that she can en-'Compass' the 'Paradise' of sexual satisfaction. Obviously the female does not physically perish or die at 'every step', so the verb 'perished' refers to a series of 'little deaths' (*la petite mort*), which is a French idiom for orgasm. This term has generally been interpreted to describe the post-orgasmic state of unconsciousness that some people have after having some sexual experiences. It can also refer to the spiritual release that comes with orgasm or to a short period of melancholy or transcendence as a result of the sudden discharge of accumulated sexual excitement during the sexual response cycle, resulting in rhythmic muscular contractions in the pelvic region characterized by sexual pleasure.

However, in another poem, the former virgin reflects on what she and her lover have done, and she then describes the sexual act and her loss of virginity as an ordeal that has been 'survived': 'Somehow myself survived the Night' (J1194/F1209). She then goes on to describe the sex act as: '...That Campaign inscrutable/Of the Interior' (J1188/F1230), which is sex described in terms used for reporting on war or military conflict. The depiction of loss of virginity as a form of warfare did not originate with Dickinson. In 'Song', a poem written in 1680, the libertine poet Rochester writes from a woman's perspective as her virginity is taken: 'Now piercèd is her virgin zone;/She feels the foe within it' (Rochester 28).

Rochester uses military/battlefield terms such as 'pierced', 'zone' and 'foe' to show that the virgin woman is thinking of the penis inside her 'virgin zone' as an invading enemy or 'foe within'. Here Rochester has used the idea of a woman having her virginity taken forcibly from her, rather than present the idea of the woman losing her virginity through her own choice of actions.

In another poem Dickinson's deflowered virgin persona conveys the same martial meaning by describing 'Love' as being 'entrenched in narrow pain' (J1737/F267). And in poem J925/F841, the loss of virginity is graphically described as an unpleasant and probably painful experience, a sex act almost verging on a rape: 'Robbed – was I – intact to Bandit –/All my Mansion torn' (J925/F841), whereas in poem J1113/F1133, Dickinson's former virgin extols the virtues of stoicism with regards to tolerating the pain of defloration:

There is strength in proving that it can be borne
Although it tear –
What are the sinews of such cordage for
Except to bear (J1113/F1133)

In J1113/F1133, Dickinson's former virgin indicates that the ability 'to bear' the pain of the loss of virginity might be a positive act. She also rhetorically asks about the purpose of such an ability; the pain of a 'tear[ing]' hymen so intense that the deflowered virgin refers to it as 'sinews of such cordage'.

Moderating her language and tone slightly, the former virgin continues with her memories of the 'awkward' aspects of sexual intercourse: "T'was awkward but it fitted me –" (J973/F900).

In another poem, the former virgin recounts the night's events, then comments on how different she feels inside, as a result of the sexual encounter:

The first Day's Night had come –
And grateful that a thing
So terrible – had been endured...

And something odd – within –
That person that I was –
And this one – do not feel the same – (J410/F423)

In the above poem, the former virgin persona is able to make a distinction between 'That person that I was' which is the (former) virgin, 'And this one' which is the woman who has lost her virginity. Her description of the 'first Day's Night's sexual act as 'a thing/So terrible'; that 'had been endured', and the resultant post-coital feeling that there is 'something odd – within', suggests a profound change, or an internal difference, be it psychological, physical or a combination of both, to an experience that has been experienced as 'a thing/So terrible'.

Here Dickinson deploys the female heterosexual persona to articulate the physical and emotional changes 'within' that take place during the transformation from virgin to non-virgin. In this poem, the experience is portrayed as terrible; in other poems, Dickinson describes the experience as 'Joyous'. Dickinson seems to be using her some of her heterosexual female poems to convey the gamut of emotional and physical reactions to defloration.

Dickinson introduces the notion of shame into another poem by changing the former virgin persona experiencing pain into the 'ashamed... Bride': 'I am ashamed – I hide –/What right have I – to be a Bride –' (J473/F705).

The fact that the former virgin is 'ashamed' and is calling into question her 'right... to be a Bride' suggests several possibilities: the attempt at defloration has been unsuccessful; the former virgin is dissatisfied with her sexual performance; the former virgin feels guilt over her male lover's feelings of dissatisfaction with her (or his own) sexual performance. The 'right' to the title of 'Bride' is then called into question. This poem offers a subtle analysis of the various psychological issues involved in female loss of virginity and of the sexual expectations placed on a virgin bride. Dickinson also questions nineteenth-century notions of shame and taboo, in that she presents being 'ashamed' as a result of not being sexually adept, rather than feeling shame for being engaged in sexual activity, as many nineteenth-century women were

expected to feel. In this respect, Dickinson is expressing opposing ideas to those of William Blake, who, in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), writes:

...the virgin
That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys
In the secret shadow of her chamber... (Blake, 1981, 205)

Blake's emphasis is on the 'enormous joys' that 'the virgin' will experience – delights so pleasurable they will 'awaken her womb'.

In John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), Fanny, the deflowered virgin, explains how she: 'arrived at excess of pleasure through excess of pain' (Cleland, 1985 80).

Similarly to Cleland's heroine, Emily Dickinson changes her female deflowered virgin persona into that of the proud bride:

No more ashamed –
No more to hide –
Meek – let it be – too proud – for Pride –
Baptised – this Day – a Bride – (J473/F705)

In both instances, the virgins articulate the process of transformation. In the above lines, the female former virgin uses the word 'Baptised' – with all of its attendant religious connotations – to describe the loss of virginity and the obtaining of the status of womanhood. In this respect, the attainment of womanhood through the loss of virginity – which for many is a rite of passage – is given the importance and significance of a religious ritual.

The ritualised loss of virginity and the subsequent state of attained womanhood is very important in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, for in several of her poems she utilises the persona of the sexually active and experienced woman. This persona is forthright and candid and able to talk quite openly and freely about sex, describing the male lover as a 'Tender Pioneer' (J698/F727); sex as a 'Republic of Delight' (J1107/F1147), as well as being able to candidly describe male and female genitalia, sexual intercourse, and many other aspects of sex and sexuality, including detailed accounts of taboo behaviour.

The utilisation of music as a metaphor for sexual activity by the female persona is a familiar metaphor used in several of Emily Dickinson's poems. In poem J503/F378, her sexually active female persona uses the masturbation/music metaphor to describe her sexual encounter as:

Better – than Music!
For I – who heard it...
This – was different – 'Twas Translation –
Of all tunes I knew – and more –

'Twasn't contained...
No one could play it – the second time...
But – I was telling a tune – I heard –

Let me not spill – its smallest cadence... (J503/F378)

Sometimes Dickinson's sexually experienced poetic personae express themselves quite crudely when articulating their sexual needs: 'We pause before a further plunge/To take momentum – ' (J1086/F1046).

She also does this in poem J603/F511, where the heterosexual female explains how her male lover, prior to entering her: 'He found my Being – set it up –/Adjusted it to place –' (J603/F511).

Sexual pleasure is a very important subject in Emily Dickinson's poetry, as can be seen by her statement: 'My business is to love' (Letter 269); by the proud boast – 'Whatever it is she has tried it' (J1204/F1200) – and by the fact that nearly half of her poetic output is concerned with sex or sexuality of one sort or another. 'Take all away from me, but leave me Ecstasy', her female persona insists in poem J1640/F1671, before stating: 'Exhilaration – is within' (J383/F645), and in poem J383/F645, in which the male lover could (according to various readings) be friend, God, idea, disputant, but could also be a lover: 'So infinite our intercourse/So intimate indeed' (J1721/F1754).

In the above lines, Dickinson's female persona self-reflexively explains that sex is important to her because of its never-ending 'infinite' variety, and because of how obviously 'intimate' it is.

In one of her letters (Letter 750) to Judge Otis P. Lord, a male admirer, Dickinson's epistemological persona writes candidly of the time they have spent together; of sexual desire; of anticipation of further sexual liaisons; and of sexual fulfilment:

...and moments we have known... the moments we had, were very good – they were quite contenting... Very sweet to know... Momentousness is ripening. I hope that all is firm. Could we yield each other to the impregnable chances till we had met once more? ... Be gentle with it – Coax it – Dont drive it or 'twill stay... after you have entered... I almost wish it would, sometimes – with reverence I say it. That was a big – sweet Story... still many Closets that Love has never ransacked. I do – do want you tenderly... The trespass of my rustic Love upon your Realms of Ermine, only a Sovereign could forgive – I never knelt to other... more divine. Oh, had I found it sooner! Yet Tenderness has not a Date – it comes – and overwhelms. (Dickinson, 1958, 27)

In poem J1231/F1226, she has her female persona refer to her sexual experience as something 'Magic'; a consecration that has been performed by a 'God of Width':

The Magic passive but extant
That consecrated me...
Oh God of Width... (J1231/F1226)

In poem J1555/F1585, the female articulates her 'nameless need' and her instinctive and immediate remedy for that need: 'I groped for him before I knew/With solemn nameless need' (J1555/F1585).

When Emily Dickinson's sexually active female persona speaks candidly of her male lover's sexual prowess, it is an indication of the lack of parameters that Dickinson is willing to provide for this particular sexual persona, and how far into taboo territory Dickinson is prepared to go in order to write about incendiary or taboo subjects that are usually left out of poetry's remit. It is also indicative of the care with which Emily Dickinson chooses the most appropriate words from her sexual lexicon. 'We learned the whole of love', her heterosexual female states candidly, 'The Alphabet – the Words' (J568/F531).

At times, Dickinson also writes using the persona of a sexually active female advising others how best to manipulate a male lover's penis in order to prevent premature ejaculation. In one poem she states:

Exhilaration is within...
...stimulate a man... the...
...Best you can' (J383/F645)

Her sexually active heterosexual female persona then instructs the reader, before announcing proudly: 'I make His Crescent fill or lack.../His Tides – do I control –' (J909/F837).

In another poem, poem J1389/F1403, Dickinson uses words and music as a metaphor for sex.

Touch lightly Nature's sweet Guitar
Unless thou know'st the Tune...
Because a Bard too soon – (J1389/F1403)

In poem J1389/F1403, Dickinson uses 'Nature's sweet Guitar' as a metaphor for what may be the male lover's penis, advising the female lover to 'Touch lightly' with experienced fingers – fingers that 'know'st the tune' of sexual intimacy. She advises this in order to prevent the male lover's premature ejaculation, or, as she puts it, the man becoming 'a Bard too soon':

And in another poem she comments on the preoccupation some men have with their own 'Individual' genitalia. She states:

No Romance sold unto
Could so enthrall a Man
As the perusal of
His Individual One (J669/F590)

In this particular poem, Dickinson articulates the way that some men are phallocentric – and have a psychological need for their female lover to 'make it (the penis) the focal point of [their] existence' (Hicks, 2005, 64).

Dickinson uses a variety of poetic methods to describe male orgasm. Whereas in one poem the sexually active female persona talks about the male lover's orgasm, describing it in one poem as: 'the Arc of a Lover's Conjecture' (J1484/F1517), in poem J391/F558, the male lover is described as the:

Visitor... Who visits in the Night –

And just before the Sun –
Concludes his glistening interview –
Caresses – and is gone – (J391/F558)

For the female persona, the night of sex culminates in the 'glistening interview' of the male orgasm, followed by a few 'Caresses', and then the departure of the 'Visitor' lover.

Sometimes the sexually active female will describe her needs or desires in quite graphic language:

To fill a Gap
Insert the Thing that caused it –
Block it up
With Other – and 'twill yawn the more (J546/F647)

In J546/F647, Dickinson's female instructs her lover to 'Insert the Thing' in order to 'fill a Gap'. She then warns the lover that to 'Block it up/With Other' – 'Other' in this case most likely referring to the lover's fingers, or tongue, or a sex toy, such as a dildo or vibrator – will cause her 'Gap' to 'yawn the more'. Here Dickinson's female is quite clearly saying that anything other than her lover's penis being immediately inserted into her 'Gap' will cause her vagina to 'yawn', or to open wider. The implication here is one of a vagina opening more due to the woman's sexual arousal. Interestingly, Dickinson's choice of the verb 'yawn' has two meanings and creates a dichotomy: 'yawn' refers to being wide open or gaping; and 'yawn' also means to involuntarily inhaling deeply due to tiredness or boredom. Dickinson's female suggests that anything other than insertion of the lover's penis 'will' cause her to feel boredom or tiredness, and this is linked to the notion that further foreplay will also cause her vagina to 'yawn' open with arousal. Simultaneous arousal and potential boredom are posited. Dickinson has, as is her poetic technique, capitalised to key words in this poem: 'Gap', 'Insert' 'Thing', 'Block' and 'Other' have each been given capital letters to emphasise their importance and significance. Dickinson, as usual, has capitalised her metaphors.

Often Emily Dickinson will have her sexually active female persona describe the sex flush of her own sexual gratification in quite blatant but nonetheless abstract imagery: 'A Route of Evanescence.../A Rush of Cochineal –' (J1463/F1489), and sometimes she uses conventional domestic imagery: 'To my small Hearth His fire came –/And all my House aglow' (J638/F703).

Here Dickinson's use of 'fire' as a metaphor either for sexual desire or for orgasm is used in another poem in which the female boasts of her and her lover's afternoon sexual activity: 'The largest Fire ever known/Occurs each Afternoon –' (J1114/F974).

Sometimes, of course, she will use straightforward language to describe sexual fulfilment: 'Satisfaction – is the Agent/Of Satiety –' (J1036/F984) and: 'Loose the flood – you shall find it patent –/Gush after Gush, reserved for you –' (J861/F905).

And sometimes Dickinson has her female persona demand that the 'Sumptuous moment' of sexual release go 'Slower', or last for longer, as she does in poem J1125/F1186:

Oh Sumptuous moment
Slower go
That I may gloat on thee – (J1125/F1186)

One of Dickinson's sexually active females often expresses an almost obsessive interest in the size of male sex organs, in particular her own male lover's penis, or 'that Pink stranger' made of 'Artery and Vein' (J1527/F1550). In poem J1057/F1029 (as in other poems) this particular female explains how she 'learned' to 'estimate' the 'Increased' penis's 'Wilderness of Size' that grows 'beyond' her 'utmost scope' (J1057/F1092) and to successfully accommodate it inside her vagina, resulting in 'a finished feeling' (J1057/F1092):

I had a daily bliss
I half indifferent viewed
Till sudden I perceived it stir –
It grew as I pursued...
Increased beyond my utmost scope
I learned to estimate. (J1057/F1029)

In another poem, Dickinson's female explains how she has been granted a 'Blessing' because she has grown accustomed to the size of her lover's 'larger' penis and is so 'satisfied' that she has 'stopped gauging' its 'enchanted size':

One Blessing had I than the rest
So larger to my Eyes
That I stopped gauging – satisfied –
For this enchanted size – (J756/F767)

And in poem J820/F1113, the female persona speaks of her ability to accommodate the males 'Sufficient' or 'Continent'-sized organ: 'All latitudes exist for His/Sufficient Continent –' (J820/F1113).

And yet in poem J921/F184 the same sexually active female persona – almost contradictorily – expresses concern about the size of her lover and the effect it will have on her vagina:

Would it make the Daisy,
Most as big as I was –
When it plucked me? (J921/F184)

Here Dickinson's female voices worries about her 'Daisy' being stretched to the size she was stretched to when first 'plucked'; words which recollect – although now in more sexually-experienced tones – the worries initially expressed by her virgin persona prior to losing her virginity.

Dickinson's use of 'It', 'Sacrament', 'friend' and 'Other' as metaphors for the penis; 'scope', 'House', 'Hearth', 'Room' and 'Chamber' for the vagina; and 'bliss', 'fire', 'Land' and 'Delight' for sexual intercourse is far from unusual in her poetry – or in the poetry and prose of other authors. Angela Carter refers to the menstruating vagina as 'The Bloody Chamber' (Carter, 1996, 2).

In another of her poems, poem J405/F535, Dickinson's female persona speaks candidly of the 'scant' size of her Dark... little Room' and the doubts she has regarding its ability to accommodate or 'contain' her male lover's 'Other' or 'Sacrament':

Perhaps the Other...

Would interrupt the Dark –
And crowd the little Room –
Too scant – by Cubits – to contain
The Sacrament – of Him –

It might be easier
To fail with Land in Sight –
Than...
To perish – of Delight – (J405/F535)

She uses similar metaphorical imagery in another poem: 'The Tenant of the Narrow Cottage, wert Thou –' (J961/F821), and in poem J1765/F1747, Dickinson has her sexually active female use railway imagery, specifically that of 'freight' train or locomotive, train track or 'groove' to explain – at the moment of male insertion – that genital size compatibility is the desired state:

That Love is all there is,
Is all we know of Love;
It is enough, the freight should be
Proportioned to the groove (J1765/F1747)

There are a number of interpretations to poem J1765/F1747; it has been suggested that the poem is about the totality of love; the overwhelming power of love; or the necessity of love in a sexual relationship. The image of the couplet is of a cargo – '*freight*' – running along a track which is appropriate and adequate to it. If the freight were too heavy, the track would break. This metaphorical image is being used to suggest that people know all about the amount of love that they can take; their capacity to understand is 'the groove' and the fact that 'love is all there is' is the freight. The sexually active female appears to be calling a halt to the sex act itself, or to be instructing the male lover to insert no more of his 'freight' into 'the groove' because 'It is enough', either because it is too big or too small for 'the groove'. Alternatively, the sexually active female could be reprimanding the male lover for not knowing his 'freight should be proportioned' or the right size for lovemaking. Another explanation is that the female is complimenting the male on his perfectly

'proportioned' 'freight' by stating that his organ's size 'is enough' for 'the groove'.

Dickinson uses railway metaphors for sex in other poems. In poem J585/F383 she has her narrator state: 'I like to see it lap the Miles –/And lick the Valleys up –' (J585/F383).

Dickinson utilises a number of techniques in poem J585/F383. Firstly, by appearing to have chosen a train as her subject (a subject that remains unnamed throughout the poem), she is able to deliberately refrain from gendering the 'it' of the poem. However, her choice of tongue-related verbs: 'lap' and 'lick' reveal the ambiguity of the poem and its oral sex subtext. Gender non-specification allows for a heterosexual or lesbian interpretation of the poem, but the narrator's opening statement: '*I like to see...*' also indicates a strong voyeuristic content to the poem. Dickinson grounds the poem in the ocular: 'I like to *see* it', then follows that phrase with the alveolar lateral approximants (also known as 'clear l' words) 'lap' and 'lick', which she alliterates with 'like', to create 'like... lap... lick' in order to infuse the poem with a voyeuristic and labial sensuality that a non-ambiguous description of a train would possibly lack. She continues this with the use of the muted alveolar sibilants of 'see... Miles... Valleys'. Here Dickinson has ensured that the two words ('Miles' and 'Valleys') that are metaphors for the sexualised human (non-gendered) body ('it') have been capitalized to indicate their importance as subjects and placed in (voyeuristic) visual and aural alignment with the word 'see'.

I like to see it lap the Miles –
And lick the Valleys up – (J585/F383)

The coded railway metaphors for sex that are evident in poem J1765/F1747 and J585/F383 were still in frequent use in twentieth-century popular culture, particularly in film, where a train going into a tunnel was used as an obvious visual metaphor for the sex act. It is a metaphor that is used by Alfred Hitchcock in the final scene of his film, *North by Northwest* (1959), to indicate that Roger Thornhill and Eve Kendall (who are actually on a train) are making love.

It is metaphor which is also used by scriptwriter Larry Kramer in his screenplay for Ken Russell's film version of D.H Lawrence's *Women in Love*, when Loerke and Gudrun play what Loerke calls: 'Secret games... Initiation games, full of esoteric understanding and fearful, sensual secrets' (Kramer, 2003, 103).

After Gudrun asks him what he wants her to do with a large candle, Loerke states:

LOERKE: Between two particular people, the range of pure, sensational experience is limited. (*He takes a candle that has been burning and places it on his chest.*) One can only extend, draw out, and electrify. One must not repeat. One must find only new ways. (Kramer, 2003, 103)

Gudrun's response to being invited to be part of these 'Initiation games' is reciprocal: 'The train is going into a tunnel. (*She blows out the candle.*)' (Kramer, 2003, 103).

In one of her most blatantly phallic poems, poem J1670/F1742, Dickinson's sexually active female describes the effect of tying string around a limp penis or 'Worm':

In Winter in my Room
I came upon a Worm –
Pink, lank and warm –
But as he was a worm...
Secured him by a string
To something neighboring
And went along.

A Trifle afterward
A thing occurred
I'd not believe it if I heard
But state with creeping blood –
A snake with mottles rare...
In feature as the worm before
But ringed with power –
The very string with which
I tied him – too
When he was mean and new
That string was there...

He fathomed me –
Then to a Rhythm *Slim*
Secreted in his Form
As patterns swim... (J1670/F1742)

The sexually active female mentions that 'that string' is 'there' and that it is the string that has caused the penis to achieve a 'mean and new' erect 'state', filled 'with creeping blood'. The three references to the 'the very string' indicate its importance. The string seems to be performing the function of a sex toy known as a 'cock ring', which is:

a ring of material that a man wears around the base of his penis and scrotal sac; it stops blood from moving away from the penis to make orgasm more intense. Men use cock rings... [t]o help maintain a stronger, firmer erection... [t]o keep an erection for a longer period of time... [t]o make the penis more sensitive to all kinds of stimulation... [t]o prolong intercourse... [t]o delay ejaculation... (Taormino, 2009, 132)

In poem J1670/F1742, Dickinson's sexually active female explains how her tying a 'string' cock ring around her male partner's flaccid, 'Worm'-like penis causes it to grow into an erect 'snake... ringed with power'. She then mentions

the snake's 'rhythm' as she is being 'fathomed', which seems to suggest that the male lover has penetrated her depths. Despite the reference to the snake being 'ringed with power' she refers to its '*slim*' girth. Again, Dickinson's female seems overly-concerned with size, in this case penis's lack of girth.

And in another poem, Dickinson reverts to her flower/vagina imagery:

The Rose received his visit
With frank tranquillity...
Their moment consummated...
Remained for her – of rapture (J1339/F1351)

The sexual narrative of poem J1339/F1351 is fairly conventional. The initial 'visit' by the male to her female's 'Rose' is made during a time of 'tranquillity'. It is only after 'Their moment'... of rapture' is achieved that the relationship is 'consummated'.

In poem J1519/F1565, Dickinson uses her sexually active female to explain how contact from the lover's penis causes clitoral arousal: 'The Tube uplifts a signal Bud/And then a shouting Flower –' (J1519/F1565). The lover has stimulated the woman with clitoral arousal or 'uplift' prior to insertion into her aroused vagina, or 'shouting flower'.

Poem J679/F773 is a candid poem about her male lover's penis which is still inside her vagina: 'Conscious am I in my Chamber –/Of a shapeless friend –' (J679/F773). Dickinson's sexually active female states that she is aware or 'Conscious' that her lover's penis is now smaller and no longer erect due to post-coital, post-orgasmic shrinkage, and has become 'a shapeless friend' inside her 'Chamber'.

As with the other types of sexual personae she chooses to use in her poetry, it is in the areas that were – and perhaps, in some cases, still are – considered taboo that Emily Dickinson is at her most candid – and her most poetic. She uses a wide variety of imagery, language and poetic techniques, and the subtle utilisation of these techniques reveals her to be a far more accomplished poet than most of her contemporaries, with the possible exceptions of Baudelaire and Swinburne.

For example, after boldly stating: 'Whatever it is, she has tried it' (J1204/F1200), Dickinson, in a number of her poems, has her sexually active female discuss 'her Transgression' (J1204/F1200); her indulgence in taboo sexual acts or 'Revelry unspeakable' (J1675/F1692). Firstly, the 'unspeakable' or taboo sex act – and in this instance the sexually active transgressive female seems to be suggesting the sex act is anal sex – is described as something that occurs 'by accident':

The man that... by accident...
Varied by a Ribbon's width
From his accustomed route –
The Love that would not try (J1150/F1326)

The female's boastful description of her enjoyment of taboo sex is something the female persona does far more explicitly in another poem, in

which she describes or reports the 'unspeakable' or 'reportless' pleasure or 'Joy' she feels: 'In many and reportless places/We feel a Joy –'(J1382/F1404).

The female persona then speaks scathingly of how taboo sex or 'Forbidden fruit' has 'a flavor' that is superior to or which 'mocks' the type of sex that is designated merely 'lawful':

Forbidden fruit a flavor has
That lawful Orchards mocks –
How luscious lies within the Pod
The Pea that Duty locks – (J1377/F1482)

In J1377/F1482, Emily Dickinson reverses the syntax in the first two lines, in order to make them appear to be saying something they are not. The first line: 'Forbidden fruit a flavor has' is simply 'Forbidden fruit has a flavor', with the word 'has' transposed to the end of the line. Similarly, the second line: 'That lawful Orchards mocks' is 'That mocks lawful Orchards', with the word 'mocks' transposed to the end of the line. Dickinson, however, has used the syntax at her command to provide a double meaning for these two lines, because one possible meaning being that 'Forbidden fruit' has 'a flavour' that is mocked by 'lawful Orchards'. Several phrases of the third and fourth lines have been inverted. An untangled, syntactically-correct reading of these two lines as prose would be: 'How luscious is the Pea that lies within the Pod, locked there by Duty'. As Paula Bennett has pointed out:

Over and over clitoral images appear in Dickinson's poetry... Dews, crumbs, pearls and berries occur... with peas, pebbles, pellets, beads and nuts.' (Bennett, 1990, 173)

Emily Dickinson addresses the theme of personal growth through sexual experimentation in several of her poems. As in most of Sade's writing, Dickinson's depictions and descriptions of sexuality often have a philosophical purpose, as well as a epistemological underpinning. In one poem she has her sexually active female persona claim that taboo sex is important in order to develop as a sexual person – to 'progress' as a sexually aware human being: 'Accept the pillage/For the progress' sake' (J1267/F1304). She refers to the taboo sex act or acts as 'pillage' and then implores the reader to 'Accept' it (or them) as essential to personal growth or 'progress':

Another controversial subject Emily Dickinson wrote of was prostitution. Christina Rossetti (to whom Dickinson is often compared) also wrote several poems about prostitutes. Emily Dickinson also tackles the theme of female prostitution and female promiscuity in some of her poetry.

Like Dickinson, Rossetti uses personae in her poetry. In 'A Smile and a Sigh', the prostitute persona states: 'And every morning brings such pleasure/Of sweet love-making, harmless sport' (Rossetti 62).

Emily Dickinson also uses a female prostitute persona to articulate her message, a technique which is evident in poem J1119/F1144, which she wrote in 1868 as she approached her fortieth year. In that poem, her female persona is an aging retired prostitute, who thinks back to all of her 'Many' former

customers, then refers to her vagina as an 'old mansion'. She also considers the sexual pleasure she has given to the 'Many' as 'Paradise': 'Paradise is that old mansion/Many owned before –' (J1119/F1144).

However, the poem also contains the implication that her 'mansion' has not only been a source of 'Paradise' for the 'Many' customers that have 'owned' it, but also for herself. Also, the notion of a 'Paradise' that exists because 'Many' have 'owned' it in the past, suggests that 'Paradise' might be more than just sexual satisfaction or pleasure. Obviously the financial connotation of the word 'owned' indicates the possibility that 'Paradise' is a reference to a woman's vagina that has earned the female prostitute persona some financial security; in other words, she is now retired from such a life and is looking back or recollecting 'before'. Poem J1119/F1144 is essentially an older woman's boast about her former ability to give and receive pleasure with her vagina.

This is in marked contrast to poem J1620/F1636, in which the sexually active female candidly promises her vagina or 'Circumference' that it is going to be 'Possessed' by multiple lovers, in fact 'every' lover or 'Knight' who shows her/it any sign of sexual interest or 'Awe'. Dickinson's use of irony is evident in this poem, for she uses archaic words (particularly 'thou', 'thee' and 'shalt'); she uses no punctuation except for capital letters; and she uses idiosyncratic speech patterns that convey ideas or at least notions of courtly love, as is fitting for the era of chivalry that the word 'Knight' would evoke for many readers. Another use of irony is that Knights were renowned for their heroic deeds whilst on a quest. What Dickinson's female does is she subversively suggests that 'every hallowed Knight' might be too busy coveting her female persona's 'Circumference' to go on any other sort of quest:

Circumference thou Bride of Awe
... thou shalt be
Possessed by every hallowed Knight
That dares to covet thee (J1620/F1636)

The four lines above are Dickinson's way of providing a subversive 'slant' (J1129/F1263) or a mocking riposte to epic chivalric romances such as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516), or Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), or Malory's *L'Morte D'Arthur* (1485).

Dickinson's subversion is also evident in her choice of the word 'hallowed', which means sanctified, consecrated, highly venerated, or sacrosanct. 'Hallowed' is a biblical word, most famous for its inclusion in 'The Lord's Prayer', which is quoted in *The Sermon on the Mount*:

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name. (*Matthew* 6: 9-13; *Luke* 11: 2-4)

Dickinson's use of the word as an adjective is to suggest that any 'knight' who is interested in her female persona's vagina is 'hallowed'. However, unlike the biblical version of the word, Dickinson's 'hallowed' is not capitalised, thereby undermining its importance in comparison to the 'Awe' generated by her sexually active female's vagina.

Poem J1620/F1636 contains several rather obvious examples of Dickinson's uses of irony, sarcasm, parody, and pastiche as deliberately subversive techniques to raise questions about matters pertaining to some religious attitudes to sexual pleasure.

At other times, Dickinson's sexually active female persona is involved in group sex with several sexual partners. Group sex as a subject in literature goes back to Petronius' *The Satyricon*. In that novel, Encolpius, the narrator, describes the details of five men and a woman involved in group sex:

Ascyrtos, meanwhile, had become a member of another group, who were attempting to partake of the same woman at the same time. Ascyrtos had positioned himself in the conventional fashion, while a second was behind her performing in the Greek tradition. A third occupied her mouth, while a fourth and fifth attended each of her breasts. She reciprocated the kindnesses of the latter two, one with each hand. (Petronius, 1970, 50)

Whilst not trying to match Petronius's excesses, in one of her poems, poem J548/F1093, Emily Dickinson's sexually active female persona describes how although three men are simultaneously trying to sexually satisfy her, she remains sexually unfulfilled.

She begins by referring to the group sex as a 'Fever or Event', then explains that although the three sexual partners 'shook the Adamant' with their 'Spirit', they 'could not make it feel'. After describing her lack of orgasm or 'privilege to live' as a 'crisis', the female persona then expresses her dissatisfaction with the men who – although they have spent a considerable amount of 'dull – benumbing time' satisfying themselves – and have 'shot' – have been unable to sexually satisfy her:

'T'was crisis – All the length had passed
That dull – benumbing time
There is in Fever or Event –
And now the Chance had come –

The instant... privilege to live...

The muscles grappled as with leads
That would not let the Will –
The Spirit shook the Adamant –
But could not make it feel.

The Second poised – debated – shot –
Another had begun –
And simultaneously, a Soul
Escaped the House unseen – (J948/F1093)

In the final stanza, Dickinson explains how 'The Second' partner had 'shot' or ejaculated as 'Another' partner had 'begun'. She then describes how

another 'Soul' 'simultaneously' 'Escaped the House unseen'. Familiarity with Dickinson's use of thinly-veiled euphemism – and her use of the word 'house' as a metaphorical substitute for 'vagina' – reveals that her actual meaning here is that a third lover withdrew as the other two men began coupling with the sexually active female.

In poem J902/F823, Dickinson's female thinks about each of the 'Men' involved in her 'tenderer Experiment' of group sex. She also seems to be trying to judge which man performs the best, but then gives up the attempt. She appears to continue her thoughts on the merits of group sex after one of the men has withdrawn from her:

'T'was empty – but the first
Was full –

This was...
My tenderer Experiment
Toward Men –

'Which choose I?
That – I cannot say – (J902/F823)

And in poem J1136/F1130, the female is involved in group sex with a man and two other women. In that poem, the female persona describes – in a convoluted form that uses many word order reversals – how the male lover gives the female persona instructions, and how two of the females ('we' then wedge themselves ('ourselves') between 'Himself and her' in readiness for sex:

'Secure your flower' said he...
Our passive flower we held...
Ourselves we wedged
Himself and her between,
Yet easy as the narrow Snake
He forked his way along
... her helpless beauty... (J1136/F1130)

Also predominant in several of Emily Dickinson's poems is the use of the word 'come' as a possible euphemism for orgasm. The sexual sense of 'come', as a verb used to describe male ejaculation or female orgasm, or as a noun used to mean semen, is now used almost exclusively in erotic and pornographic writing. According to the OED:

Come is a verb meaning 'to experience sexual orgasm. Also with -off. Slang. c1650 from the anonymous ballad, 'Walking in a Meadow Green', in Bishop (Thomas) Percy's *Loose Songs* (1765) and c1714 from the anonymous poem 'The Cabinet of Love'.

In short, 'come' has a venerable tradition as a euphemism for male and female sexual release. It has survived for nearly three hundred and fifty years

with its sexual meaning intact. Used to describe the experience of sexual orgasm, 'come' was most likely derived from *come off*. As stated by the OED, its conjugated form, used to describe male ejaculation, is attested from c1660, in the anonymous ballad, 'Walking in a Meadow Green', originally published in a 1765 folio of 'loose songs' collected by Thomas Percy:

They lay so close together
They made me much to wonder;
I knew not which was whether
Until I saw her under.
Then off he came, and blushed for shame
So soon that he had ended;
Yet still she lies, and to him cries,
'Once more, and none can mend it.' (Parker, 1980, 125-126)

This use of the word 'come' to mean sexual orgasm is also found in another ballad originally published in Bishop Percy's *Loose Songs*. In 'I dreamed My Love', the narrator states:

I dreamed my love lay in her bed:
It was my chance to take her:
Her legs and arms abroad were spread;
She slept; I durst not wake her...
Methought her belly was a hill
Much like a mount of pleasure,
Under whose height there grows a well;
The depth no man can measure...
He plunged about, but would not shrink;
His Coming forth they waited.
Then forth he Came as one half lame,
Were weary, faint and tired;
And laid him down betwixt her legs,
As help he had required. (Howell, 1970, 24-25)

In the above poem, the anonymous poet has helpfully capitalized 'Coming' and 'Came' in order to emphasise and underline the explicitly sexual nature of the words.

Dickinson's frequent use of the word 'come' to describe sexual release can be seen to be a continuation of a poetic tradition.

In poem J218/F189, Dickinson's female persona appears to be bisexual, as she is asking a woman named Sue about two male lovers.

Is it true, dear Sue?
Are there *two*?
I shouldn't like to come
For fear of joggling Him!
If I could shut him up...
Or tie him...

Till I got in...
To "Toby's" fist –
...I'd come! (J218/F189)

This particular poetic persona seems to be outlining a scenario in which two females dominate their male lovers in a group sex situation. The dominant female persona articulates her penchant for bondage, incarceration, and male humiliation. At first the female seems reluctant to 'come' – that is, either to orgasm or to join in 'for fear of joggling' one of the men during the sex act. She then suggests that if she could 'shut him up' or 'tie him' till she 'got in', then she'd 'come', that is, she could achieve orgasm. For this particular female, the idea of shutting up a male lover or tying him to the 'fist' of someone named 'Toby', inflames her ardour and serves as a stimulus to orgasm.

Sometimes, Dickinson's heterosexual female presents the male lover as a passive lover; one who is happy for the female to take the lead sexually: 'He was weak, and I was strong – then –/So He let me lead him in –' (J190/F221).

In another poem, the female boasts of her sexual control over the male lover, explaining how he performs for her at her command: 'He holds.../Or gropes, at my command' (J909/F837).

Sometimes Dickinson's female persona is simply a woman who takes a superior, dominating role in lovemaking: 'She rose as high as his Occasion' (J1011/F1019) and: 'She rose to His Requirements – dropt' (J732/F857)

In other poems, Dickinson's female articulates her varied and sometimes contradictory feelings about male potency during lovemaking:

...Men may weary –
But the Man within...
Never knew satiety – (J746/F783)

and:

Growth of Man – like Growth of Nature –
Gravitates within – (J750/F790)

and:

He is alive – this morning –
He is alive – and awake...
Blossoms dress for His Sake...
Him to regale – Me – Only –
Motion... (J1160/F1173)

In several other poems, one of Emily Dickinson's female persona's adopts a stance that suggests she has no interest in sex at all. In one poem, the normally sexually active female – without giving any specific reason – tells the male lover to stay away from her erogenous zones:

Go not too near a House of Rose...

Or inundation of a Dew...
Nor climb the Bars of Ecstasy...
In Joy's insuring quality. (J1434/F1479)

Poem J880/F928 is one of Emily Dickinson's most complex poems; in it the female persona initially seems to be contradicting herself when she states that:

The Rose content may bloom
To gain renown of Lady's Drawer
But if the Lady come
But once a Century, the Rose
Superfluous become – (J880/F928)

This poem appears to be contradictory because it suggests that as the 'Lady's' vagina or 'Rose' is only used to make 'the Lady come/But once a Century', then that 'Rose' 'become[s]' 'Superfluous', or not needed. However, the contradiction lies in the fact that if the 'Lady's' 'Rose' is used at all, no matter how infrequently, then it is obviously not 'Superfluous'. Therefore, the suggestion in this poem is that the 'Lady' is complaining about the lack of 'bloom' of her 'Rose' and that its infrequent use ('once a Century') is not enough to make her 'Rose content'.

This particular poem appears to be a plea for more sex, and also a complaint by the female persona or 'Lady' about the lack of sexual use of her vagina. A lesbian reading of poem J880/F928 reveals how 'the Rose' may be 'the Rose' of some other woman, for the poem could very well be that the lesbian persona is castigating a female lover for her sexual negligence, or it could be that the lesbian persona is trying to seduce 'the Lady' by warning her that infrequent use of her 'Rose' will render it 'Superfluous'. The complexity of poem J880/F928 lends itself to such multi-gendered readings and analyses.

The dominant female is a persona that Dickinson utilises in a number of her poems in order to make serious points about notions of the equality and the inequality of male and female sexuality. One of Dickinson's most challenging poems is poem J616/F454, in which the dominant female changes into a 'phallic woman', that is, someone who is a female-male hybrid; a fe-male, fe/male or a shemale, depending on one's personal nomenclatural preference. 'Shemale', a portmanteau noun used to describe women who were masculine in dress, mannerisms and pursuits, was a familiar term in mid-nineteenth century American fiction; it can be found in the popular *Davy Crockett Almanac* published annually between 1835 and 1856, in which the anonymous authors emphasise the dual nature of the 'riproarious shemales' or 'hybrid women, who... twist the perceived realities' of gender (Lofaro, 2001, 7). The word 'shemale' features in the title of one particular Davy Crockett almanac: *Davy Crockett's Riproarious Shemales and Sentimental Sisters*.

In European literature, Rachilde, in *Monsieur Venus* (1884), referred to the male/female hybrid as 'that individual... two distinct sexes in one unique monster' (Rachilde, 2004, 155).

Twenty years before Rachilde's 'unique monster', Dickinson has her shemale state:

I rose – because He sank –
I thought it would be opposite –
But when his power dropped –
My Soul grew straight...

I told him Best – must pass
Through this low Arch of Flesh...

And so with Thews of Hymn –
And Sinew from within –
And ways I knew not that I knew – till then –
I lifted Him – (J616/F454)

In this poem, Dickinson's shemale lists a series of binary opposites: 'I' and 'He'; 'rose' and 'sank'; 'Thews' and 'Sinews'; 'knew' and 'knew not' – and then expresses confusion over the arrangement or sequence of those opposites: 'I rose – because He sank – / I thought it would be opposite', she says. The phallic woman's puzzlement is based on certain heterosexual gender assumptions and on the notion of gender reversal – Dickinson's reference to 'Thews of Hymn' indicates, via the homophonic pun on 'Hymn'/'Him', that her female is endowed with male 'Thews' and with a phallus of 'Sinew'; a penis that 'grew straight' and 'rose' to an erect state when 'He', the male 'sank' or 'dropped' to his knees to fellate her.

Not surprisingly, the initially confused heterosexual phallic female, by stating she 'thought it would be opposite', implies that she thought it would be herself, the female, who would be on her knees, fellating the erect male. 'But when his power dropped', she adds, hinting at his impotence, 'My Soul grew straight', after which she 'told him' that her 'Best' – 'must pass / Through this low Arch of Flesh'. Here Dickinson's female is informing the passive male that she's going to sodomise him with her penis, which is the 'Best' of the two, because her 'sinew' is erect, whereas his 'power' has 'dropped'. Dickinson puns on 'Hymn' to indicate that her phallic female's 'Sinew' is erect when she states 'with Thews of Hymn – / And Sinew from within... / I lifted him'. The implication is that the phallus-endowed female has lifted up the passive male by impaling him 'from within' by the 'Sinew' of her erect penis.

In Dickinson's phallic woman, the fusion of the masculine and the feminine enables the masculine female to attain a combination of feminine beauty and masculine power within her own body. The phallic woman contains the aggressive triumph of the desiring penis, and the female eye enjoys its own body, or, to be more precise, the 'Thews', 'Sinew' and 'Best' that belong to the shemale sex. Dickinson's focus is on the phallic female, not on the passive male; he is barely mentioned because she (the female) is far more interested in relaying her own feelings, actions and reactions to the situation: 'I rose'; 'I thought'; 'My Soul'; 'I told him'; 'with Thews of Hymn – / And Sinew from within

– /And ways I knew not that I knew – till then –/I lifted Him – ' (J616/F454) she states.

The shemale's claim that she resorted to 'ways I knew not that I knew – till then' implies the triumph of instinct over reason, or of nature over nurture.

Dickinson's heterosexual female personae are as varied as her other sexual personae and range from little girls to adult virgins; from brides to widows; from prostitutes to shemales. All of these personae provide her with the aesthetic method to write about attitudes to sexuality in Victorian America.

The Male Heterosexual

Emily Dickinson's utilisation of a male persona has been identified and analysed in depth by John Emerson Todd in his monograph, *Emily Dickinson's Use of the Persona*, published in 1973. Todd's monograph was published eighteen years after the 1955 publication of Thomas H. Johnson's *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*; the first time a *complete* edition of Dickinson's poetry had been available in print, and the first time that many of Dickinson's poems had been made available for the general public to read.

In *Emily Dickinson's Use of the Persona* (1973), Todd uses the 'commonly anthologised' poem J986/F1096:

Yet when a Boy, and barefoot –
I more than once at noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone – (J986/F1096)

to make what might now be seen to be a rather obvious (and somewhat naïve) point. Todd states:

What [Dickinson] very likely did was adopt the persona of a young boy briefly for dramatic effect. The quoted passage indicates that, in her projected role as a young barefoot boy, she has 'more than once' come upon what she has taken to be a snake sunning itself at noon and that she has even made unsuccessful attempts to pick it up. (Todd, 1973, xi)

When Todd's book was published, Dickinson studies and scholarship were relatively new and Todd's idea of using the 'major poses or personae that Emily Dickinson... consciously adopted in her poetry' (Todd, 1973, xv) as a method of organising and analysing her poetry was ground-breaking at the time, although it had become something of a commonplace by the twenty-first century, with Camille Paglia, Robert Weisbuch, Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Elizabeth Phillips, amongst others identifying various personae deployed by Dickinson in her poetry and letters.

In 'Prisming Dickinson', Robert Weisbuch suggests that Emily Dickinson's use of persona is self-reflexive or meta-narrative; that

at each stage of the analogical process in Dickinson's best poems, the persona serves to make the word flesh, to register the consequences of the pattern her own words are evolving. (Weisbuch, 1975, 215)

Cynthia Griffin Wolff claims that Emily Dickinson's personae use is 'multi-voiced' and that Dickinson utilises 'many personae' in her poetry, including a 'man-and-boy' persona, as a 'self-conscious strategy of artistic rebellion' (Wolff, 1996, 188).

As George T. Wright states in *The Poet in the Poem* (1960):

we need to recognise the great importance of the 'I' to any poem – to any mask – and to see that the ambiguity inherent in the word is the starting point... of satire and irony, modes that obviously rely on the reader's perception of the speaker's multiplicity...' (Wright, 1960, 163)

In a number of her poems, Emily Dickinson's 'multiplicity' includes adopting the persona of a heterosexual male. Dickinson's utilisation of 'the inner masculine side of a woman' (Jung, 1972, 209), has been posited by Judith Farr as a woman writer's 'classical use of the masculine gender' (Farr, 1992, 324). As this reference to a 'classical use' implies, utilising a male persona and using a first person male narrator is not an unusual strategy in the writings of female authors.

In the nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë – who adopted the male persona of Currer Bell as a means of publishing her works in a male-dominated publishing world – was just one of several women authors who used a male persona, and/or a male pseudonym, and/or a first person male narrator, 'to transcend the limits of her sex' (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, 480). Similarly, Mary Anne Evans adopted the male persona/pseudonym of George Eliot, and wrote using a first person male narrator in her novel, *Mill on the Floss* (1860). Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) – which deploys three consecutive male first-person narrators – was initially published anonymously to disguise the author's female gender. The first edition was also issued with a preface written by Mary Shelley's husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who many readers assumed was the actual author of *Frankenstein*.

The adoption of a male persona – an action based on what Freud referred to as 'the masculinity complex' (Freud, 1977, 320) – by women writers in the nineteenth century is indicative of the woman writer's loss of innocence; of her awareness of the financial necessity of assuming a male identity in order to enter the mainstream literary world and become 'competitors in the [literary] marketplace' (Showalter, 2013, vii). The use of the male persona/ pseudonym/ narrator is unavoidably bound up with a number of compromises for the woman writer and for the female reader. However, adopting a male persona and thereby vicariously experiencing the life of the masculine 'other' allows the woman writer a privileged insight into the processes through which the masculine world-view is created and how it is sustained in the narrative. The use of a male persona therefore allows the woman writer to cast a critical light on those processes.

Emily Dickinson had no use for a male persona to be a competitor in the literary marketplace; due to her lack of professional ambition, neither literary competition nor publication held any interest for her. As Dickinson has her female writer persona state in one of her poems:

Publication – is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man –
Poverty – be justifying
For so foul a thing (J709/F788)

Instead, Dickinson uses the male heterosexual persona for entirely different purposes. 'Me, change! Me, alter!/Then I will...' (J268/F281), Dickinson announces, for the modes of multiplicity and metamorphosis she uses for poetic effect are literary techniques pioneered by Shakespeare.

A huge admirer of Shakespeare's works, Dickinson adopts a number of Shakespeare's techniques and, in her poetry, readily changes into a sexually active heterosexual male. She utilises a poetic version of the dramatic elements found in Shakespeare's comedies of disguise, such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Cymbeline*, in which heroines disguise themselves as men. In many of her letters, Dickinson signs off by using male names, including 'John' (J497/F366), 'Brother Emily' (Letter 367), 'Judah' (Letter 97), 'Jim' (Letter 604), and 'Phaeton' (Letter 642) and 'Dick' (Letter 604).

The name 'Dick' is highly significant, especially in relation to poetry of a sexual nature and narrated by a heterosexual male persona. 'Dick' is, first and foremost, short for Dickinson. 'Dick' is also slang for the penis, as well as slang for a fool or idiot, and also for detective (first used in the United States in 1850, in regards to the Pinkerton National Detective Agency established by Alan Pinkerton), as well as being the shortened or familiar form of the male name Richard. Most uses of the word have an exclusively male orientation and apply to male domains, orientations and applications which Dickinson has capitalised on and fully exploited.

The name 'Phaeton' is from Greek mythology and is an interesting choice of male persona, as Phaeton is the son of Helios, the sun god. Phaeton is a 'venturesome young charioteer, by usurping his father's place, causes incalculable mischief, and, in punishment for his mismanagement of the solar steeds (the fleecy white clouds), is hurled from his exalted seat by a thunderbolt launched by the hand of Jupiter [Zeus]' (Guerber, 1994, 352). The name Phaeton translates as 'a bright and shining one' and it indicates Dickinson's awareness of her own poetic talent, and her presentation of herself as an anarchic poetic sensibility, whose writer's 'gait' is 'spasmodic' and 'uncontrolled', with 'little shape' and 'no Tribunal' (Dickinson, 1958, 409), and whose literary 'posture is benighted' (Dickinson, 1958, 412).

According to Elaine Showalter, fin de siècle women writers 'were a major presence in the new literary world' (Showalter, 2013, vii), and one of the reasons for the deployment by a female author of a heterosexual 'male narrative persona [is] to create an atmosphere of ambiguous sexuality' (Showalter, 2013, xi). For Emily Dickinson, this would be one of the reasons for her adoption of a male mask.

Since 'the history of citizenship is a history of fundamental formal heterosexist patriarchal principles and practices' (Evans, 1993, 9), heterosexuality remained – for many years – an unnamed type of sexuality. It was a type of sexuality which, although it obviously existed, had no technical name or term to label it. Victorian sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, Karl Westphal, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Sigmund Freud published books and studies on sexuality, all of which had a significant influence on Victorian society, but

they all wrote without actually naming – and without having a term for – heterosexuality.

It was not until Krafft-Ebing's study of sexual types, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) that this nomenclatural oversight was corrected when the term 'heterosexual' (Krafft-Ebing 21) was first used in C.G. Craddock's translation of Krafft-Ebing's book, published in 1892. According to Colin Wilson, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a medical textbook, is most notable for:

the sheer range of sexual perversions it describes. After reading a dozen or so cases, the reader begins to feel that the streets of 19th-century Berlin or Vienna must have been packed with sadists, masochists, voyeurs, fetishists and transvestites. (Wilson, 1988, 71)

Once the word 'heterosexual' had been included amongst Krafft-Ebing's 'range of sexual perversions', the noun began to be used more frequently by sexologists and doctors from the early 1920s, but did not enter common use until the 1960s. With regards to the etymology of the word 'heterosexual' itself, *hetero* comes from the Greek word *heteros*, meaning 'different' or 'other', and from the Latin for sex (ie, characteristic sex or sexual differentiation).

The lack of a word to act as a signifier for the concept of heterosexuality implies a lack of theoretical, scientific or medical material specifically about heterosexuality prior to 1892. It also indicates that a name for heterosexuality was considered unnecessary, due to heterosexuality itself being accepted as a sexuality that was 'the norm', whereas the other types of sexuality were considered 'perversions'.

Despite the lack of a word to describe heterosexuality and heterosexual practices during her lifetime, Emily Dickinson was able to imagine what Richard Burton in his translation of *The Kama Sutra* (1886) called: 'women acting the part of a man' (Vatsyayana, 1971, 68) and utilise the male heterosexual persona in her poetry and her letters, simply because it was a type of sexuality that existed and was considered 'the norm' by the Victorian bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century; a time when:

The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law... imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged... (Foucault, 1998, 3)

What Foucault identifies as a 'legitimate and procreative' heterosexuality that 'reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy' (Foucault, 1998, 3) is a Victorian 'norm' that is challenged by Emily Dickinson's poetry, specifically by her use of symbolic or metaphorical language to 'speak' about explicit sexual conduct; conduct that is, due to its intimacy, normally a matter of privacy, ruled by a 'principle of secrecy'.

Dickinson (like Sade) refuses to acknowledge heterosexual procreativity as the primary or imperative form of sexuality, and instead deigns to 'grant women the sexual freedom of men' (Paglia, 1990, 244). However, whereas Sade uses female personae to posit social, political, literary, philosophical and

sexual ideas regarding women, Dickinson uses the heterosexual male persona to create poetry that posits questions regarding attitudes to male sexuality. However, she does not present only one form of male sexual persona, but utilises a variety of male heterosexual types, and is therefore able to present masculinity in a number of interesting and informative ways.

As with her other sexual personae, Dickinson utilises the unruly or 'uncontrolled' male persona to achieve a number of specific poetic effects. Initially, her chosen male persona is that of 'a Boy':

Yet when a Boy, and barefoot –
I more than once at noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone – (J986/F1096)

In this poem, the shift from a non-gender-specific narrator to a clearly defined male persona – 'a constructed 'second self'' (Wolff, 1992, 122) – is used by Dickinson to present the 'barefoot' 'Boy' as a Huckleberry Finn-type character. As Jane Donahue Eberwein points out, '[M]any poems in which Emily Dickinson adopts a child's persons... should be read ironically as her means of raising subversive thoughts' (Eberwein, 1998, 40).

Interestingly, Dickinson does not introduce the gender of this particular persona until halfway through the poem, which is a poetic strategy used to confuse the readers that have assumed that the poem's narrator was female, simply because that is the gender of Emily Dickinson. Here Dickinson is employing an aesthetic precursor to Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'Intentional Fallacy' – where the reader's 'confusion between the poem and its origins' is used to disorientate them and try to make them rethink – and then reread – the poem. As a poetic technique, this sudden introduction of a seemingly contradictorily-gendered narrator is a sophisticated form of female transgression. It is also an object lesson to the reader in how to read without making any assumptions regarding the biography of the narrating persona.

Dickinson's later adoption and deployment of an adult male persona can be seen as part of a poetic tradition whereby poets use gender reversal to challenge notions of gender and sexuality. It is possible that Dickinson's greatest originality lies in her use of multiple personae as a tool for breaking out of the prescribed terms of gender altogether.

The Restoration libertine poet, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, uses a female persona in several of his poems, and Charles Baudelaire, who was writing poems for his seminal collection, *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), in France at the same time Dickinson was writing her poetry in North America, also used a female persona in several of his poems. In 'Confession', he introduces the poetic persona as female halfway through the poem:

That sound said many things to me. It said:
'Things aren't always as they might seem,
because behind the mask, though in disguise,

selfishness can always be seen.

It's tough being a beautiful woman;
I wear my ready-to-wear face;
I'm like a dancer who has a slight fall
and yet keeps a fake smile in place...' (Baudelaire, 2008, 53)

Until the line: 'It's tough being a beautiful woman', there is no indication in the poem as to the poetic persona's gender and it could be assumed by the reader that because Baudelaire is male, the narrator is also male. The introduction of the female-gendered poetic persona into the poem is therefore Baudelaire's own deliberate strategy to disconcert the reader, possibly to elicit a more sympathetic rereading of the poem.

Rochester utilised a female persona in 'The Platonic Lady', who, in contrast to her ironic title states:

I love a youth will give me leave
His body in my arms to wreath;
To press him gently, and to kiss...
I'd give him liberty to toy
And play with me, and count it joy. (Rochester, 1995, 25)

Rochester uses this particular female persona to describe sexual desires and sexual acts. Sade's adoption of a female persona in his novel *Justine* serves a similar function, and like Sade's female alter ego, Dickinson's male persona is used by Dickinson to speak about sexuality, masculinity and femininity.

'I am a rural man' (J1466/F1488) Dickinson writes, 'An independent Man' (J801/F856), letting her male persona declare his gender, class and geographical location.

Sometimes she adds concise detail and becomes 'bearded like a man' (J1737/F267). This last detail is one later used by Wallace Stevens in his poem *Tea at the Palaz of Hoon*, in which his bearded male persona states: '...in purple I descended/...ointment sprinkled in my beard...' (Stevens, 1965, 20).

Dickinson then uses this newly created persona for a variety of functions. Sometimes she will use the heterosexual male persona to speak frankly of his libido:

I cannot meet the spring unmoved –
I feel the old desire –
A Hurry with a lingering, mixed...

With something hid in Her – (J1051/F1122)

The heterosexual male of J1051/F1122 states he is unable to remain sexually unaffected or 'unmoved' by the onset of 'Spring'; that he 'cannot meet the Spring unmoved', as spring causes a rekindling of 'the old desire' within him. The adjective 'old' means both 'ancient' and 'previous', so this particular male is suggesting that his ancient 'desire' has returned, as it always does,

during the 'the Spring' and that it is a combination of urgency ('A Hurry') and deliberate delay ('a lingering'). He then goes on to state that his 'desire' is inflamed because it is 'mixed... With something hid in Her'. When the male mentions this 'something' that is 'hid' within 'Her', he is referring to what Catherine Hakim refers to as a person's intrinsic 'erotic capital' (Hakim, 2011, 2). According to Hakim, a person's 'erotic capital' refers

to a nebulous but crucial combination of beauty, sex appeal, skills of self-presentation and social skills – a combination of physical and social attractiveness which makes some men and women... attractive to all members of their society and especially to the opposite sex... Erotic capital combines beauty, sex appeal, liveliness, a talent for dressing well, charm and social skills and sexual competence. It is a mixture of physical and social attractiveness. Sexuality is one part of it... Erotic capital is multifaceted. (Hakim, 2011, 2-14)

In poem J1051/F1122, Dickinson has the predatory heterosexual male identify some of 'Her' erotic capital. Dickinson's male uses the phrase 'hid in' to suggest some of the more tangible elements of erotic capital, but also to suggest sexual depths and sexual secrecy.

At other times, Dickinson's heterosexual male acts and speaks in a sexually exuberant way: 'I wish I knew that Woman's name –/So when she comes this way...' (J588/F394).

In this instance, the male's exuberance contains implications of seduction or menace. Sometimes Dickinson uses the male persona in an aggressive way, presenting her male as a sexual predator, willing to kidnap and carry off a 'struggling' female victim:

So breathless till I passed her –
So helpless when I turned
And bore her struggling, blushing,
Her simple haunts beyond! (J91/F70)

In this particular poem the male uses violence to exert control over his female victim. As Rosalind Coward has noted:

For men, sexual encounters represent access to power, a series of encounters and experiences which build up a sense of the individual's power in having control over women's bodies. (Coward, 1993, 145)

In the final stanza of the same poem, Dickinson's male persona changes noticeably, becoming someone who commits crimes *for* the woman he has carried away:

For whom I robbed the Dingle –
For whom betrayed the Dell –
Many will doubtless ask me,
But I will never tell! (J91/F70)

Dickinson's male kidnapper comments semi-euphemistically of a number of crimes that he has committed for – or on behalf of – his female victim, before ending the poem with his ominous statement of intent to keep what happened to the woman a secret. Dickinson continues using this ominous male persona, and then increases his menace by employing a disturbing strain of aggressive potential rapist language in her poetry:

What Soft Cherubic Creatures
These Gentlewomen are –
One would as soon assault a Plush –
Or violate a Star – (J401/F675)

In poem J230/F244, Dickinson, while retaining the voice of the male sexual predator, removes the tone of menace and replaces it with a dissembling voice. In this poem, Dickinson's narrator takes on the persona of a single, unattached male. In the poem, the male is asked – and avoids fully answering – a number of questions about himself and his conduct:

Do we 'get drunk'?
Ask the jolly Clovers!
Do we 'beat' our 'Wife'?
I – never wed – (J230/F244)

In the above poems, Dickinson has carefully utilised the male poetic persona in order to speak on subjects that range from the male libido to male desire, and to patriarchal attitudes towards alcoholism, marriage, wife-beating and sexual violence. Dickinson's single male implies that a husband will most likely 'get drunk' and 'beat' his 'Wife'. This is presented as a cultural truism, with Dickinson placing the words 'get drunk', 'beat' and 'Wife' in quotation marks to imply that they are words quoted by a person (or persons) aware of such behaviour. The final line, the male's denial of his own culpability due to 'never' having 'wed' is also a tacit acknowledgement of what appears to be a cultural norm.

The subjects that Dickinson mentions in this poem prefigure the findings in *Bizarre Sex* (1989), Roy Eskapa's study of twentieth century sexual mores, in which he states:

In the United States... husbands who engaged in wife-beating were shy, sexually ineffectual, reasonably hard-working 'mother's boys' with a tendency to drink excessively. (Eskapa, 1989, 117)

Dickinson's positing the male as someone unwilling to answer serious questions about serious (and intimate) sexual relationship issues is a literary device she has borrowed from the earliest American authors, whose stories

turn from society to nature or nightmare out of a desperate need to avoid the facts of wooing, marriage, and child-bearing. (Fiedler, 1982, 25)

One early example of this male adult responsibility avoidance fiction is Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* (1819), a story set in the years before and after the American Revolutionary War. Rip Van Winkle, a villager of Dutch descent, lives in a village at the foot of the Catskill Mountains. Rip is an amiable man whose home and farm suffer from his lazy neglect. One autumn day he escapes his nagging wife by wandering up the mountains where he encounters a group of strangely dressed men. After drinking some of their liquor, he settles down under a tree and falls asleep. Rip wakes up twenty years later and returns to his village. During his sleep, his wife has died and his close friends have either died in a war or gone somewhere else. Unaware that the American Revolution has taken place, he immediately gets into trouble when he proclaims himself a loyal subject of King George III. Eventually an old local recognizes him and Rip's grown daughter puts him up. When Rip resumes his habitual idleness, certain hen-pecked husbands wish they shared Rip's good luck.

In poem J230/F244, Emily Dickinson has identified American literature's preoccupation with the flight of the male from adult responsibility, and has then set out her own series of challenges to it. The same can be said about poem J249/F269:

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!
Were I with thee
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!...

Rowing in Eden –
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor – Tonight –
In Thee! (J249/F269)

The critical debate about poem J240/F269 posits various readings of this much-anthologised poem. Alicia Suskin Ostriker provides a lesbian reading by commenting on 'the orgasmic and possibly lesbian fantasy of "Rowing in Eden – /Ah, the Sea!"' (Ostriker, 1997, 172). Helen McNeil suggests a heterosexual union with gender roles reversed, because the 'last image' in the poem makes the final two lines 'look like gender reversal, with the speaker seeing herself as the active partner' (McNeil, 1986, 15). Contrarily, John Emerson Todd calls it 'a projection of erotic love in which the persona appears to be a male lover' (Todd, 1973, 36).

The explicit nautical content of poem J249/F269, delivered as it is in biblical language, suggests that Dickinson has borrowed her persona from the narrators of pseudo-biblical seafaring novels of Herman Melville, and has readily adopted the male persona of a mariner recently home from the sea; one who uses seafaring metaphors to request sexual favours:

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!
Were I with thee
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!...

Rowing in Eden –
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor – Tonight –
In Thee! (J249/F269)

In another poem, Dickinson continues using the same male mariner's voice to speak of a sexual union. In the poem, she has italicised the word '*port*' and capitalised the word 'Brig' to show that they are sexual euphemisms: 'One *port* – suffices – for a Brig – like mine –' (J368/F410).

In poem J368/F410, Dickinson has subverted the sailor's adage 'A girl in every port', and has instead presented it as said by the male mariner as a profession of monogamy, albeit one that is being used as a method of seduction.

The male persona used by Dickinson was also used by a number of male poets – Robert Browning and Oscar Wilde in the nineteenth century; Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Edgar Lee Masters and W.B. Yeats in particular in the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, a male or female poet's utilisation of a poetic mask or persona is a literary commonplace, but in the nineteenth century it was Emily Dickinson – one of the most technically able and audacious of poets – who used a multitude of different-gendered sexual personae to show the full extent of human awareness and understanding from – and through – a variety of shifting perspectives and different viewpoints by employing what Oscar Wilde referred to as 'The Truth of Masks' (Wilde, 1988, 1060).

In this respect, Dickinson's use of a poetic persona can be seen to be an including and inclusive act, whereby the chosen persona is utilised to emphasise a particular injustice or wrong, the highlighting of which can ultimately suggest or bring about a corrective. However, this is not meant to imply that Emily Dickinson's poetry was written to serve a particular social function – the fact that she refused to publish and her *Complete Poems* (1955) was not published until sixty-five years after her death indicates this.

In poem J452/F451, Dickinson utilises Shakespeare's ideas of a white woman being a black man's 'jewel' (1,3,195), as in *Othello*; and of her being like an 'Ethiop's' 'rich jewel' (1,5,45) as in *Romeo and Juliet*, as she (Dickinson) tackles issues of mixed race or interracial sex:

The Malay – took the Pearl...
Unsanctified – to touch...
The Swarthy fellow swam –
And bore my Jewel – Home –
Home to the Hut! (J452/F451)

Dickinson uses the figure of 'The Malay', a nineteenth-century term for an Austronesian native of the Malay Peninsula or Thai-Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, as first propounded by the anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who, in his 1775 doctoral dissertation titled *De generis humani varietate nativa (On the Natural Varieties of Mankind – 1775)*, outlined four main human races by skin colour, namely Caucasian (white), Ethiopian (black), Native American (red), and Mongolian (yellow). In 1795, Blumenbach added another race to his categories; the 'Malay', which he considered to be a subcategory of both the Ethiopian and the Mongolian races. According to Blumenbach, the Malay race was of a 'brown colour, from olive and a clear mahogany to the darkest clove or chestnut brown' (Blumenbach, 1969, 42). Blumenbach expanded the term 'Malay' to include the native inhabitants of the Marianas, the Philippines, the Malukus, the Sundas, the Indochinas, and Tahitians. In *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, Blumenbach writes:

Malay variety. Tawny-coloured; hair black, soft, curly, thick and plentiful; head moderately narrowed; forehead slightly swelling; nose full, rather wide, as it were diffuse, end thick; mouth large. upper jaw somewhat prominent with the parts of the face when seen in profile, sufficiently prominent and distinct from each other. This last variety includes the islanders of the Pacific Ocean, together with the inhabitants of the Marianne, the Philippine, the Molucca and the Sunda Islands, and of the Malayan peninsula. I wish to call it the Malay, because the majority of the men of this variety, especially those who inhabit the Indian islands close to the Malacca peninsula, as well as the Sandwich, the Society, and the Friendly Islanders, and also the Malambi of Madagascar down to the inhabitants of Easter Island, use the Malay idiom. (Blumenbach, 1969, 43)

In poem J452/F451, Dickinson posits a 'Malay' and an 'Earl' as rivals for a 'Pearl' white woman; one that both men consider to be a valued prize. In the poem, Dickinson utilises ideas of a white woman being a Malay man's 'pearl', as in 'Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl' (1,1,94), and 'She is a pearl/Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships' (2,2,82), both from *Troilus and Cressida*. Conversely – and controversially – Dickinson's over-familiarity with, and fondness for, the works of Shakespeare means she would have been all too aware of Proteus' claim that 'Black men are pearls in beauteous ladies' eyes' (5,2,12-2077) as he states in *As You Like It*.

When Dickinson's heterosexual male states: 'The Malay – took the Pearl'/Not – I – the Earl', there are a number of factors to be considered regarding Dickinson's strategic use of the word 'Pearl'. First and foremost, *The Pearl* was the name of the infamous underground Victorian magazine of erotica and pornography. It was well known nationally and internationally. The editor of *The Pearl* claims to have given the magazine:

a suitable name... in the hope that when it comes under the snouts of the moral and hypocritical swine of the world, they may not trample it

underfoot, and feel disposed to rend the publisher, but that a few will become subscribers on the quiet. (*The Pearl*, 1995, 1)

The 'Pearl' as 'a piece of jewellery' (Freud, 1995, 210) also has a particular Freudian meaning, and a very specific interpretation: 'a... pearl... or a jewel... is a favourite expression... for the female genitals' (Freud, 1995, 210).

In the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of a pearl as a metaphor for the vagina or for virginity, or at the very least a jewel associated with sex and sexual activity, was established in the public mind. By that time, the Malay race was also firmly established as exotic in the public mind. Emily Dickinson's juxtaposition of these two contrasting elements in her poetic references to interracial or mixed race sex with a 'Malay' or 'Negro' in poem J452/F451 would have met with considerable resistance, or outright opposition, or hostility from many contemporary readers of her poetry – had the poem been published during her lifetime. As it is, poem J452/F451 remained unpublished until 1955; over ninety years after Dickinson had written it, and sixty-nine years after Dickinson's death. The poem was written in 1862, during the American Civil War, which was being fought (in part) over the abolition of African-American slavery, and three years before the race hate group, the Ku Klux Klan, was formed in Tennessee.

There is, of course, another aspect to poem J452/F451. It is to be found in Dickinson's heterosexual aristocratic male's insistence that 'The Malay – *took* the Pearl'. The word 'took' has the implication of theft or forced taking. It also has a sexual connotation, meaning 'to engage in consensual or non-consensual sex'. There is then, the implication that a 'Pearl'-white woman (possibly a virgin), has been raped by a 'Swarthy' 'Malay', as suggested by the first line of poem J452/F451.

The heterosexual female's use of the word 'Unsantified' – synonyms for which include: unholy, unconsecrated, impure, defiled and profane – reveals much about the female's reaction to the rape, in fact much about her revulsion for the 'touch' of the 'Swarthy fellow'.

The Malay – took the Pearl...
Unsantified – to touch...
The Swarthy fellow swam –
And bore my Jewel – Home –
Home to the Hut! (J452/F451)

In the lines:

The Swarthy fellow swam –
And bore my Jewel – Home –
Home to the Hut! (J452/F451)

the heterosexual female suggests either that she has been kidnapped, or that her 'Jewel' has been taken away or removed by 'The Malay'; that her 'Jewel', her virginity, has been taken by the 'Swarthy fellow... Home to the Hut'. The use of the word 'Home', repeated in the poem for emphasis, is ambiguous

– it is unclear as to whether the 'Home' is solely the Malay's home, or whether 'the Hut' is the 'Home – /Home' of both the 'Pearl'-white woman *and* the 'Malay'.

That Emily Dickinson could write a poem about mixed race sex (with all its inflammatory socio-political implications) at such a time shows her remarkable artistic courage, and her willingness to experiment with controversial themes in an attempt to widen the subject base of poetry's remit. It also (again) shows her aesthetic similarity to Charles Baudelaire, who also wrote of mixed race sex in several of his poems, particularly in his poem 'Still Not Satisfied', where he describes his black female lover as a 'bizarre deity, as brown as the night' (Baudelaire, 2008, 37). He goes on to extol the virtues of a Creole lady in 'To a Creole Lady', stating that he has 'known... a Creole lady's depths and mysteries' (Baudelaire, 2008, 68). Finally, in 'Entirely', Baudelaire's male persona praises his black female lover by stating:

...She's dark like night
And yet she dazzles like the dawn.

Her body has a harmony
That's perfect... (Baudelaire, 2008, 49)

Of course, Dickinson's 'Malay', 'Negro' and 'swarthy fellow' could very well be three separate men, and the 'swarthy fellow' might just as easily be a native American, in which case, for Emily Dickinson, the idea of Native America mixed race sex in her home state of Massachusetts was a notion that had become prevalent after the publication of Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), in which she recounts the details of her abduction from her home in Massachusetts by a tribe of Narragansett Native American warriors. Her narrative describes her captivity in great detail and it was an instant bestseller. According to one critic:

Her exciting story has enjoyed three centuries of popularity, primarily because of the vivid particularity with which she recreated her adventures. (Conn, 1990, 30)

Rowlandson's *Narrative* inspired a number of fictional imitations that focussed on the female captive's real or imagined fear of a sexual threat from the Native American abductors.

Another heterosexual male persona that Dickinson readily adopts and utilises is that of the bridegroom. In one of her poems Dickinson explains that s/he would like to be 'Ourself a Bridegroom' (J312/F600) of 'Mrs [Elizabeth Barrett] Browning' (Letter 261), a poet she greatly admired. Dickinson's admiration for the works of Barrett Browning is evident in one of her letters in which she writes: 'For poets – I have Keats – and Mr and Mrs Browning' (Dickinson, 1958, 404). In an indirect way, Dickinson is claiming she would like to be Robert Browning. Dickinson's use of sexual personae can therefore be

seen as imitations of Robert Browning's poetic personae, or as a form of flattery or homage to Browning and his work.

Continuing to use her bridegroom persona, Dickinson's proud groom highly praises his bride, stating:

Never Bride had such Assembling –
Never kinsman kneeled
To salute so fair a Forehead – (J649/F759)

The bridegroom also comments on his sexual intentions:

To Pluck Her –
And fetch Her Thee – be mine – (J671/F744)

In many ways, Dickinson's adoption, utilization and deployment of multiple and multiple-gendered poetic personae or literary masks in her poetry and letters predates Nietzsche's explanation of the use of those personae. Nietzsche refers to the writer's use of personae when he states:

Everything profound loves masks... such a hidden man, who instinctively uses speech for silence and concealment... *wants* a mask of him to roam the heads and hearts of his friends in his stead... and that is a good thing. Every profound spirit needs a mask: more, around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing... (Nietzsche, 1989a, 69-70)

For Nietzsche then, the male mask or persona provides the *man* (my emphasis) with the opportunity and the means to be profound – to speak seriously on serious and/or important subjects. For W.B. Yeats the function of the poetic mask, persona or narrative voice is very different to that outlined by Nietzsche. Yeats writes in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918):

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed. We put on a... painted face to hide us from the terrors of judgement, invent an imaginative Saturnalia where one forgets reality, a game like that of a child, where one loses the infinite pain of self-realization. (Yeats, 2010, 21)

For Yeats, the poetic persona is a 'mask of some other self' or a 'painted face' that is 'assumed' by the poet, thereby providing the poet with an opportunity to become someone else – 'something not oneself'; in short, the poetic persona allows the poet to escape 'self-realization' and 'where one forgets reality'. Yeats adopts a persona or 'Mask' in order to exclude his personal life from his carefully calculated personal poetic utterances in print, mythologising himself in the process as he transmutes the subjects of his reveries into symbols of his own mythology. Although he has very different, almost contrary, reasons to Dickinson for his use of personae, Yeats, like

Dickinson, becomes a literary ventriloquist – and it is the act of ventriloquism that produces the poetry. The utterances of a persona-using poet become what Yukio Mishima termed the *Confessions of a Mask* (Mishima, 2007, 1).

Contrary to Yeats, and more in line with Dickinson's reasons for utilising personae, for Carl Jung, the function and the use of the persona is to achieve self-knowledge:

Never shall we put any face on the world other than our own, and we have to do this precisely in order to find ourselves. For higher than science or art as an end in itself stands man, the creator of his instruments. (Jung, 1970, 737)

It is impossible to fully determine Emily Dickinson's aesthetic reasons for utilising her multiple-gendered and sexual personae – she left no theoretical texts, no essays on prosody or narrative. In one of her poems, she did however comment on using poetic personae as a method of becoming someone else. However, it is a comment made from the perspective of another persona and may or may not be Emily Dickinson's actual point of view being expressed.

I make believe until my Heart
Almost believes it too (J1290/F1345)

The above two lines illustrate that there is a very definite mind/heart, or mind/emotions division in Emily Dickinson's creation of the persona. In many ways Emily Dickinson's 'make believe' resembles W.B. Yeats' 'game like that of a child' in which the child dresses up in a variety of costumes and make believes or pretends to be someone else – although ultimately, Dickinson's poems don't appear to eschew or forget 'reality'.

Dickinson's use of the word 'Almost' gives the poem an element of ambiguity, for it provides a note of discord in the poem; a note of discord which reveals that the power to 'make believe' is not strong enough to totally obscure the truth from a discerning person. The person 'Almost believes', but does not fully believe they are who or what or where they are pretending to be. It also reveals the falsity or the theatricality of the 'make believe' world of using a persona.

Dickinson's interest in the theatrical possibilities of personae is evident in the 'variety of poses' (Weisbuch, 1975, 59) she adopted – and from the 'many performances in the poems' (Phillips, 1988, 78). Utilising multiple personae, Dickinson has them act out 'Drama's vitallest expression' (J741/F776) According to Elizabeth Phillips, 'Dickinson recognised, early in her career, the value of the dramatic monologue and learned to use it with skill' (Phillips, 1988, 82).

'Good to hide.../ The Fox fits the Hound' says one of Dickinson's mask-wearing animal personae. 'Best, to know and tell,/ Can one find the rare Ear' (J842/F945), she continues, offering an explication of opposites – a poetic effect she has achieved by donning a mask in order to speak in a fox's voice from a hound's perspective.

Emily Dickinson's constant use of personae, particularly her willingness to switch from one sexual persona to another, almost from poem to poem,

anticipates Ruth Hoberman's suggestion that 'the persona can cross gender lines' (Hoberman, 1997, 75) because 'gender itself is a form of masquerade rather than biological essence and... the phallus, the crucial indicator of sexual difference in Western culture, may not be the unambiguous gender signifier that it at first seems' (Hoberman, 1997, 74).

At times, Dickinson's work echoes her culture's sexual stereotypes, but it also frequently works against them, depicting and celebrating sexual ambiguity. Dickinson does this by paying a great deal of attention to the genitals of the female (and male) bodies she depicts in her poetry. Dickinson's utilisation of a male persona appears initially to suggest that her work demonstrates the woman writer's deep need to affirm the patriarchal structure. However, far from affirming patriarchy, the poems that are narrated by – and mediated through – Dickinson's heterosexual male persona actually depict the human body in such a way that s/he undermines the sexual categories on which patriarchy is based. In the following two examples, Dickinson reveals her skills at writing ambiguous poems; one poem deals with lack of sexual satiation, and the other with complete culmination of the heterosexual sex act from the male's point of view:

In poem J746/F783, Dickinson writes of her heterosexual male's lack of sexual satisfaction: 'But the Man within.../Never knew Satiety –' (J746/F783).

In poem J789/F740, Dickinson's male persona – obviously in a sexually aroused state – boasts proudly of his 'ample' 'Columnar Self' and how his lover can 'rely' on the 'Certainty' of his sexual prowess and his ability to satisfy her:

On a Columnar Self –
How ample to rely
In Tumult – or Extremity –
How good the Certainty (J789/F740)

Poem J789/F740 has multiple sexual personae 'speaking' it. The heterosexual male is only one of the personas to speak this particular poem; the autoeroticist female also narrates this poem – and thereby changes the meanings of this particular poem. This is part of the power, the appeal and the longevity of Emily Dickinson's poetry – that often one particular poem is 'spoken' by a multiplicity of gendered personae, thereby providing a variety of meanings and interpretations, depending on narrative viewpoint and on which sexual persona is speaking the poem. In Dickinson's poetry, a different gender always provides a different meaning, or rather, the meanings of the poems change according to which persona they are mediated through. From this it is possible to understand why a female writer like Dickinson might use a male persona, and how popular, apparently 'middlebrow' texts such as Dickinson's can work not merely to reinforce the 'dominant beliefs and social structures of [her] culture' (Greenblatt, 2005, 231), but also to challenge, question and subvert them.

According to Arthur Schopenhauer, any poet who is willing to utilise poetic personae or 'masks' is someone able to express themselves 'in a million forms of endless variety and diversity' (Schopenhauer, 1969, Vol. 2, 318), whereas for Jung, the writer or artist who uses multiple personae to speak a variety of truths is a crucial, even essential member of society; someone who is

needed for the good of mankind; for all of humanity. The personae-using artist or poet 'is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms which the age is most lacking' (Jung, 1972, 82). For Jung, this is because:

Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthralls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night. (Jung, 1972, 82)

Whilst Jung's view of repeated archetypes and the earlier invocation of 'deconstructed' role playing seem to be at odds with one another, the rationale for, and the objective of, Dickinson's restless ventriloquism and her trying on of multiple voices seems to be that 'whether nineteenth-century poets write dramatically, as in the dramatic monologue, or write directly of themselves, they are fundamentally in search of their own identities' (Elliott, 1982, 98).

Dickinson's skill in speaking 'with a thousand voices' has ensured that her poetry has not only enthralled and overpowered, but has also endured, a phenomenal feat considering that despite her refusal to publish her poems in her lifetime, the posthumous publication of her complete poems has secured her a reputation as one of North America's most significant poets.

Dickinson's use of personae has been one of the factors in the durability of her poetry. Her skill in utilising poetic personae, and in this instance, the heterosexual male persona, to speak on subjects including the male libido, desire, marriage, alcoholism, wife-beating and sexual violence towards women cannot be underestimated, especially when considered in light of the puritan-patriarchal-economic socio-political climate she lived and wrote in. As to which predominates when Dickinson writes through a male perspective or voice: parody of maleness for political purposes, or exhilarating freshness and potency of expression; it is very often both of these. Dickinson's shifting use of persona can also be seen as a manifestation of her fear of the self-imprisonment that self-consciousness can cause, and because of this she used personae as a way to objectify poetic emotion.

For Emily Dickinson, the urge to self-discovery drives her into taking on the personages of the unnamed characters she creates; it is her way of exploring human possibility and her own humanity. It is in this respect that many of Dickinson's poems, especially her male heterosexual persona poems, can be considered challenging, subversive and even transgressive.

The Autoeroticist

Autoeroticism is generally defined as the arousal and satisfaction of sexual desires within or by oneself, usually by masturbation, and/or voyeurism, and/or the use of sex toys. In *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet* (1990), Paula Bennett foregrounds the poet's awareness of nineteenth-century feminine culture, and claims that several of Emily Dickinson's poems express a 'homoerotic and autoerotic commitment to women' (Bennett, 1990, 180). These poems are concerned with 'the auto-erotic and masturbatory manifestations of sexuality' (Freud, 1977, 141); poems that focus mostly – but not exclusively – on female masturbation, poems which, Bennett suggests, 'all... say the same thing: a woman's vagina is a wonderful place in which to be lost.' (Bennett, 1990, 167)

Paula Bennett claims there were 'many nineteenth-century poems by women centring on autoerotically-based female sexual desire' (Bennett, 1995, 194), and these poems formed part of 'a vast body of women's literature – in particular, nineteenth century women's literature – in which the authors do speak their desire, and in which they use their eroticism socially and psychologically to empower themselves.' (Bennett, 1995, 193)

Attitudes to masturbation in Victorian America:

The ancient Egyptians included descriptions of masturbation into their creation story (with the sun god Atum), and the ancient Greeks masturbated with dildos – as is testified to by Greek and Roman dramatists who wrote about this practice in several serious plays. Most reactions against male or female masturbation stem from the fact that it is a non-procreative act – meaning that masturbation's sole function is to provide pleasure. Consequently, there have been various attempts throughout the ages to repress masturbation, for a variety of reasons – with the repression of masturbation being advocated by some doctors for alleged health reasons; by religious leaders on the grounds of it being deemed (by specific deities) sinful; and by politicians for a variety of politically strategic/expedient reasons. And of all the eras in which anti-masturbation reached its zenith, the Victorian era, became the ultimate era of repression, denial and sin.

With regard to female masturbation during the Victorian era, women were restricted from riding horses or bicycles, and even from squatting down to do laundry because the feelings associated with these activities were considered 'too pleasurable'. One doctor warned: 'horseback riding, use of sewing machines, and bicycle riding could all lead to female masturbation' (Maines, 1999, 59). According to Krafft-Ebing, 'the French writer A. Coffignon thought that the power of the sewing machine was such that heterosexual women could be turned into lesbians by "excessive work" on them' (Maines, 1999, 57).

In order to deter women from 'finding relief in masturbation' (Freud, 1977, 238), anti-masturbation supporters hired expert speakers to denounce the practice. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell – the first woman M.D. to graduate from an American medical school – was one such prominent and outspoken female doctor who, in her book, *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Children* (1879), espoused the consequences of what she referred to as 'bad-touch' (Blackwell, 2012, 21), in which she discussed controversial topics such as masturbation, which she openly disapproved of, calling it one of the 'vices from which all other forms of unnatural vice springs' (Blackwell, 2012, 24). She blamed it for domestic violence, and for making both women and men lose their self-control. Despite her anti-masturbation stance, Blackwell was a feminist who claimed that it was wrong to think that women were any less sexual than men.

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg was possibly the Victorian era's most renowned anti-masturbation fanatic. Kellogg (1852-1943), a cereal magnate, was a health advocate who received his medical degree from Bellevue Hospital Medical College in New York in 1875, and worked to change the nation's sexual appetite through diet. As the staff physician at the health reform institute known as Battle Creek Sanatorium, he promoted a strict regime of bland foods and daily exercise for overall health. Kellogg believed that the key to being fit lay in sexual starvation. He thought masturbation was 'the most dangerous' (Kellogg, 2007, 143) of the sexual behaviours, and in his *Treatment for Self-Abuse and its Effects* (1888) he describes numerous ways to stop children from masturbating. Kellogg reputedly spent the first night of his honeymoon writing his *Plain Facts for Old and Young*, a 225-page treatise with a 97-page focus on female masturbation, which he refers to as 'A Beauty-Destroying Vice' (Kellogg, 2007, 214):

But by far the worst enemy of beauty and health of body, mind, and soul... is a sin concerning which we would gladly keep silence; but we cannot see so many of our most beautiful and promising girls and young ladies annually being ruined, often for this world and the next alike, without uttering the word of warning needed... misuse or abuse of the sexual organism is visited in girls and women, as in boys and men, with the most fearful penalties. Nothing will sooner deprive a girl or young lady of the maidenly grace and freshness with which nature blesses woman in her early years than secret vice...

The awful effects of this sin against God and nature, this soul-and-body-destroying vice... stamps its insignia upon the countenance; it shows itself in the walk, in the changed disposition and the loss of healthy vigor. It is not only impossible for a victim of this sinful practice to hide from the all-seeing eye of God the vileness perpetrated in secret, but it is also useless to attempt to hide from human eyes the awful truth.

Headache, side-ache, back-ache, pains in the chest, and wandering pains in various parts of the body, – these are but a few of the painful ailments from which girls who are guilty of this sin suffer...

Not infrequently it is not until the girl has grown up to be a wife and mother that... new weaknesses and diseases make their appearance,

new pains and sufferings are felt, which no woman who has not in some way seriously transgressed the laws of health will suffer... Often, indeed, maternity is impossible, the injury resulting from the sins committed being so great as to render the diseased organism incapable of the functions required. (Kellogg, 2007, 214-217)

Kellogg and Blackwell were just two of many health-through-sexual-abstinence advocates who wrote tracts which were designed to inculcate fear of aspects of sexuality, and who contributed to a general climate of over-zealous anti-masturbation fanaticism and repression of female sexuality. Their specific emphasis was on eradicating female masturbation by convincing women via a proliferation of such texts as that quoted above that any form of self-pleasuring would cause irreparable damage to the bodies of any woman who indulged. And because the writers of these texts had a medical or scientific background, many readers took their fear-driven texts to be fact.

It was during this time that Emily Dickinson, speaking her desire, and using her eroticism socially and psychologically to empower herself, wrote some of her most sexually explicit poems – many of which were about the joy, the pleasure – and the necessity and the importance – of female masturbation.

Emily Dickinson's horticulture metaphors:

Emily Dickinson wrote much of her poetry and prose regarding masturbation in a euphemistically metaphorical coded language that frequently relied on horticultural metaphors to convey her messages. Paula Bennett refers to this language as 'the conventionalized and readily decodable terms of women's identification with nature – in particular, with flowers' (Bennett, 1995, 194).

Dickinson's use of flowers as sexual metaphors in her poetry is complex and multi-layered. In an early poem, poem J168/F179, she acknowledges that certain objects are metaphors and should not be taken literally. In poem J168/F179, Dickinson deploys her autoeroticist to ask about '*flowers*', but she also alerts readers to her own method of utilising metaphor. Dickinson has her autoeroticist ask: 'If the foolish call them "*flowers*" –/Need the wiser, *tell*?' (J168/F179)

Poem J168/F179 is mediated through the sexual personae of an autoeroticist who has divided a readership into two distinct categories: 'the foolish' and 'the wiser'. In this instance, 'the foolish' are those who, when presented with the metaphor of '*flowers*', are unable to deduce that those '*flowers*' are sexual metaphors and are only able to see flowers and nothing else. Conversely, 'the wiser' are those who, when presented with the metaphor of '*flowers*', understand that those '*flowers*' are sexual metaphors. The poem's second line rhetorically asks the reader if those who are 'wiser' 'Need' to '*tell*' 'the foolish' that sometimes, although they may 'call' '*flowers*' flowers, this is not necessarily the case. To paraphrase:

Is it really necessary, Dickinson's autoeroticist asks rhetorically, for 'wiser' readers who've understood metaphor, to '*tell*' 'the foolish' readers who

haven't understood metaphor, that sometimes '*flowers*' are far more than just flowers?

The autoeroticist's use of the italicised word '*tell*' is significant in that it ends a rhetorical question that is addressed to 'the wiser' reader concerning the exclusivity of the autoeroticist's voyeuristic and knowing audience. There is an element of the autoeroticist persona performing for an audience of sophisticated hedonists in the two-line question: 'If the foolish call them "*flowers*"—/Need the wiser, *tell*?'(J168/F179).

Simultaneously, Emily Dickinson, the poet, uses the rhetorical question embedded in these two lines to convey to the reader (via the meta-fictional technique of indirectly explaining specific knowledge) the method of her own aesthetic process, whilst also self-reflexively commenting on that knowledge and the technique used to impart it. Consequently, she is very careful to let the discerning, 'wiser' readers know she is using '*flowers*' metaphorically; referring to those who would regard '*flowers*' as being *only* flowers as 'the foolish'. For the 'foolish' or less-discerning readers, Dickinson uses italics and quotation marks to emphasise the word '*flowers*'; she also uses italics to emphasise the word '*tell*'.

Dickinson's use of the italicised and quoted metaphor '*flowers*' is significant in that it draws attention to the fact that it is likely 'the foolish' will consider her use of the word '*flowers*' to be literal, and to be nothing more than '*flowers*'. The italics and quotation marks also alert 'the wiser' reader to the fact that '*flowers*' is important as a metaphorical – and that it is being commented on.

The use of the italicised word '*tell*' is significant in that it ends a rhetorical question that is addressed to the reader concerning the exclusivity of the autoeroticist's voyeuristic and knowing audience. There is an element of the autoeroticist persona performing for a readership or audience of sophisticated hedonists in the two-line question.

With regard to Dickinson's use of flower metaphors, by being written and presented as a question that 'the wiser' reader is asked directly, poem J168/F179 is presented as a meta-narrative that comments on and questions Dickinson's own poetic process and technique. Specifically, it questions the 'Need' to explain to readers who don't understand the deployment of sexualised metaphors and symbols for poetic effect. The implication is that 'the foolish' don't 'Need' to have the function of metaphors explained to them. Poem J168/F179 announces its own exclusivity in its first two lines as it outlines Dickinson's deployment of metaphor and then comments on that deployment.

Over half of Dickinson's poetic output contains references to flowers of one sort or another. Consequently, horticultural metaphors abound in Dickinson's poetry.

Poem J339/F367, for example, depicts an unnamed female someone resorting to masturbation while the 'Absentee' lover is elsewhere. It is almost a blueprint of Dickinson's technique and contains the type of indirect, but also very explicit language Dickinson uses to present her autoerotic ideas.

I tend my flower for thee –
Bright Absentee!

My Fuschzia's Coral Seams
Rip – while the Sower – dreams...

My Cactus – splits her Beard
To show her throat...

A Hyacinth – I hid –
Puts out a Ruffled Head –
And odors fall...

Upon my Garden floor -
Yet – thou – not there...

Her Lord – away! (J339/F367)

In poem J339/F367, Dickinson uses the persona of a female horticulturist to suggest to an absentee lover that she will masturbate in his/her absence, in order to keep her 'flower' and her 'Garden' tended for him/her. The poem is addressed, in the form of a note, to someone 'not there'; a 'Bright Absentee' who is 'away', and the main claim made by the autoeroticist is that she is masturbating 'for thee', the 'Absentee', and not for herself. The poem contains the dichotomy of an erotic promise to masturbate ('I tend my flower for thee'), and the hint of a mild rebuke: 'thou – not there'. The bulk of the poem is a description of female masturbation disguised as horticultural activity. Describing how her labia lips part as she inserts her finger inside her vagina as she fantasises, the female autoeroticist tells her lover 'My Fuschzia's Coral Seams/Rip – while the Sower – dreams...' She then talks about the depths of her vagina: 'My Cactus – splits her Beard/To show her throat...' and how her clitoris enlarges through stimulation and arousal:

A Hyacinth – I hid –
Puts out a Ruffled Head –
And odors fall... (J339/F367)

Emily Dickinson's sexualised discourse is often mediated through such oblique, coded language of dense botanical metaphor and convoluted nature symbolism involving 'Birds' (J1420/F1450), 'Bees' (J1405/F1426), 'flowers' (J137/F95), 'Trees' (J742/F778), 'Butterflies' (J137/F95), a 'garden' (J116/F101), and many other elements from the world of nature.

In some of her poems, Emily Dickinson takes the euphemistic phrase 'the birds and the bees' quite literally, whereas in other poems, she uses the phrase, 'the birds and the bees', (sometimes expanded to 'the birds, the bees and the butterflies', or to 'the birds, the bees, the flowers, and the trees') as it is meant; as an English-language idiomatic expression which refers specifically to courtship and sex and is usually used in reference to teaching someone about sex and reproduction. The phrase is evocative of the metaphors and euphemisms often used as strategies to avoid speaking candidly and technically about the subject of sex. The idiomatic phrase has a distinguished literary

history. Pliny mentions the activities of 'birds... and bees' (Pliny, 1967, 471) as analogies for human activity in his *Natural History*; Virgil mentions 'birds, And... bees' (Virgil, 1983, 108) in the *Georgics*; and in his *Theogony*, Hesiod mentions: 'the birds; as swift as time they dart along... and in the thatched hives honey-bees feed the drones' (Hesiod, 1973, 31; 42).

Emily Dickinson's classical education means she would have been familiar with these particular works – and with the concept of 'the birds, the bees, the flowers, and the trees' as a metaphor for human sexual activity. Dickinson's interest in the fiction of her contemporaries means she would also have been aware of the reference to 'the birds and the bees' (Collins, 1999, 352) in Wilkie Collins' novel, *The Moonstone* (1868). The phrase then was commonplace and its meaning quite clear.

Emily Dickinson was not the only poet to write about masturbation – Baudelaire, Whitman and Swinburne also wrote about it, as did many other contemporary poets, although sometimes the work of these other (mostly male) poets was possibly not as serious as Dickinson's. As Derek Parker states in his 'Introduction' to *An Anthology of Erotic Verse*: 'Occasionally, to be sure, one is rather uneasily aware that the poets are writing to arouse themselves' (Parker, 1980, 22).

Emily Dickinson may very well have been 'writing to arouse' herself, but she seems also to have had other functions in mind for her poetry. Her utilisation of an autoeroticist persona in several of her poems is a literary strategy she employs to present her thoughts and theories on masturbation and its various permutations. For the purposes of this thesis, the two definitions for autoeroticism are: self-satisfaction of sexual desire, as by masturbation, and the arousal of sexual feeling without an external stimulus.

As with the other sexual personae that she utilised in her poetry, Emily Dickinson's autoeroticist personae are multitudinous, the types including an autoeroticist who has to masturbate out of necessity due to her lover being absent; one who finds masturbation 'arid'; another who is finding it difficult to orgasm via masturbation; an autoeroticist who surreptitiously masturbates and is discovered doing so by her lover; one who teases herself by temporarily denying herself satisfaction; another who uses masturbation as a method of preparing herself for penetrative sex with her lover; an autoeroticist who uses sex toys, in particular a dildo; one who uses masturbation as a way to self-knowledge; and another who achieves pleasure through spontaneous and unexpected touching.

The autoerotic persona is one mode of presentation for a literary artist. Dickinson's 'Representative of the Verse' or 'supposed person' (Letter 268), is the specific sexual personae she utilises in her poetry. Emily Dickinson, like Baudelaire and Swinburne, uses the tropes of decadent literature in her work, and could be considered a decadent poet. According to Peter Michelson:

Early decadence manifested itself in subject and imagery rather than form. By introducing the ugly, the grotesque, and the 'immoral' as agencies of beauty and 'harmony', the early decadents refuted moral idealism, but maintained the poetic unity so long associated with it. Thus decadence

attempted to 'liberate' art from morality, and even life. (Michelson, 1993, 74)

Here then, is a reference to one of Dickinson's projects. Through the medium of a variety of sexual personae – and because of the emotional distance and detachment that Dickinson achieves by utilizing each particular mask or persona – Dickinson is able to clearly present the erotic thoughts and actions of her sexual beings. In the following pages of this chapter, Dickinson explores the masturbatory actions of her autoeroticist.

Masturbation as a substitute for an absent lover:

Emily Dickinson's employment of an autoeroticist persona who presents masturbation as a necessary sexual substitute for an absent lover is evident in poem J773/F872: 'Deprived of other Banquet,/I entertained Myself –' (J773/F872).

Dickinson's use of the food metaphor, 'Banquet', in this poem indicates the importance of sex to her autoeroticist persona. The implication is that sex, like food, is a necessity. In J773/F872, the sex she has been 'Deprived of' is not simply a meal, but is rather a sumptuous multi-course 'Banquet'. In this poem, masturbation is presented as an expedient form of arousal and release, but also of play, for as the autoeroticist states: she 'entertained' herself. The implication is that the masturbation she 'entertained' herself with is equal to, not less than, the 'other Banquet' of sex with her lover, that she was deprived of. Dickinson's masturbator does not present a sexual hierarchy, but presents masturbation as a necessity, due to being 'Deprived' of a full sexual 'Banquet' with her lover.

The capitalised 'Myself' reveals the importance of the self to the autoeroticist persona – and the necessarily solipsistic and solitary nature of that particular sexual persona's activities.

While the poem contains a celebratory tone, as evidenced by the word 'Entertained', there is also an undercurrent of what Dickinson refers to as the 'Sweets of Pathos' (Letter 668), due to the presence of the word 'Deprived' in the poem. The poem continues:

At first – a scant nutrition –
An insufficient Loaf –

But grown by slender additions
To so esteemed a size
'Tis sumptuous enough for me –
And almost to suffice (J773/F872)

Here Dickinson's autoeroticist continues to use the food metaphor as she compares the two sexual activities – masturbation and intercourse, and states that 'At first', masturbation does not provide much in the way of satisfaction; that it is 'insufficient' and provides 'scant nutrition'. Dickinson puns on the word 'Loaf' (a word favoured by Whitman), using it to continue the food metaphor, to make a Biblical analogy, and to suggest either that the autoeroticist's loafing (a

euphemism for masturbation) is 'insufficient', that is, initially without reward, until 'slender addings' make it satisfactory, or that the lover's attempt to sexually satisfy the autoeroticist is unsuccessful because the 'size' of his 'insufficient Loaf' provides 'scant nutrition'. This is remedied by the autoeroticist who states that by constant manipulation or 'slender addings', the intensity of feelings has 'grown' to become 'sumptuous enough'. Dickinson puns on the word 'grown', suggesting either that the intensity of the autoeroticist's feelings had 'grown', or that her clitoris has enlarged or 'grown... To so esteemed a size', due to her stimulation. The word 'grown' also puns on its homophone to suggest 'groan', which implies that the masturbator has uttered or is uttering a groaning sound during the masturbatory act.

Finally, the autoeroticist claims the resulting gratification from masturbation, although 'sumptuous enough', is not quite the same as satisfaction from intercourse, which is the 'other Banquet' she is being 'Deprived of', although she does claim it is 'almost to suffice'.

Poem J693/F716 does something very similar to the above poem. Dickinson's autoeroticist persona in poem J693/F716 is again someone whose lover's absence has meant that she has had to masturbate in order to achieve sexual satisfaction:

Wherefore so late – I murmured –
My need of Thee – be done –
Therefore – the Pearl responded – (J693/F716)

In this instance, the lover has returned just after the autoeroticist has finished masturbating and has achieved orgasm. The autoeroticist asks why s/he (the lover) is 'so late' returning, as her need' of the lover is 'done' or no longer necessary. The autoeroticist adds that this is because her 'Pearl responded'.

Dickinson's use of the word 'Pearl' in the final line of poem J693/F716, and of her use of the same word in many other poems, including: 'Happening in After Ages/To entertain a Pearl –' (J693/F716) is an example of how the word 'Pearl' is used as a metaphor for the vagina or clitoris. As Paula Bennett points out in *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet*:

Dews, crumbs, pearls and berries' and peas, pebbles, pellets, beads and nuts' are 'images that represented to the poet her subjective awareness of her female sexual self... In privileging this imagery, consciously or unconsciously, Dickinson was replacing the hierarchies of phallogocentric discourse – hierarchies that disempowered her as a woman and as a poet – with a (paradoxical) clitorocentrism of her own. (Bennett, 1990, 173)

After having extolled the pleasures of masturbation in poem J773/F872, the absence of the lover in another poem causes one of Emily Dickinson's autoeroticist personae to describe masturbation as 'an arid pleasure' (J782/F885). Dickinson's use of 'arid', with its twin definitions of dry and dull, is revealing, for the suggestion is that although masturbation is an expedient

sexual necessity due to the lover's absence, it is the lover who provides the necessary excitement and its resultant lubrication.

Dickinson also presents an autoeroticist persona for whom the moment of orgasm remains elusive and demands more effort in order to be achieved; what is needed is a faster masturbatory rhythm:

Severer service of myself
I – hastened to demand
To fill the awful vacuum...

I strove...
To harass to fatigue
The glittering Retinue of nerves – (J786/F887)

In poem J903/F80, the autoeroticist persona articulates a moment of surreptitious masturbation – just as the 'unsuspecting' lover reaches out for her:

I hide myself within my flower,
That fading from your Vase,
You, unsuspecting, feel for me —
Almost a loneliness. (J903/F80)

In this poem, the autoeroticist is so busy hiding herself 'within' her 'flower', or employing what Swinburne referred to as 'the strokes of night' (Swinburne, 1927, 272), that she is unconcerned that her lover is reaching out to 'feel' for her. The moment of physical contact is delayed in order to heighten the sexual tension, and to suggest that the autoeroticist is near to orgasm. The lover is presented as 'unsuspecting', but Dickinson's autoeroticist persona refers to the lover as 'You'. This particular strategy has the effect of re-positioning the reader as the 'unsuspecting' partner who discovers the masturbating lover. The reaction is not specified, thereby allowing each reader to provide their own reaction.

The voyeur:

There is a reaction recorded in one of Dickinson's more complex autoerotic poems:

The supreme iniquity –
...thy candid hand
In a moment contraband – (J1461/F1500)

In this poem, the viewpoint has been switched to that of another type of autoeroticist. The speaking persona is no longer the masturbator, but a voyeuristic partner who is observing the masturbator. The one watching the masturbator is therefore put into the position of voyeur, although whether this is willingly or unwillingly is not stated, nor is it made clear from the context.

The 'candid hand' implies a bold, unashamed masturbatory act, whereas a 'contraband' hand is one that is involved in an act that is surreptitious or stolen. 'Contra' is Latin for 'against', and 'bando' is Italian for 'law'. The word 'contraband' (against the law) therefore implies a criminal act – or certainly an act which is forbidden or taboo. This is supported by the voyeur's use of the phrase 'The supreme iniquity' to describe the act of masturbation.

In poem J1461/F1500, Dickinson has the voyeur use the archaic 'thy' instead of 'your'. This specific word choice implies that this particular persona has been given repressive/conservative tendencies, because the word 'thy' is biblical, specifically from *The Lord's Prayer*, namely the interdictory lines:

Thy Kingdom come

Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven... (*Matthew* 6: 9-13; *Luke* 11: 2-4)

Throughout her poetry, Dickinson frequently uses words from Christian texts, prayers, hymns, or sermons in her poetry and letters. *The Lord's Prayer* is one text that she repeatedly refers to or quotes from in her writing, often for an ironic or subversive purpose. The purpose in this particular poem is to suggest that the voyeur is on some self-awarded moral high ground, and is making a value judgement about the masturbator and masturbatory act s/he is witnessing. This in turn raises questions about the psychology of the voyeur – and the morality of voyeurism when compared to masturbation.

In poem J1461/F1500, Dickinson has created a moral dichotomy whereby the voyeur is revealed to be judgemental regarding masturbation, despite being a willing voyeur of the masturbatory act that offends him/her. Dickinson skilfully co-opts the reader into making their own psychological assessments – and their own value judgements of the voyeur, of the masturbator, and of the acts of voyeurism and masturbation.

Finally, with regards to the metrical musicality of this particular poem, Dickinson emphasises the repetitive rhythm of the masturbatory act by the use of repetition of the '-and' sound:

Thy c-*and*-id h-*and*

In a mo-ment con-tra-*band* – (J1461/F1500)

The subject of the poem (clandestine masturbation) is commented on by the voyeur in disapproving and censorious terms, but the incantatory repetition and the sensual rhythm of the mode of expression is delivered in time to the movements of the masturbation, revealing the voyeur's fascination for the 'iniquity', and thereby undermining the criticism of the 'contraband' act. Here Dickinson can be seen to be melding content with form in order to expose one aspect of the hypocrisy of the Victorian era's attitude to non-productive sexual acts.

Sometimes the masturbating female speaks of the 'magnanimous' delight of unplanned spontaneous masturbation; explaining how to 'take oneself by surprise' is 'the finest of joys':

To do a magnanimous thing
And take oneself by surprise
If one is not in the habit of him
Is precisely the finest of joys – (J1699/F1729)

When the autoerotic persona mentions that her spontaneous ('by surprise') 'masturbatory activity' (Freud, 1977, 250) has come about because 'one is not in the habit of him', it implies that her male lover – who she is now 'not in the habit of' – is absent. Therefore, the autoeroticist persona's 'compulsion to masturbate' (Freud 1991a 167) is not only presented in the poem as an essential method of sexual release and gratification, but also, because of the masturbating persona's willingness to experience 'the finest of joys' or pleasures by taking herself 'by surprise', it describes the joy of pleasure's spontaneity and culmination after its deferment. Dickinson's precise use of the word 'magnanimous', which is a synonym for 'generous', 'kind', 'charitable' or 'altruistic', implies that the act of masturbation (an activity presented as necessary due to the lover being away) is a 'magnanimous' act of self-kindness or self-compassion.

The notions that masturbation is a necessary act, and also an act of kindness to one's self, would not have been either popular or accepted views in Emily Dickinson's lifetime, which was a time when masturbation was perceived to be a vice, and, as pointed out by John Harvey Kellogg, the 'most dangerous of all sexual abuses' was female masturbation (Kellogg, 2007, 143).

In the mid-nineteenth century, medical texts began to discuss the clitoris and its evident purpose. Doctors were troubled by its location as well as its possibilities. They concluded that the reason the clitoris was located within easy reach of the average woman's fingers and not inside the vagina, where it would be more easily stimulated during intercourse, was that women were designed to experience sexual pleasure without relying on a man; this conclusion was enormously threatening to the Victorian male. Female masturbation (something that some male doctors had once considered impossible) represented women's independence.

Emily Dickinson's description in poem J1699/F1729 of her autoeroticist's 'magnanimous' taking 'oneself by surprise', and her claim that it is 'the finest of joys', indicates that the poem has a subversive message. The 'magnanimous' pleasuring of 'oneself' due to sexual needs arising because of a lover's absence; the spontaneous act of taking 'oneself by surprise'; and ultimately experiencing 'the finest of joys', are all examples of a woman's sexual independence. The result of Dickinson's feminist stand in this particular poem had repercussions: the poem itself was not published in any form until the mid-twentieth century, and was not available to be read by the public until 1955, when Thomas H. Johnson included it in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

In poem J802/F858, Dickinson changes tack and writes about masturbation as a method of vaginal preparation for penetrative sex. Dickinson is not averse to using humour to make her point: poem J802/F858's autoeroticist is an anxious autoeroticist who uses masturbation as a method of preparing herself for penetrative sex with her lover, but who then becomes so engrossed in masturbation that the eager lover is ignored:

I fear me this Circumference
Engross my Finitude –

To His exclusion, who prepare
By Processes of Size...
Of His diameters – (J802/F858)

In the above poem, the autoeroticist has allowed her exploration and stimulation of her own 'Circumference'; that is, her 'persistence in masturbation' (Freud, 1977, 380), and her enjoyment of masturbation, to 'Engross' her to the 'exclusion' of her lover, who is attempting to 'prepare' the autoeroticist for the 'Processes of size' of 'His diameters'; that is, of penetration, of insertion, and of sexual consummation.

Dildo masturbation:

Dickinson also uses the persona of an autoeroticist who masturbates using a dildo. A dildo is a sex toy, often explicitly phallic in appearance, intended for bodily penetration during masturbation or sex with a partner or partners. 'Dildos,' according to *The Big Book of Sex Toys*, 'are insertable toys designed for penetration that don't vibrate... They vary in length and width... Some dildos are made to look like penises, while others are simply phallic in shape' (Taormino, 2009, 138). Dildos and other sexual items are also known to be used not only for masturbation but also for other sexual activities'. Dildos were a common aid to masturbation in ancient Greek times. Most dildos were manufactured and exported from Miletus. According to one historian:

Miletus, a wealthy commercial city on the coast of Asia Minor, was the manufacturing and exporting center of what the Greeks called the *olisbos*, and later generations, less euphoniously, the dildo... This imitation penis appears in Greek times to have been made either of wood or padded leather and had to be liberally anointed with olive oil before use. (Tannahill, 1980, 98)

The earliest extant literary reference to the dildo – complete with a complaint about the lack of dildos being exported from Miletus, due to a betrayal by – and subsequent war with – the Milesians – is to be found in Aristophanes' 411 BC comedy, *Lysistrata*:

And so, girls, when fucking time comes... not the faintest whiff of it anywhere, right? From the time those Milesians betrayed us, we can't even find our eight-inch leather dildos. At least they'd serve as a sort of flesh-replacement for our poor cunts... (Aristophanes, 2000, 1,1,46)

Herodas' comic drama, *The Two Friends*, written in the 3rd Century BC, involves two young women friends, Metro and Koritto, and begins with Metro trying to find out who made Koritto's dildo for her:

Metro: Please don't lie to me, dear Koritto. Who was the man that made that red dildo for you?

Koritto: Oh, have you seen it, Metro? Tell me – have you?

Metro: Yes, Koritto, and what I particularly want to find out from you is: who made it for you? If you love me, tell me... Please, Koritto, don't hold back – tell me who made it?

Koritto: Oh, why plead with me? Kerdon made it... He came with two of them, Metro. When I saw them, my eyes swam at the sight – men simply don't have such big, firm pricks! Not only that, but the dildo is so smooth – and its straps are soft like wool, not leather. (Herodas, 2002, 83)

The dildo is also mentioned by John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, the English libertine poet known as Rochester, who published his poem *Signior Dildo* in 1673. Rochester's *Signior Dildo (You ladies all of merry England)*, was a mock address anticipating the advantages of a Catholic marriage and the subsequent importation of Italian dildos, to the unspeakable joy and comfort of all the ladies of England:

You ladies all of merry England
Who have been to kiss the Duchess's hand,
Pray, did you not lately observe in the show
A noble Italian called Signor Dildo?...

A rabble of pricks who were welcomed before,
Now finding the porter denied them the door,
Maliciously waited his coming below
And inhumanly fell on Signor Dildo... (Rochester, 1995, 36)

Emily Dickinson dildo poems use more oblique language than Rochester or any of the Greek or Roman dramatists. In her typically elliptical style, she does not mention the dildo by name, but uses obvious descriptive metaphors for it, in particular a 'Columnar' object, and a phallic 'Dirk'. With most of Dickinson's writing, her indirect treatment of the thing gives her the freedom to be far more candid and graphically descriptive than those who preferred a 'Direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective' (Pound, 2005, 95). In poem J379/F664, for example, Dickinson has her autoeroticist espousing the joys of masturbation using a dildo:

Rehearsal to Ourselves
Of a Withdrawn Delight –
Affords a Bliss like Murder –
Omnipotent – Acute –

We will not drop the Dirk –
Because We love the Wound
The Dirk Commemorate – Itself

Remind Us that we died. (J379/F664)

The drama of the masturbatory act is evident in the word 'Rehearsal' and an element of self-teasing is also implicit in the phrase 'Withdrawn Delight'. The word 'Commemorate' in the penultimate line posits masturbation as a ceremony honouring something – or more likely, someone – presumably the person who is the object of affection. Dickinson's autoeroticist persona therefore imbues her act of dildo masturbation with the importance of ceremony or ritual.

The final line of the poem: 'Remind Us that we died' is an oblique reference to the French phrase *La petite mort*, or 'the little death', which is a term of reference for the refractory or recovery phase that follows sexual orgasm. The term has been generally used to describe the post-orgasmic fainting spells or the bouts of unconsciousness that some lovers experience. It can also refer to the spiritual release that comes with orgasm, or to a short period of melancholy or transcendence, as a result of the expenditure of what Bernard Shaw referred to as the 'Life Force' (Shaw, 1957, 169).

In poem J789/F740 Dickinson again writes of dildo masturbation, but in a more subtle way:

On a Columnar Self –
How ample to rely
In Tumult – or Extremity –
How good the Certainty (J789/F740)

In this poem, the 'Columnar' (or column-shaped) dildo is also a part of the autoeroticist's 'Self' – in other words, it is a part of her. Here, in two words Dickinson is able to discreetly write of phallic insertion, and to then comment in the following line on the large or 'ample' size of the 'Columnar' dildo the masturbator is having 'to rely' on for sexual fulfilment. In this particular poem, Dickinson's description is very explicit; the beginning of the first line states: 'On a Columnar self'. The first two words – 'On a' – clearly indicate that the female autoeroticist has lowered herself onto the 'Columnar' dildo. Dickinson's autoeroticist then goes on to mention two states of sexual arousal or gratification: 'Tumult' (upheaval or commotion) and 'Extremity' (the limit or furthest point), and to suggest that the 'Columnar' object can be relied upon ('How good the Certainty') to provide satisfaction for one or the other of these states.

In poem J789/F740, Dickinson's autoeroticist provides a detailed description of the sexual activity, the item used, the size of the item used, and the position of the autoeroticist. The subject of the poem is in direct opposition to the medical advice of the day regarding the use of dildos. As Reay Tannahill points out in *Sex in History*, in an era

when dildoes were used to excess... All the handbooks warned against too much reliance on these in case they damaged the tissues, a particular hazard. (Tannahill, 1980, 179)

Dickinson also writes of dildo masturbation in poem J378/F633, but unlike J789/F740, poem J378/F633 is more concerned with the masturbator's mental reaction to her physical stimulation:

I felt the columns close –
The Earth reversed her Hemispheres –
I touched the Universe –

And back it slid – and I alone...
Went out upon Circumference –
Beyond the Dip of Bell – (J378/F633)

That an unmarried female poet was prepared to write of such intimate acts at all in 1862 not only shows a great deal of daring on Dickinson's part, but it also reveals Dickinson's seriousness of intention and commitment to enlarging the subject remit of poetry. It is also indicative of her artistic need to produce poetry that expressed the pleasurable aspects of female sexuality that generally remained unwritten about by women Victorian writers.

Dickinson also uses similarly oblique metaphorical language and symbolic imagery when writing of orgasm achieved through masturbation: 'In my Puritan Garden, and as a farther stimulus, I had an Eclipse of the Sun a few Mornings ago' (Dickinson, 1958, 270).

Emily Dickinson's poetry is not usually, in the words of Ezra Pound, a 'direct treatment of the 'thing'' (Pound, 2005, 95), but it is instead, or seems to be, a paradoxically indirect treatment of the 'thing', although the indirection appears to endow the poetry with a far more explicit content than any 'direct treatment' would have allowed. For example, the above line of Dickinson's was possibly about an actual eclipse of the sun that occurred on a specific date in New England, which is therefore a 'direct' reference to a literal, actual 'thing' or event. But it is also a symbolic or indirect image that has been utilised in order to refer to a specific sexual act. It has also been made into a metaphorically indirect reference to a state of sexual release. In poem J415/F427, Dickinson states: 'Master.../Eclipses be – predicted' (J415/F427).

In both pieces of writing, letter and poem, Dickinson is able to utilise the technique of symbolic realism to combine the actual or literal eclipse with the metaphorical and the symbolic eclipse – in order to signal her autoeroticist's desire and sexual anticipation.

Masturbation as a method of acquiring knowledge:

Dickinson deploys one of her autoeroticist personae to convey the idea that masturbation is a necessary method of acquiring self-knowledge. As with her other sexual personae, Emily Dickinson utilises a specific sexual persona for a particular purpose. Dickinson's autoeroticist's persona in poem J832/F814 suggests that one can grow or develop as a result of specific masturbatory activity. By using the theme of autoeroticism and, in particular, masturbation, Dickinson's autoerotic female persona is clearly positing the notion that

masturbation is a reliable method of finding out about oneself; of making certain that the female 'Continent' does not remain 'Undiscovered':

Explore thyself!
Therein thyself shalt find
The 'Undiscovered Continent' – (J832/F814)

Dickinson's use of the phrase 'Explore thyself' is complex and far-reaching. The phrase is firstly a direct quotation from Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), in which Thoreau wrote 'Explore thyself. Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve' (Thoreau, 1995, 218). Thoreau famously began *Walden* with the words:

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. (Thoreau, 1995, 1)

Because of Dickinson's admiration 'for Thoreau' (Dickinson, 1959, 455), her use of the quotation from *Walden* can be seen as a possible homage to Thoreau.

The quotation 'Explore thyself' is a satirical form of commandment, for the word 'thyself' (instead of 'yourself') is mock-biblical (as is 'shalt'), and the poem's tone is pseudo-biblical. In this respect, the poem can be seen as a female challenge to patriarchal literary domination. Emily Dickinson read the Bible, but was not religious in the conventional sense. Her presentation of a mock commandment is ironic – and a challenge to the patriarchal domination of the many narrators of the Bible, presumably, in this case, Moses, who was the mouth-piece through which the commandments were uttered.

'Explore thyself' is also a parody of the Ancient Greek aphorism 'Know thyself', or 'Know yourself' (Greek: γνῶθι σεαυτόν or *gnōthi seauton*) which according to the Greek geographer Pausanias is 'in the fore-temple [of Apollo] at Delphi' where there

are written maxims useful for the life of men, inscribed by those the Greeks say were sages. They... dedicated to Apollo the celebrated maxims, 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing in excess'. (Pausanias, 1965, 507)

There is also a reference to 'Know Yourself' in Juvenal's eleventh satire. According to Juvenal:

the saying, "Know Yourself" (inscribed on Apollo's temple at Delphi) comes from Heaven. It should be fixed and pondered in the unforgetting heart. (Juvenal, 2004, 403)

Dickinson's classical education would have ensured her familiarity with the works of these authors.

Dickinson would also have been familiar with Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem, 'Γνώθι Σεαυτόν' (Gnothi Seauton, or Know Thyself). Dickinson mentions having been sent a collection of 'Ralph Emerson's Poems' (Dickinson, 1958, 84) in one of her letters and Emerson was a guest at the Dickinson's family home when on a reading tour of New England. Dickinson wrote of the impact his poems had on her. 'Ralph Waldo Emerson... whose name my Father's Law Student taught me, has touched the secret Spring' (Dickinson, 1958, 750).

Dickinson's use of the phrase 'Explore thyself' can therefore be seen to be a subtle homage to Emerson. Her incorporation of a parody of the phrase 'know thyself' into her poetry can also be seen as an intertextual form of literary subversion and rebellion.

With reference to Emily Dickinson's use of the phrase 'Undiscovered Continent', it is important to recognise that both words are capitalized and that the phrase is placed inside quotation marks for particular emphasis. The phrase also has literary echoes; Dickinson's 'Undiscovered Continent' is a land mass that is bigger than Hamlet's 'Undiscovered country' (3,1,79), and bigger than Virgil's 'tiny Republic' (Virgil, 1983, 108). Hamlet's 'Undiscovered country' is a place that Dickinson's female persona refers to in a letter to an absent male friend, expressing 'rapture at your return, and of the loved steps, retraced almost from the "Undiscovered Country"' (Dickinson, 1958, 725).

Hamlet's use of the word 'country' when talking to Ophelia reveals Dickinson's intention of using the word in a similar way, namely to draw attention to female genitals, as Hamlet does when he speaks to Ophelia of 'country matters' that 'lie between maid's legs' (3,2,116-119). Therefore, the quotation is doubly ironic, for Dickinson, having competed with Moses as commandment-giver, now competes with Shakespeare by making her 'Undiscovered Continent' simultaneously refer to a vagina and also to a sexualised geographical mass that is bigger than Hamlet's 'Undiscovered country' and Virgil's 'tiny Republic'.

The idea of a woman exploring her own body for pleasure, here mooted by Dickinson via her autoeroticist personae, is one found in Christopher Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Elegies*, specifically 'Elegy 15' in *Book 2*. In 'Elegy 15', Marlowe's narrator describes his wish to transform into the ring he gave his absent lover, Korinna, thereby experiencing pleasure as she explores her body:

Blest ring, thou in my mistress' hand shall lie;
O would that suddenly into my gift
I could myself by secret magic shift!
Then would I wish thee touch my mistress' pap,
And hide thy left hand underneath her lap...
Then I...
Would first my beauteous wench's moist lips touch... (Marlowe, 1971, 155)

Marlowe's narrator then describes how his 'man's part', or 'thing will swell' and 'perform a man's part well'; one which will 'Fit her so well':

And... make thee...
Fit her so well, as she is fit for me...
But seeing thee, I think my thing will swell,
And even the ring perform a man's part well. (Marlowe, 1971, 155)

Like Marlowe, Dickinson achieves multi-layered intertextual irony by reconfiguring geography as anatomy, or anatomy as geography. John Donne does something very similar in his 'Elegy 19', 'To his Mistress Going to Bed', in which his narrator requests that his mistress:

Licence my roving hands, and let them go
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America, my new found land,
My kingdom, safest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my empery,
How blessed am I in this discovering thee! (Donne, 1970, 89)

H. Rider Haggard also reconfigured an exotic landscape into naked female anatomy, specifically by feminizing and sexualising the African topography in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). In that novel, Haggard describes the journey of three English men who successfully penetrate a sexualized African landscape; a landscape that is depicted as the body of the long-dead Queen of Sheba. The three English adventurers, led by the narrator Allan Quatermain, climb 'Sheba's breasts' (Haggard, 1994, 20) until they reach 'the nipple' (Haggard, 1994, 20), and then continue their journey, traveling across her torso, until the group arrive at, and 'enter... a cavity prepared to receive it' (Haggard, 1994, 251). The 'cavity' is where diamonds are stored inside the Queen's cavernous body, a space Haggard also ambiguously refers to as 'Solomon's treasure chamber' (Haggard, 1994, 21).

Haggard's depiction of the African landscape as highly feminized and sexualized represents the deep entrenchment in white men of the Victorian ideals of domesticity and femininity. Victorian women had to be passive, silent, and the object of the male gaze. Victorian male belief in their right to colonize and possess women is the motivating philosophy for colonization.

Haggard's experiences of Africa, and his belief in the patriarchal order of things, domestically, nationally and internationally, can be seen in the description of the map in the very first pages of *King Solomon's Mines*, which reveal it to be the barest outline of the female form, lying on her back with her legs spread apart and missing a head. This immediately generates an image of a woman passively waiting to be penetrated, her open legs a clear invitation. The description reveals Quatermain's view of the female bodyscape to be that of a 'recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep' (Haggard, 1994, 62). Such an image points to the rape of the landscape, people and lifestyles of South Africa for imperial gain. Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) sets the scene for a colonized Africa, whose lands and people are available for imperial consumption. The feminized and sexualized landscape is a contested one, it is both the passive and resistant target of the penetrative confidence of the male gaze and a test of virility (which is dependent on the stifling of female power),

and thus consequently an indicator of the anxieties infecting the imperial body politic in its compulsive need to prove this. Emily Dickinson's lines:

Explore thyself!
Therein thyself shalt find
The 'Undiscovered Continent' – (J832/F814)

have a tone which is far removed from the Victorian male sexual anxiety of Haggard's work. Dickinson's lines are celebratory, defiant and clearly influenced by the potency of a sexualised landscape and the effectiveness of readily-available explorer/ cartographer/ geographer metaphors for the exploration of the body. She writes of her autoeroticist's sexual awakening using similar techniques to Haggard.

Dickinson's three lines from poem J832/F814 therefore draw upon and make parallels with literature of the eroticised/sexualised exotic land mass explored by a human geographer, be it 'country' or 'continent', to explore ideas of the self, of an absent other, and of autoeroticism. Dickinson deliberately and consistently blurs the boundaries between psychological and physical self-exploration as her autoerotic persona emphasises the necessity of masturbation as a substitute for the loss or absence of a sexual partner, and as a method of self-discovery in all its forms.

The Masochist

Rather than deriding nineteenth-century masochistic sentimental literature as a genre of subjugation, and instead of championing nineteenth-century masochistic sentimental literature as emancipating, Marianne Noble, in *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (2000), argues that tropes of eroticized domination in sentimental literature need to be recognized for what they actually are, which is: aspects of simultaneous oppression and empowerment. To this end she attempts to show how – without there being a contradiction – the defenders and the critics of sentimental literature are both correct in their assessment of the genre's focus on pain as a mode of simultaneous liberation and subjugation.

Noble presents this seemingly tautological premise as a necessary corrective to the general critical/academic binary assumption that empowerment and suffering are mutually exclusive. 'I seek to offer a more complex and subtle analysis of sentimental masochism than... a victim/subversion dichotomy invites' (Noble, 2000, 4), Noble states, before claiming that 'within the ideological constraints of the culture' (Noble, 2000, 5), 'nineteenth-century American' sentimental literature 'is as obedient as it possibly could be, and yet, as the erotics of its violent imagery suggests, it is submissive with a vengeance' (Noble, 2000, 4-5).

Marianne Noble attempts to show the different ways in which a great deal of sentimental literature of the nineteenth century contains a streak of female masochism and abjection – and that masochism is 'neither subversive nor purely reactive' (Noble, 2000, 5). Noble carefully outlines her intentions. She states that *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* 'is a genealogy of the discourse that produces masochistic fantasies. It studies nineteenth-century literature by women in which violent images and tropes serve as the language of erotic desire' (Noble, 2000, 13).

Noble begins by exploring the various nineteenth-century social and cultural forces that converged, thereby creating an ideology of female sentimental masochistic desire. She focuses firstly on the Protestant discourses that equated suffering with love, and secondly, on the nineteenth-century middle-class male-created discourses that have become known as 'the Cult of True Womanhood' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 13). Noble then demonstrates how sentimental literature takes advantage of the expressive power in the convergence of these two overlapping discourses to present an imagined version of female romantic desire. Noble concludes that in sentimental literature, images of eroticized male domination of females are not necessarily the antithesis of female pleasure, but can be one constitutive aspect of it.

Noble defines how identification through suffering, as well as through pleasure, works in the production of – and the consumption of – sentimental literature. This particular strand of Noble's inquiry – possibly the primary concern of the book – contains seemingly disparate, even contradictory notions, and is a particularly interesting aspect of the analysis of sentimental literature – or of sentimental masochism in general – that has been explored by a scholar in recent years.

Through an investigation of Emily Dickinson's poetry, Marianne Noble explicates the ways in which masochism eludes the binary opposition of the submissive to the dominant. The author warns against an over-reliance on the certainty of the self/other dichotomy because, as she reveals, the masochist's power is simultaneously the centre and the circumference of a theatrical or performative power space that is indifferent to the oppressive political, social, and generally patriarchal hierarchies that function within the nineteenth-century culture she is analysing.

Noble's investigation of a nineteenth-century 'masochistic aesthetic' leads her to reference the theoretical work on masochism found in the constitutive texts of Kinsey and Krafft-Ebing, although, as she takes pains (no pun intended) to point out, her 'book makes no attempt to formulate a comprehensive theory of the origins of masochistic desire' (Noble, 2000, 14). Therefore, there is no reference to possibly the most famous – or infamous – of all nineteenth-century masochists: Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, author of the masochistic novel, *Venus in Furs* (1870), and the person that masochism was named after. However, Noble systematically explicates – and advances – the premises regarding masochism in nineteenth-century literature, psychology, sociology and cultural studies as were subsequently posited by Deleuze, Bataille, Kristeva, Benjamin, Bersani, Noyes, and Mansfield. Having outlined the dual nature of masochism: masochism as subjugation; masochism as subversive pleasure, Noble then explicates and analyses the sentimental masochism that is readily found in the letters and poems of Emily Dickinson. In a chapter entitled 'The Revenge of Cato's Daughter', Noble explicates and analyses the ways in which Emily Dickinson poetically utilises the concept of masochism or suffering as a method of control.

Noble's essay continues an argument first posited by Gilles Deleuze in his seminal work on masochism and masochistic desire, *Coldness and Cruelty* (1989). Noble states that Dickinson, along with the other authors she has analysed, utilises 'two converging discourses – sentimentalism and Calvinism' (Noble, 2000, 147), and that:

Dickinson takes advantage of this convergence for aesthetic purposes. However, unlike Warner's and Stowe's, Dickinson's use of sentimental masochism as an expression of desire is a self-conscious, ironic, and intentional appropriation of conventional discourse for her own literary aims. (Noble, 2000, 147)

Specific reference is made by Noble to a letter written by Emily Dickinson, known as the "'man of noon" letter' (Noble, 2000, 147). Noble's explication of this letter reveals a great deal about Dickinson's 'intentional appropriation' of the attitudes, trappings and rituals of masochism that are utilised in many of Dickinson's letters and poems, and an example of Dickinson's 'poetic fusion of body and text' (Noble, 2000, 152), into a sexual/textual hybrid.

In a footnote to 'The Revenge of Cato's Daughter', Marianne Noble criticises Camille Paglia's misreading of the sadomasochism in Emily Dickinson's poetry. In her book, *Sexual Personae* (1990), Paglia claims that 'the academic

view of [Dickinson] remains too genteel'. Paglia also asserts: 'She is frightening' (Paglia, 1990, 637). Noble criticises Paglia's claims that 'Dickinson as much as Baudelaire is anti-bourgeois' (Paglia, 1990, 633) and that 'Dickinson relishes blood...' (Paglia, 1990, 633), by stating: 'Paglia's absolute belief in biological determinism leads her to pronouncements about female nature that are not only detestable but dangerous, because they routinely receive serious widespread attention in the contemporary culture at large. Paglia', Noble concludes, 'derives appalling social conclusions' (Noble, 2000, 226).

Noble concludes her argument by positing Dickinson's 'act of writing as fundamentally masochistic' (Noble, 2000, 233), a theoretical stance she shares with Hélène Cixous. Noble reiterates her belief that Emily Dickinson confronts 'the misery of the human condition' (Noble, 2000, 191) in 'poetry that has afforded readers intellectual and sensual pleasures for over a century, with no foreseeable decline in her relevance for contemporary readers' (Noble, 2000, 191), and that Dickinson was able to achieve aesthetic 'empowerment through masochism', and that 'Dickinson's successful grasp of aesthetic power through the deliberate cultivation of suffering suggests that we should rethink our attitudes to masochism' (Noble, 2000, 191).

Masochism is generally defined as the passive acceptance of pain for sexual gratification. In her poetic and her epistolary writings, Dickinson utilises a masochistic persona in order to participate in and to continue a masochistic literary tradition in which the metaphorical pain of love and the agony of unrequited desire form constant themes. As she writes in letter 66:

I dont care how sharp the pain is, not if it dart like arrows, or pierce bone and bone like the envenomed barb, I should be twice, *thrice* happy to bear it... (Dickinson, 1958, 162)

Emily Dickinson is just one of many writers for who there is pleasure in pain or 'Pain in Pleasure' (Barrett Browning, 1996, 333), and for who – during a 'momentary intoxication with pain' (Bronowski, 1967, 15) – pain and love, or pain and sexual pleasure, are intricately intertwined – and have always been so entwined. Dickinson has written several poems from the masochist's perspective; poems which chronicle the physical and mental (psychological) effects of 'aromatic pain' (Pope, 1977, 511). These poems include: 'After great pain, a formal feeling comes' (J341/F371); 'Pain has an element of blank' (J650/F760); 'T'was the old – road – through pain' (J344/F365); 'There is a pain so utter' (J599/F515); 'A Plated Life – diversified/ With Gold and Silver Pain' (J806/F864); 'Pain – expands the Time' (J967/F833); 'If pain for peace prepares' (J63/F155); 'Teach me the skill... That I instil the pain' (J177/F168); 'pain.../ Makes work difficult – then' (J244/F242); 'Delight – becomes pictorial – / When viewed through pain' (J572/F539); 'Pain has but one acquaintance' (J1049/F1119); 'You left me Boundaries of Pain' (J644/F713); 'The hallowing of Pain' (J772/F871); 'A pang is more conspicuous in Spring' (J1530/F1545), and 'The Surgeon – does not blanch – at pain' (J396/F552).

Depictions of pain and the masochistic enjoyment of pain are not unusual in literature and art, although masochistic practices have had a long, but largely hidden, history. There are depictions of various masochistic practices

in the art and poetry of antiquity, although obvious controversies exist over precise or accurate interpretations of sexuality in the classical era; given that Greece and Rome were slave cultures, the consent of all participants cannot simply be assumed. This factor is further complicated by the inherent violence and cruelty of those societies, as epitomised by events such as the Roman gladiatorial games.

Explicit reference to masochism can be found in the famous Sanskrit text *The Kama Sutra*, written by Vatayayana in North India during the third century AD, and first translated into English by the explorer/scholar Sir Richard Burton in 1883. *The Kama Sutra's* recommendations for the use of 'scratching with the nails' (Vatayayana, 1971, 52), 'different kinds of biting' (Vatayayana, 1971, 57), and 'the various modes... of striking with passion' (Vatayayana, 1971, 64) are presented as ritualized concomitants of eroticism and not as the representation of aggressive passion. According to Vatayayana: 'In short, nothing tends to increase love so much as the effects of marking with the nails, and biting' (Vatayayana, 1971, 55).

However, questions of female consent arise from the author's phallocentric assumptions that the female's 'appropriate sounds' (Vatayayana, 1971, 64) – her 'eight kinds of crying' (Vatayayana, 1971, 64), including 'cooing... sighing and weeping sounds' (Vatayayana, 1971, 65) – are merely an expected, even ritualized, response to the inflicting of pain by a male.

Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and poetry also include references to sexualized violence. A notable example can be found in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Cleopatra makes an allusion to 'The stroke of death' which is like: a lover's pinch, which hurts and is desired. (5, 2, 294-5)

This masochistic theme can also be seen in the writings of the Swiss Enlightenment philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Confessions* (1872) contain an account of his own masochistic proclivities; childish proclivities he seems not to have indulged in as an adult. A psychological explanation for masochism is given as Rousseau recounts the lasting effects of youthful experiences of corporal punishment at the hands of his schoolmaster's sister:

...when in the end I was beaten I found the experience less dreadful in fact than in anticipation; and the very strange thing was that this punishment increased my affection for the inflictor... I had discovered in the shame and pain of the punishment an admixture of sensuality which had left me rather eager than otherwise for a repetition by the same hand... (Rousseau, 1967, 25)

Themes of masochism also famously pervade the fiction of the late nineteenth-century Austrian writer, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the author of *Venus in Furs* (1870), who gave his name to the passive endurance of pain.

A number of early attempts by sexologists to analyse the subject of masochism tended to conflate wider instances of cruel punishments within society with the (conscious) erotic enjoyment produced by similar experiences within a minority. The early sexologists also tended to make gender-biased assumptions, seeing sadism as an excessive manifestation of inherent male aggression, and masochism as merely an exaggeration of the submissive role assigned to women, even though male masochists were not uncommon.

Following the rise of Freud's theories, psychoanalysts elaborated complex explanations of sadistic and masochistic behaviour (conscious and unconscious). Well into the later decades of the twentieth century, discussions of sadism and masochism tended to be framed in terms of psychopathology and dysfunctionality. However, as the century drew on and attitudes towards sexuality in the Western world became more liberalized, various surveys of sexual attitudes and behaviour revealed that significant percentages of individuals admitted to finding pleasure in certain sadistic or masochistic scenarios, either in reality or as fantasy. In this changing social context, and with the increasing belief that sexual pleasure was in itself a good thing, subcultures of individuals interested in consensual masochistic practices developed, gradually and with great discretion.

Early writers such as Meibomius have explicated the anatomical reasons why painful stimulation might evoke sexual arousal, as well as alluding to the general tonic effect on the system. Modern science similarly suggests that effects such as increasing the blood flow to the area would have this result. After stating: 'Pain and death are a part of life. To reject them is to reject life itself' (Ellis, 2010, 154), sexologist Havelock Ellis pointed out, in *Love and Pain* (1903), that masochistic practices were points along an erotic continuum, often consisting of the intensification of acts widely regarded as 'normal' concomitants of sexual activity. Ellis also theorized that psychological factors played a part in the pleasure of pain, since informants described being aroused simply by the thought of being whipped.

In the later twentieth century, physiologists pointed out the effect of pain in producing natural endorphins and a resultant 'high'; an experience which is also found in certain sports and other non-sexual activities. It has also been recognized that, during sexual arousal, sensations which might be considered painful in the non-aroused state may be experienced as intensely pleasurable. Certain kinds of pain can also become eroticized through their association with sexual pleasure, or in anticipation of it.

As Michael Moorcock's fiction suggests, psychological and symbolic elements are significant to those who enjoy masochistic pleasure and for many masochists, though not all, an explicit context of dominance and submission is of considerable importance. Moorcock writes:

He moved his hand quite suddenly so that she rolled hard against him and his nails slid down her back and were like tiny knives moving across the flesh of her bottom, her inner thighs and the backs of her legs, behind her knees so that she forgot her immediate sexual needs, giving herself up to his cruel and gentle fingers, lying now on her stomach as he continued to caress her.

Gradually, perceptibly, the touch of his finger-tips, scarcely felt, profoundly sensed, was replaced by the lightest touch of his fingernails on her shoulders, neck and back, stroking and scratching her waist, breasts, stomach and groin until her sexuality was completely sublimated and she wished for greater pain, for catharsis by means of his subtle and relentless cruelty; and she moaned very faintly, unable either to speak or to cry out... (Moorcock, 1976, 92)

Although masochistic scenes, motifs and descriptions such as the above extract are rife within popular culture, there is still much discomfort and even taboo about these practices. Media reports of fetish events, or of allegations of celebrities indulging in masochistic sex, typically strive for a jocular or a distancing editorial note and demonstrate the continuing unease that many feel at the blurring of the boundaries of pleasure and pain; with many journalists unsure of how to articulate seriously the delights many masochists feel after having arrived at 'a place where... pleasure was pain... and vice versa' (Barker, 1986, 51).

In 1870, Leopold van Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* (1870) was published. The novel concerns the relationship between Severin Kuziemski, the narrator, and Wanda von Dunajew, the woman he persuades to become his cruel mistress – his 'Venus in Furs', in order to gratify his desire to be dominated by a cruel woman. The novel became – and has remained – Sacher-Masoch's most successful work of fiction. Derived from the Sacher-Masoch's surname, the terms 'Masochist' (Krafft-Ebing, 1997, 21), and 'Masochism' (Krafft-Ebing, 1997, 20) have been subsequently appropriated by psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing and utilised in *Psychopathia Sexualis* – his 'comprehensive study of sexual deviations' (Wilson, 1988, 91) – as terms to describe a person who derives sexual pleasure from his or her own pain or humiliation, and to identify this type of sexuality as a perversion.

In many of her poems, Emily Dickinson uses the sexual persona of the masochist and uses it in a number of ways for a variety of purposes. Dickinson's ability to identify different types of masochist and masochism is unsurprising – in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), Sigmund Freud is able to pinpoint two types of masochist: physical masochists: the type 'who find their pleasure... in having physical pain inflicted upon them', and 'mental masochists'; the type 'who find their pleasure... in humiliation and mental torture' (Freud, 1993, 243). In the masochistic poems of Emily Dickinson, the physical, the mental, and an amalgamation of both types of masochist are presented, and in all cases have literary parallels with certain aspects of Sacher-Masoch's novel.

Severin Kuziemski, the masochistic narrator of *Venus in Furs*, appears at first to be both a physical and mental masochist, happy to receive mental cruelty from Wanda von Dunajew – his 'Venus in Furs' – when she is either unwilling or unable to inflict physical cruelty upon him. But just as both types of cruelty bring him pleasure when they are dealt out separately, the intensity of the pleasure is increased when physical and mental cruelty are combined and inflicted upon him simultaneously. An example of this is the incident in which Severin is whipped by Wanda's Greek lover, at Wanda's insistence, a scene which Severin describes in the following way:

The sensation of being whipped before the eyes of a woman one adores by a successful rival is quite indescribable; I was dying of shame and despair.

What was most humiliating was that I felt a wild and supersensual pleasure in my pitiful situation... (Sacher-Masoch, 1989, 268)

Sacher-Masoch's concept of 'supersensual pleasure' is echoed by T.E. Lawrence, who writes in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922) of the 'probably sexual' reaction he has to a brutal whipping he receives after being arrested in Deraa:

They kicked me to the head of the stairs, and stretched me over a guard-bench, pommelling me... The corporal... now came back with a whip of the Circassian sort, a thong of supple black hide, rounded, and tapering from the thickness of a thumb at the grip (which was wrapped in silver) down to a hard point much finer than a pencil.

He saw me shivering, partly I think, with cold, and made it whistle over my ear, taunting me that before his tenth cut I would howl for mercy... and then he began to lash me madly across and across with all his might, while I locked my teeth to endure this thing which lapped itself like flaming wire about my body...

As the punishment proceeded the whip fell more and more upon existing weals, biting blacker or more wet, till my flesh quivered with accumulated pain, and with terror of the next blow coming...

I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up... I remembered smiling idly at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was swelling through me: and then that he flung up his arm and hacked with the full length of his whip into my groin. This doubled me half-over, screaming, or, rather, trying impotently to scream, only shuddering through my open mouth... Another slash followed. A roaring, and my eyes went black: while within me the core of life seemed to heave slowly up through the rending nerves, expelled from its body by this last indescribable pang. (Lawrence, 1962, 451-454)

There are several aspects of masochism mentioned or alluded to in Lawrence's description of being whipped. First, Lawrence explains how 'the shapeless weight of pain' becomes 'a gradual cracking apart of my whole being by some too-great force whose waves rolled up my spine till they were pent within my brain, to clash terribly together'. This is a description of a pair of cymbals with the qualities of nutcrackers, the implication being that Lawrence's body is being cracked apart by the force of a huge pair of clashing mental nutcracker-like cymbals.

Lawrence also describes the whip as being 'of the Circassian sort, a thong of supple black hide, rounded, and tapering from the thickness of a thumb at the grip (which was wrapped in silver) down to a hard point finer than a pencil...' (Lawrence, 1962, 451).

Detailed descriptions (by the victims) of the implements of torture is a trope common to literature of masochism: Severin describes in great detail the whip and the clothes of his mistress' Greek lover; O describes Sir Stephen's whip in great detail.

Then there is Lawrence's description of 'A roaring, and my eyes went black: while within me the core of life seemed to heave slowly up through the rending nerves, expelled from its body by this last indescribable pang' (Lawrence, 1962, 452). In this part of his description of the whipping, Lawrence

objectifies himself, explaining how 'the core of life' was heaved 'slowly through the rending nerves' and 'expelled from its body'. Lawrence depersonalises the experience three times in the same sentence – he uses the phrases 'the core of life', 'the rending nerves' and 'its body', when writing about himself and his reaction to the pain, instead of writing 'my core of life', 'my rending nerves' and 'my body'.

This act of self-objectification or depersonalisation may be a subtle form of damage limitation, because Lawrence also mentions the 'indescribable pang' of 'delicious warmth, probably sexual' (noticeably similar to Severin's masochistic 'supersensual pleasure') that he feels as he is being brutally whipped and beaten.

If Lawrence had any 'feelings of guilt and self-reproach' (Knightly & Simpson, 1969, 222) about deriving sexual pleasure from pain, which his biographers, Knightly and Simpson, claim he did, then this deliberate distancing of his pleasure-feeling self from his pain-feeling self would simply be a matter of self-protection by depersonalising (and thereby de-emphasising) his own 'delight' for 'pain'.

The same type of masochistic pleasure is described as 'Delight' in several of Emily Dickinson's poems, particularly in poem J572/F539, where the masochistic persona states:

Delight – becomes pictorial –
When viewed through Pain –
More fair – because impossible
Than any gain – (J572/F539)

For this particular masochist, 'Delight.../When viewed through Pain', 'becomes pictorial' or like art. However, this ability to experience 'Delight' in order for it to become 'pictorial' is 'impossible' or unattainable – it is an ideal, an artistic ideal which lies outside human reach, whilst the 'Pain' it is viewed through – the 'Pain' caused by attempting to create the 'pictorial' – is always present as a form of vision, through which the world is 'viewed'.

Emily Dickinson's depictions of 'supersensual delight', or the 'probably sexual' 'Delight' of masochism is also evident in poem J341/F372, in which the masochist persona claims that 'After great pain, a formal feeling comes –' (J341/F372) and that 'Pain – has an Element of Blank –' (J650/F760). Both poems deal with a feeling of bodily or physical transcendence, as poem J396/F552 does; a poem in which the masochist persona states:

There is a Languor of the Life
More imminent than Pain –
'Tis Pain's Successor – When the Soul
Has suffered all it can –

A Drowsiness – diffuses –
A Dimness like a Fog
Envelops Consciousness –
As Mists – obliterate a Crag. (J396/F552)

The masochist uses a variety of verb phrases: 'a Drowsiness' that diffuses', 'A Dimness' that 'Envelops' 'like a Fog', suggesting a mist-like enshrouding sleepiness or weariness of the debilitating type which Edgar Allan Poe in *The Poetic Principle* termed 'a pleasurable sadness' (Poe 101), and which Charles Baudelaire termed 'Ennui' in his poem 'To the Reader' (Baudelaire, 2008, 16). Metaphors that relate mental detachment to climate, temperature, and weather are also given precedence, not only in the above poem, but also in Dickinson's poem J341/F372, where it is claimed that 'After great pain, a formal feeling comes –' (J341/F372), and in which the masochistic persona claims to feel 'A Quartz contentment' which affects both 'The Nerves' and the 'Heart', and then in the final stanza reveals that:

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs...
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go – (J341/F372)

In this poem, the emphasis is focused almost primarily upon coldness ('Freezing', 'Snow', and 'Chill', which is an integral part of the masochistic tendency; according to Gilles Deleuze, in *Coldness and Cruelty*, a psychological study of Sacher-Masoch, masochism and *Venus in Furs*, 'Everything is suggestive of coldness: marble body, woman of stone, Venus of ice, are favourite expressions of Masoch' (Deleuze, 1991, 53).

The notion of coldness as an emotional state which is needed in order to be able to administer cruelty is borne out by Severin's reference to how his 'cold, cruel beloved' (Sacher-Masoch, 1989, 153) gave him a kiss with 'cold lips' which 'had the chilling fragrance of an autumnal rose' (Sacher-Masoch, 1989, 207).

Another aspect of poem J341/F372 – an aspect that is important to not only Dickinson, but also to other authors who write about masochists and masochism – is the notion of time passing slowly due to some form of pain having been administered to the masochist.

The masochist immediately mentions the onset of the post-pain 'formal feeling', in which 'The Nerves' no longer feel or do anything, but simply 'sit ceremonious, like Tombs'.

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs...
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone – (J341/F372)

Dickinson's unerring eye for ambiguity is evident in her use of 'great pain'. The adjective 'great' has its usual synonyms: 'huge', 'immense', 'enormous' as well as the analogues of noble or exalted; but 'great' also has the synonyms 'wonderful' or 'excellent', and it is in this phrase, 'After great pain' that Dickinson sets out her ambiguous masochist's emotional terrain, a cold, stony landscape she'll examine in the following lines of the poem.

Dickinson's notion of the 'formal feeling' that comes after 'great pain' (J341/F372) focuses on the idea that once the masochist has suffered great pain, there is a 'formal' realm of 'feeling' beyond it, which, when experienced, 'comes' upon the masochist and provides 'contentment'. This concept is addressed by Gilles Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty* (1991). Deleuze states that because 'the combinations of pleasure and pain in a specific sensual experience imply certain formal conditions which cannot be ignored... beyond all sensation or feeling there is... a formal masochism which preexists physical, sensual or material masochism' (Deleuze, 1991, 100-101).

Having attained this 'formal feeling' Dickinson's masochist then mentions the dislocation or disruption of time, brought about by 'great pain': 'This is the Hour of Lead/ Remembered, if outlived' (J341/F372) is presented in both present and past tenses. The mood conveyed is one of immediacy ('This is'), but also one of retrospection and reflection ('Remembered'), because the 'Hour' has actually gone past, and is now 'outlived'. This sense of temporal dislocation, in which 'the time is out of joint' (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1,5,187), is apparent in much erotic literature, not only in works contemporaneous with Dickinson's writing, but also erotic works that have been written and published years after Dickinson's poetry and letters. A case in point is Pauline Réage's masochistic novel *The Story of O* (1954), in which the third-person narrator explains how, after having received punishment:

O soon lost track of time, for here there was neither night nor day... She'd been waiting about three months, about three days, or ten days, or ten years. (Reage, 1973, 424)

This concern over time – and the recognition of temporal dislocation and the unease it causes – is evident in T.E. Lawrence's account of his whipping, about which he states:

To keep my mind in control I numbered the blows, but after twenty lost count, and could feel only the shapeless weight of pain... Somewhere in the place a cheap clock ticked loudly, and it distressed me that their beating was not in its time. I writhed and twisted, but was held so tightly that my struggles were useless. (Lawrence, 1962, 452)

In Emily Dickinson's poem J1121/F1338, the masochist persona states: 'Time does go on', which is a statement that also deals with an altered perspective of time, in this case its prolongation, as can be seen in the masochist persona's claim that: 'Time does go on –/I tell it gay to those who suffer now' (J1121/F1338).

The same can be seen in another poem in which 'Pain' 'contracts' and 'expands the Time' (J976/F833), a claim which deals with the expansion and the contraction of time due to a single cause:

Pain – expands the Time –
Ages coil within
The minute Circumference
Of a single Brain –

Pain contracts – the Time –
Occupied with Shot
Gammuts of Eternities
Are as they were not – (J976/F833)

The first stanza deals with time expansion as perceived and contained 'within' the human 'Brain', whilst the second stanza deals with time contraction, which causes 'Eternities' to be shorter than they seem or 'as they were not'. Both of these conflicting notions of 'the Time' – as perceived by the masochist – are brought about by the administration of 'Pain'. The punished masochist's sense of time disruption, due to heightened emotions and sensibilities caused by pain means, as Gilles Deleuze points out, that: 'past, present and future are constituted in time *simultaneously*, even though, from a natural standpoint, there is a qualitative difference' (Deleuze, 1991, 115).

From 1858 to 1862, Emily Dickinson wrote a number of letters to a 'recipient unknown' whom she addressed with the honorary title of 'Master' (Dickinson, 1958, 233, 248). Many of the poems she wrote during this time also feature a reference to a 'Sir' or a 'Master'. One particular poem which contains such references is J366/F405, in which the subservient masochist states:

...This might have been the Hand
That sowed the flower, he preferred –
Or smoothed a homely pain,
Or pushed the pebble from his path –
Or played his chosen tune –
On Lute the least – the latest – (J366/F405)

This willingness to submissively serve the 'Master' by tending his garden, soothing his pains, clearing obstacles from his path, and playing him his favourite music, is not presented as without cause or reason. In the final stanza of the poem, the masochist persona points out that the subservience offered to 'Sir' is actually a form of payment offered in return for the knowledge which has been taught by 'Sir':

That I may take that promise
To Paradise, with me –
To teach the Angels, avarice,
You, Sir, taught first – to me. (J366/F405)

'I am always in love with my teachers', Dickinson declares in one of her letters (Dickinson, 1958, 45), and it is the teacher/pupil relationship that is emphasised in this stanza, revealing subservience is a form of repayment for knowledge, although this gratitude for knowledge might very well be 'avarice' for more knowledge. A similar type of sensibility can be seen in J366/F405, where in the final stanza, the masochist states:

And then – he'll turn me round and round –
To an admiring sky –
As one that bore her Master's name –
Sufficient Royalty! (J366/F405)

The teacher/pupil relationship of poem J366/F405 has been replaced in this poem with three different types of power relationships. In the first line the central idea of someone being turned 'round and round/To an admiring sky' is reminiscent of a children's game in which the child is blindfolded, and then spun around. This notion of being spun around – possibly by someone unknown – and then left to blindly find others, is one type of power relationship. Another type is emphasised in the third line, with the masochist being 'one who bore her Master's name', a line which contains the implication of marriage or incest, as well as the adherence to the patriarchal social order which was dominant at the time the poem was written. Finally, the notion of the masochistic persona according her 'Master' 'Sufficient Royalty' is indicative of a ruler/subject relationship, and as well as all of the attendant notions which accompany such hierarchical structures. The deference the masochist shows to 'Master' is the 'formal feeling' (J341/F372) that leads to 'contentment'.

Dickinson's idea of 'Master' as ruler continues in poem J151/F133, in which the masochistic persona states:

Mute thy Coronation –
Meek my Vive le roi,
Fold a tiny courtier
In thine Ermine, Sir,
There to rest revering
Till the pageant by,
I can murmur broken,
Master, It was I – (J151/F133)

The one who rules the 'tiny courtier' is given the titles of 'Sir' and 'Master' in this poem. Like Severin's fur-clad 'Venus' in *Venus in Furs*, the 'Master' is clad in 'Ermine', in which the masochist can only 'rest revering'. The concept of accepting the 'Master' as one worthy of the rituals, clothes and title of royalty is one which can be found in most masochistic literature, not only in *The Story of O* – where O's master is 'Sir Stephen H' (Reage, 1973, 55) – but also in some of the poems of Algernon Swinburne, in particular, 'Dolores', in which the poem's narrator praises 'Dolores' with her 'cruel/Red mouth like a

venomous flower', and gives her the status of a 'Lady of Pain' (Swinburne, 1927, 154). 'Dolores' can be seen to be an idealised version of Sacher-Masoch's own Lady of Pain – Wanda von Dunajew, who was idealised by Severin, and elevated beyond the realms of royalty to Goddess status, therefore failing – ultimately – to meet his requirements by proving to be merely human.

In the poems of Emily Dickinson, the masochist persona's willingness to surrender to one considered superior is often linked to pain. In one of the 'Master' letters she writes:

I've got a Tomahawk
in my side but that
dont hurt me much.
(If you) Her master
stabs her more – (Dickinson, 2002, 26)

The shift in tenses – past and present, 'I' and 'Her' – reveal the putting on and the removal of the masochistic personae in mid-paragraph, during the presentation of these personae. The self-conscious, self-reflexivity of this extract reveals the masochistic persona/narrator distancing the (her) self from the 'Master' but still being stabbed and still being able to comment upon it during and after the stabbing. As already shown, the 'I' is a 'supposed person' – a person or persona that is already at one remove. The use of 'Her' is a second remove, distancing the masochist even further into the text – making this 'Her' seem to almost be a different person to the masochistic persona/narrator. This meta-fictional distance remains in poem J925/F841, where the masochist, after being 'Struck', 'Maimed' and 'Robbed', states: 'Most – I love the Cause that slew Me.' Even death, when administered by the 'Master' is something to be cherished and revered.

This sense of reverence is also apparent in the poems which link masochism and the masochistic sensibility to art and the creation of art. Art is important to the masochist – not just pictorial art, but also sculpture and literature, as can be seen in the many literary works which deal with the masochist and masochism, in particular *Venus in Furs*, where not only does Severin express a critical interest in art and literature and list the many books he has read, but he also reveals his own creativity by being the narrator of his own story, which is presented in the literary form of a manuscript, to be read by a third person, all of which takes place within the outer story of *Venus in Furs*.

A further example of this can be seen in Sacher-Masoch's own contracts with his wife, where although he gives her the contractual right to punish him 'in whatever manner she pleases' (Sacher-Masoch, 1989, 277), he insists that 'she shall allow him six hours a day for his personal work, and shall never look at his letters and writings' (Sacher-Masoch, 1970, 277).

Dickinson's utilisation of the masochist persona also serves a metaphysical, ethical, aesthetic and epistemological function. For Dickinson, knowledge is reached via 'the old – road – through pain' (J344/F376). In other words, pain is a direct route to knowledge. In this respect, she is in agreement with Aristotle, who states: 'We cannot learn without pain' (Aristotle, 1976, 36);

and with Nietzsche, who states: 'There is as much wisdom in pain as there is in pleasure' (Nietzsche, 1974a, 133). This notion of pain as a source of knowledge was examined in further detail in the twentieth century by Simone Weil, who observed: 'Pain is the root of knowledge' (Weil, 2005, 94).

In poem J806/F864, Dickinson's masochistic persona speaks of:

A Plated Life – diversified
With Gold and Silver Pain
To prove the presence of the Ore
In Particles – 'tis when

A value struggle – it exist –
A Power – will proclaim
Although Annihilation pile
Whole Chaoses on Him – (J806/F864)

The 'value struggle' is based on the precious metal weight/value system, with gold worth more in monetary terms than silver. The poem was written in 1864, nine years before the Coinage Act of 1873, which had the effect of imposing a gold standard on the United States, instead of the previously-imposed bi-metallic standard. It was also nine years after the California gold rush, and five years after the discovery of the Nevada silver mine known as the Comstock Lode. In poem J806/F864, these two precious metals represent two different types of 'Pain'; one of which ('Gold') is valued more highly than the other ('Silver'). Silver's lower price relative to gold is based on its relative abundance to gold. During the Victorian era, the silver/gold ratio was 16:1, making gold the more valuable of the two metals.

In poem J806/F864, metallurgical, mineral and mining metaphors are used to analyse the qualities inherent in 'A Plated Life'. 'Life' is presented as being metaphorically 'Plated' with two different or 'diversified' degrees and/or types of 'Pain' which are designated 'Gold and Silver'. 'Plated' is a description of a semi-precious covering or coating. The implication is that the 'Life' which is covered, is not of any real value to the one living it. In order to give that 'Plated Life' more 'value', the one living it has 'diversified' into two areas of 'Pain' – one 'Gold' and the other 'Silver'. The implication is that the masochist persona has decided to have two different types of pain: 'physical pain' and 'mental torture' (Freud, 1991b, 243), inflicted upon 'Him', in order to give 'value' to the 'Plated Life'.

In order to uncover life's real 'value', the masochistic persona mines the metals and sifts the 'Particles' to find 'the presence of 'the Ore', in order to get the precious metals from it. This process presents 'Gold... Pain' and 'Silver Pain' as the two metals, with gold as the more precious (therefore more valuable and valued) of the two types of 'Pain'. 'Life' is posited as a metaphysical dichotomy or 'a value struggle' between the two types of 'Pain'.

However, despite 'Whole Chaoses' being piled 'on Him' by the possibility of 'Annihilation', the masochist grows stronger from adversity and acquires 'a Power'. In this respect, Dickinson's masochist has become a precursory

embodiment of Nietzsche's maxim: 'What does not kill me makes me stronger' (Nietzsche, 1990, 33).

In the study of philosophy, a value struggle is a matter of ethics, aesthetics or metaphysics, concerned with the intrinsic value of a concrete or abstract object; in short, intrinsic value is an ethical and philosophic property. It is the ethical or metaphysical or aesthetic value that an object has 'in itself' or 'for its own sake', which makes it an intrinsic property. An object with intrinsic value, such as the 'Life – diversified/ With Gold and Silver Pain' that is posited in poem J806/F864, may be regarded as an end-in-itself.

Other names for intrinsic value are terminal value, essential value, principle value or ultimate importance. Intrinsic value is mainly used in ethics, but the concept is also used in other branches of philosophy, including aesthetics, metaphysics and epistemology, with terms that essentially refer to the same concept. It is synonymous with the meaning of life, as this may be expressed as what is meaningful or valuable in life. Its equivalent in medieval philosophy is *summum bonum*, a Latin expression used in philosophy to describe the ultimate importance, the singular and most ultimate end which human beings ought to pursue. *Summum bonum* is generally thought of as being an end in itself. This phrase (meaning 'the highest good') was one that Emily Dickinson would have been familiar with from her Latin lessons at college, and from her familiarity with, and her admiration of, Robert Browning's poems, one of which is entitled 'Summum bonum':

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine, – wonder, wealth, and – how far above
them –
Truth, that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl, –
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe – all were for me
In the kiss of one girl. (Browning, 1999, 667)

In the second stanza of poem J806/F864, the masochist alerts the reader to a controversy:

A Value struggle – it exist –
A Power – will proclaim
Although Annihilation pile
Whole Chaoses on Him – (J806/F864)

The 'value struggle' according to Dickinson's masochist is a reference to the opposing theories of pain which were expounded by the Victorian legal society and the written works of the Marquis de Sade. Sade had very different views to the Victorian norm regarding the philosophy of pain. Sade posits the view that pain itself has an underpinning ethics, and that the pursuit of pain, or the imposing of it, may be useful and pleasurable. Sade's theory is that this is the purpose of the state – to indulge the desire to inflict pain in revenge, for

instance, via the law. In Sade's time, most punishment was the inflicting of pain.

The nineteenth century view in Europe was that Sade's philosophy had to be suppressed so intensely that it – as Sade predicted – became a pleasure in itself to indulge. The 'veritable flood of publications during the Victorian period of works devoted to describing the experience of flagellation' (Marcus, 1966, xvi), is often cited as the most explicit example of this hypocrisy.

With poem J806/F864 and with the other poems that are narrated via a masochist persona, and/or from a masochist's viewpoint, Emily Dickinson shows that she is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on – and the analysis of – pain. In short, she is constructing, delineating and mapping a phenomenology of pain.

According to Thomas Higginson – Emily Dickinson's literary advisor – poetry and the creation of poetry were, for Dickinson, firmly linked to the climactic and the emotional coldness of masochism. In an article on Dickinson, Higginson states that Dickinson told him: 'If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry' (Higginson, 2000, 559).

Literature which inspires physical coldness, rather than the heat and desire of passion, is not out of place according to the Dickinson maxim of: 'Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –' (J1129/F1263). Similarly, there appears to be no contradiction between the artistic sensibility and the poet's offer of subservience to the 'Master', as can be seen in when she writes: 'Master... I wish that I were great, like Mr. Michael Angelo, and could paint for you.' (Dickinson, 1958, 187). The underlying theme of patronage, and the implied artistic duty which the one being patronised has towards the patron, is clearly evident in these lines.

When Gilles Deleuze states, in *Coldness and Cruelty*, that 'there is an aestheticism in masochism' (Deleuze, 1991, 134), the same awareness of the connection between masochism and creativity, and – in particular the creativity involved in the creation of poetry – is being expressed by Emily Dickinson in her writing. For Dickinson, this 'aestheticism in masochism' was both poetry and creativity, just as it was for Sacher-Masoch.

By using the persona of the masochist, Dickinson can be seen to be putting on what is now considered to be a psychological mask, in order to speak about receiving pain from the perspective of the masochist. However, for Dickinson, the use of this particular sexual persona – as well as the others she uses – is inextricably bound to the creative aspects of writing poetry. This can be seen in the following poem:

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me 'still' – (J613/F445)

According to Helen McNeil, this particular poem is one of Emily Dickinson's 'most powerful poems of imprisonment' and 'offers itself up to biographical speculation' (McNeil, 1986, 225). This may be so, but the poem

also deals very clearly with an explanation of the usurping of the literary form of poetry by another literary form – that of 'Prose'. To add to the conundrum, the literary form the explanation takes is that of the usurped literary form. There is an obvious irony at play in this poem, for the narrating masochistic persona obviously has not been 'shut... up in Prose' at all, and has the power to speak in a poetic voice. For this particular masochistic persona, being 'shut... up in Prose' is not the terrible poem/prison nightmare some critics claim. The power of the masochist is the power to choose the mode of expression. Poetry is presented by Dickinson as a more powerful mode of expression than prose.

'How soft this Prison is' (J1334/F1352), boasts the masochistic persona of another poem. These are not the words of someone who finds the right to use words to be a punishment. Dickinson goes on to make the point even clearer, by having her masochist persona state in another poem: 'A Prison gets to be a friend –' (J652/F456), in which the pleasure of incarceration, in particular the act of pacing a small cell is described as 'A Geometric Joy'. This is the solitude Dickinson's masochist desires in order to create poetry.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), Sigmund Freud puts forward the suggestion that:

There is a masochistic component in the sexual constitution of many people, which arises from the reversal of an aggressive, sadistic component into its opposite. (Freud, 1991b, 243)

The Freudian notion that masochism is sadism in reverse – a theory which Freud later amended – is a notion which is not expressed in any of Dickinson's masochist poems. Instead, there is a clear delineation of sexual types, with the masochist presented as the masochist, and the sadist as the sadist. However, whilst this is so, it can also be seen in the case of the masochist that there is a clear link to sadism, and in particular to the type of authority which the sadist wields over a victim.

In contrast to Freud, Gilles Deleuze, in *Coldness and Cruelty*, stresses the considerable differences between sadism and masochism, in particular the fact that 'Sadism is institutional, masochism contractual' (Deleuze, 1991, 134), whilst maintaining that 'there is a masochism specific to the sadist and equally a sadism specific to the masochist, the one never combining with the other' (Deleuze, 1991, 134). Deleuze goes on to emphasise the fact that masochism, with its complex rituals is a dialectic of sexualised power which is wielded through an established set of contracts, rituals and costumes, which ultimately force the enforcer to be submissive to the whims of the masochistic submissive one. The masochist, by being willing to suffer, but by instigating proceedings and then by deliberately relinquishing control, remains still very much in control.

The restrictions that bondage imposes on the masochist and the resulting sexual 'Delight' that such restriction provide for the masochist is made evident in Dickinson's poem J725/F749, where the masochist states: 'What Thou dost – is Delight –/Bondage as Play – be sweet –' (J725/F749).

This theme of bondage as a form of 'sweet' sexual 'Play', or, in other words, as a source of masochistic sexual pleasure or 'Delight', is reiterated in

poem J1005/F1005: 'Bind me – I can still sing' (J1005/F1005). In this poem, the masochist begs to be bound, but then boasts that despite being bound, she can and will 'still sing'. Dickinson has utilised the verb 'sing' to mean something other than to give voice to a melody. The masochistic role-play of contractual control is evident in J1005/F1005 in the interdict, 'Bind me'. It is also evident in the boast, 'I can still sing'. To sing, in this context, is to give voice (in the form of vocal utterances) to the deriving of pleasure from being bound. The time-line of the utterance of this specific line of poetry is six beats: 'bind me' is two beats, and 'I can still sing' is four beats.

'How ruthless are the gentle –' (J1439/F1465), writes Dickinson, for in her poems, the masochist persona, by being the narrator, displays the control she has over 'Master'. The letters and poems are addressed to a 'Master', but they are not by 'Master'. They are written by a poet who, for a while, takes on the guise or the persona of the masochist, out of whose sexualised sensibility 'Master' is created, so that 'Master' exists due to being created and defined by the poet through the persona of the masochist.

In this sense, the masochist is responsible for the creation of another, just as the poet is responsible for the creation of the masochist, and then uses a masochist persona to articulate masochistic need and desire. The masochist therefore becomes the dominant, creative persona, which enables the poet to create further personae. By utilising the masochist persona to explore the inner realm of her own self, Emily Dickinson can be seen to be enhancing and extending her own personal knowledge and creativity, thereby defining and self-creating herself as a poet.

Because of her skill in utilising it, the masochist persona, with its misperceived attitudes of submission, obedience, compliance, deference and surrender, becomes a mask of power for Dickinson, for she is able to overturn its perceived cultural values and then wear it to create beautiful poetry of great complexity and originality.

The Sadist

Dickinson's Sadist

In several of her poems, Emily Dickinson adopts the poetic persona of the sadist. For the purposes of this chapter, a sadist is defined as someone who derives pleasure as a result of inflicting pain, cruelty, degradation, or humiliation, or from watching such behaviours inflicted on others.

In her essay, 'Amherst's Madame De Sade' in *Sexual Personae* (1990), Camille Paglia attests to Dickinson's propensity for literary sadism and her poetic 'catalogue of Sadean abuses of the body' (Paglia, 1990, 631). The essay focuses on what Paglia perceives to be a predominant streak of sadism running through Emily Dickinson's poetry. 'Emily Dickinson is the female Sade', Paglia states boldly, 'and her poems are the prison dreams of a self-incarcerated, sadomasochistic imaginalist' (Paglia, 1990, 624). Paglia then categorizes the poems into two types: 'the Sadean and the Wordsworthian' – that is, texts that are either full of 'barbarities and diabolical acts' of sadism (Paglia, 1990, 624), or those that are 'sentimental feminine... mawkish lyrics' (Paglia, 1990, 638). Paglia maintains that the 'Wordsworthian' 'sentimental' and 'mawkish' half of Dickinson's poetic output was written for the specific purpose of counterbalancing the other half of her poetry, which were poems depicting sadistic 'barbarities and diabolical acts' and extreme cruelty.

'No major figure in literary history has been more misunderstood... the academic view of her remains too genteel,' Paglia asserts. 'Even the best critical writing on Emily Dickinson underestimates her. She is frightening. To come to her directly from Dante, Spenser, Blake, and Baudelaire is to find her sadomasochism obvious and flagrant' (Paglia, 1990, 637). In a deliberate re-gendering statement, Paglia asserts: 'Dickinson is like the homosexual cultist draping himself in black leather and chains to bring the idea of masculinity into aggressive visibility.' (Paglia, 1990, 673)

Paglia's dissection of Dickinson's poetry reveals the sadism at the core of many of the poems. The reasons given by Paglia for Dickinson's subversive streak are many: 'Dickinson as much as Baudelaire is anti-bourgeois.' (Paglia, 1990, 633); 'Dickinson relishes blood...' (Paglia, 1990, 633); Dickinson's sadism comes from her... rustic bluntness about birth and death.' (633); and perhaps most significantly: 'Dickinson is a pioneer among women writers in renouncing genteel good manners. She cultivates knavish insolence' (Paglia, 1990, 634).

As the above comments show, Paglia puts forward a whole range of profound and disturbing ideas on Dickinson's reasons for utilising aspects of sadism and for imitating and/or implementing some of the literary tropes of Sade and Sacher-Masoch. Her analysis of Dickinson's poetry is an attempt to reveal aspects of the poet's work that have been consistently ignored by academics, due to the poetry's graphic depictions of taboo subjects.

Despite its obvious merits, something in the tone of Paglia's essay annoys and upsets many readers. One possible reason for this is that Paglia's tone is (intentionally) strident and loud. As she admits in the preface to *Sexual*

Personae, her 'method is a form of sensationalism' (xiii), and her style is deliberately confrontational and provocative. However, it appears that the author has made it so in order to challenge or subvert preconceived notions: 'In the beginning was nature' (Paglia, 1990, 1), is the opening line of the book, a clear parody of – and a secular/pagan challenge to – the New Testament's 'In the beginning was the Word.' (*John*, 1.1)

There are numerous similar parodies/inversions/subversions/pastiches in *Sexual Personae* (1990) – and there are several provocative claims made too. 'If civilization had been left in female hands we would still be living in grass huts' (Paglia, 1990, 246), is one statement that has obviously infuriated many feminist critics, as did the statement: 'There is no female Mozart because there is no female Jack the Ripper' (Paglia, 1990, 247). By asserting the truth of certain basic binary oppositions – male/female, Apollo/Dionysus, sadism/masochism, Christian/Pagan, creative/destructive, hetero/homo – Paglia creates a thinking-space where it is possible to see how art and literature have flourished in the tense zone that exists between those poles.

Other challenging statements, such as: 'She that gives life also blocks the way to freedom' (Paglia, 1990, 14); 'A fetus is a benign tumor, a vampire who steals in order to live' (Paglia, 1990, 36); and (in an echo of Sade's philosophy) 'We have the right to thwart nature's procreative compulsions, through sodomy or abortion' (Paglia, 1990, 14), are considered shocking because by articulating them, Paglia decisively (albeit quite loudly) eviscerates and subverts a number of received – and deeply entrenched – ideas. Paglia's prose is clear and dramatic and full of insight and her erudition and interest in art, world literature, cinema, theatre, sexuality, human nature, gay sensibility, and decadence are explicated in original and provocative ways.

Paglia's analysis of Dickinson's poetry reveals the cruelty and barbarism inherent in much of Dickinson's poetry. Paglia's thesis; that Dickinson's poetry can be categorised into two simple categories or 'representational modes': the sadistic or the mawkish, is based on Paglia's notion that sadism and sentimentality (rather than, for example, sadism and masochism, or sadism and algophobia) are binary opposites. Paglia's insistence that Dickinson writes using only these two representational modes; these two specific *sexual personae*, is limiting, in that it refuses to allow that Dickinson uses other types of personae in her writing. It is on this point and at this point that Paglia's thesis and this chapter diverge, as Dickinson's sadist persona is only *one* of the multiple sexual personae she utilised in her poetry.

Dickinson and Sade

Emily Dickinson utilises the persona of the sadist in her poetry in order to express poetically what the French poet Lautréamont terms 'the delights of cruelty' (Lautréamont, 2011, 31), and what Susan Sontag refers to as 'an erotics of agony' (Sontag, 1982, 107).

Although there is no evidence that Emily Dickinson ever read the works of the philosopher-pornographer, the Marquis de Sade (there are no references to Sade or his works in her letters; none of his books were in the Dickinson library), by utilising the persona of the sadist for poetic purposes,

Dickinson can be seen to be aligning herself – in a literary sense – with some aspects of Sade's philosophy. As Clement, one of Sade's libertines from *Justine* states:

...there is no more lively sensation than that of pain; its impressions are certain and dependable, they never deceive as may those of the pleasure women perpetually feign and almost never experience... (Sade, 1965, 606)

For Sade, 'pain' is 'certain and dependable' and will 'never deceive'. Sade appears to believe that pain is a vehicle for sincerity or truth. In J241/F339, Dickinson's female sadist boldly states:

I like a look of Agony,
Because I know it's true –
Men do not sham Convulsion,
Nor simulate, a Throe –

The Eyes glaze once – and that is Death –
Impossible to feign... (J241/F339)

Here Dickinson's sadist is a disciple of Sade, who in *The 120 Days of Sodom* has his group of sadistic libertines watch a woman 'perish in the midst of incredible agonies, while they look on and have themselves frigged by the girl they have with them' (Sade, 1990, 639).

Dickinson reverses Sade: her sadist is a female watching the agonies of 'Men'; Sade's sadistic libertines are men watching a girl's 'incredible agonies'. Dickinson's sadist is a Sadean voyeur of acts of cruelty, and also a philosophical searcher for truth; 'a look of Agony' is presented as a truth which is 'Impossible to feign' or to 'sham', and which can therefore be celebrated as real and tangible, as can the ending of pain – the end 'that is Death'. For Dickinson, when she states: 'Twas the old – road – through pain –' (J344/F376); she means that the 'road' is a metaphysical road that leads towards the notion that there is truth to be found within the realms of 'pain'. This particular idea, of being able to find truth within pain, is closely aligned to the philosophy of Sade, who uses his fictional characters to commit acts which were – and in some cases still are – considered anti-social, criminal, and sometimes blasphemous. Having created these characters, Sade then uses them to argue – by way of justification – that there is:

no act, however awful, however atrocious, however infamous... which we cannot perform every time we sense the urge, why! which we have the right not to commit, since Nature puts the idea in our heads. (Sade, 1991, 171-172)

Both Sade and Dickinson refuse to see female sexuality as a procreative function and instead present sex in their works as an 'arena of pleasures' (Lawless, 1992). In this respect, Dickinson uses the sadist persona in the same way Sade has his female sadist, Juliette, use her 'sexuality as terrorism' (Carter, 1967, 78).

In *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia claims that 'Emily Dickinson is the female Sade' (Paglia, 1990, 624). Dickinson's alignment with, and similarity to, Sade, who states: 'it is always by way of pain one arrives at pleasure' (Sade, 1965, 280), and her deployment of the sadist persona, reveals that she, like Sade, is 'someone with an intellectual project: to explore the scope of transgression' (Sontag, 1982, 107). By deploying the sadist persona, Dickinson is also experimenting with her poetic identity by using an archetype which was readily available in culture and in literature, not only in the works of Sade (whose name Krafft-Ebing used to give this type of sexuality its label), but also in a number of Shakespeare's plays – in particular *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth* – with which Dickinson was familiar.

There are many poems in which Dickinson uses the sadist persona in order to express a joy in cruelty: poems which do not simply restrict suffering to Dante's 'blind prison of pain' (Alighieri, 1949, X.59), but rather help to emancipate pain and integrate it into an accepted and acceptable realm of experience.

Dickinson adopts the sadist persona in her letters; in a letter (letter 56) to Susan Gilbert, asking about her (Gilbert's) students, Dickinson writes:

I hope you whip them Susie – for *my* sake – whip them *hard* whenever they dont behave just as you want to have them! (Dickinson, 1958, 144-5)

In the above three-part sentence, Dickinson italicises the words that are the most important. The whole sentence contains a number of significant linguistic features. 'I hope you...' is first and foremost a plea from the correspondent (Dickinson) to the addressee (Gilbert). Dickinson employs a sadistic epistolary persona to ask Gilbert to 'whip' the students. She repeats the words 'whip them' and then adds the italicised word '*hard*' to the second demand. With the words 'for *my* sake' removed, the sentence becomes almost fevered in its delivery: 'I hope you whip them Susie... whip them *hard*'. In this short extract, the correspondent is attempting to impose her own sadistic desires onto the letter's addressee. There is a certain amount of emotional blackmail taking place in the sentence; the italicised '*my*' of '*for my sake*' is emphatically possessive, implying a close hierarchical relationship; 'for *my* sake' is a pronominal possessive adjectival phrase, one that refers to an understood noun, 'sake', and shows possession by that noun by something or someone – in this case '*my*'. The fact '*my*' is italicized signifies and adds emphasis to its possessive function and nature. The sentence changes tone and function as it progresses towards its end. The initial plea of 'I hope you' changes to the sadistic 'whip them Susie' and from there to the emotionally charged 'for *my* sake', which alters again to the almost frenzied command 'whip them *hard*...', with the emphasis on the repeated word 'whip' and the italicised '*hard*'. The correspondent uses phrases that are similar to the orders and instructions issued by Wanda von Dunajew and her Greek lover, in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870). The Greek is a sadist who at his lover's urging, whips his love rival in front of Wanda:

'Whip him then,' she shouted...

'Now look!' cried the Greek, 'see what a thorough beating I will give him.'

... And he began to lash me so unmercifully, so fearfully, that I quivered under every blow, and trembled from head to foot; tears poured down my cheek. (Sacher-Masoch, 1970, 154-158)

'To punish them would please me' (Dickinson, 1958, 681), Dickinson's sadistic epistolary persona declares boldly in another of her letters (letter 675), before taking this a stage further in poem J622/F688, where Dickinson articulates sadism via the persona of the female sadist wanting to know how much a male victim has suffered. Dickinson's sadist states: 'To know just how He suffered – would be dear –' (J622/F688).

In this poem, Dickinson's capitalization of the pronoun 'He' indicates that her sadist is possibly referring to Christ's crucifixion. Dickinson, who 'reserves her most contemptuous witticisms for the Son who came to justify the ways of God to men' (Paglia, 1990, 651), has her sadist express the desire to know the precise details of 'just how He suffered', and exactly what Jesus' experiences of pain were. The sadist claims that such knowledge 'would be dear'; with the word 'dear' meaning either 'precious' or 'costly', with costly having its own multiple meaning of fiscal cost or emotional cost. By having this double meaning embodied in (or by) the word 'dear', Dickinson's sadist is an ambiguous someone looking at Christ's crucifixion from dual perspectives. One perspective is that of a non-Christian sadist who finds the details of the pain Christ 'suffered' to be salacious information that provides 'dear' or precious sadistic satisfaction. Another perspective is that of an unspecified someone wanting the same information, for the same reasons, but who believes that such knowledge is going to be too 'dear' or too expensive (financially or emotionally) to acquire.

Dickinson and Shakespeare

The desire to kill gratuitously is another aspect of the sadist persona sometimes used by Emily Dickinson. In two of her poems the narrator speaks with relish of an overwhelming desire to commit 'murder'. In poem J762/F485, the sadist admits to 'Murder by degrees', before ending the poem with the ominous words: 'Tis Life's award – to die', whilst in poem J379/F664, Dickinson uses words and imagery familiar to the reader of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*, including a 'dirk', a 'wound', a 'murder', as well as the capitalised word 'Rehearsal', which helps to draw attention to the fact that the poem is set within a deliberately 'staged' dramatic setting, as was *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*. This theatrical effect is due to Dickinson's use of the literary technique Julia Kristeva has termed 'intertextuality' (Kristeva, 1986, 111), which is simply the transposition of one text to another, but also a literary device used by Dickinson during a time that prefigure metafiction's self-reflexivity by several years. The allusions to Shakespeare are also apparent when Dickinson's sadist persona speaks of 'a Bliss like Murder' (J379/F664), which resembles Macbeth's 'noble passion' for killing (4.3.114).

Dickinson and Firearms

Dickinson has also written a number of poems which feature the sadist expressing a desire to kill by using a gun. This may seem like a particularly modern (twentieth and twenty-first century) mental attitude, but in fact the Colt revolver, America's most popular handgun, had been patented in 1835, five years after Emily Dickinson's birth, so firearms would have been a normal – even accepted – facet of American life, especially in a country whose constitution insisted that it was 'the right of the people to keep and bear Arms' (quoted in Tindall & Shi, 1992, A22). This fascination with guns is expressed by Dickinson's sadist persona most succinctly in poem J754/F764, a poem which, according to Helen McNeil, is 'much anthologised today because of its phallic imagery' (McNeil, 1986, 175), although apart from the word 'Gun', it is difficult to find any 'phallic imagery' in the poem at all. What is emphasised in the poem is the integration of the female narrator with a firearm, most likely a hunting rifle, which belongs to a man:

My life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away –

And now We roam in Sovereign Wood –
And now We hunt the Doe... (J754/F764)

In the first two stanzas, the teamwork of the working couple is emphasised, with 'The Owner' as the hunter and the sadist persona as the 'Loaded Gun', who is 'carried' by him into the 'Sovereign Wood' to 'roam' and 'hunt'.

When Dickinson's sadist states: 'And now We roam in Sovereign Wood – /And now We hunt the Doe' (J754/F764), she has become Gilles Deleuze's 'ideal woman who hunts' (Deleuze, 1991, 94), in a persona 'in which the hunting, the agrarian and the matriarchal elements become fully integrated' (Deleuze, 1991, 95). In the last two stanzas, the sadist persona explains the underlying power structure of the 'Owner'/'Loaded Gun' relationship:

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –
None stir the second time –
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –
Or an emphatic Thumb –

Though I than He – may longer live
He longer must – than I –
For I have but the power to kill,
Without – the power to die – (J754/F764)

The 'Loaded Gun' is 'carried', but not controlled by 'The Owner', for it is not 'He' who has 'the power to kill' at all, but her. 'He' is actually presented as

powerless – merely one whose job it is to carry the real killer, The 'Loaded Gun' however, which is also presented as the 'life' of the sadist persona in the first stanza, has the power of immortality, revealed in the lines: 'I have but the power to kill,/Without – the power to die –', a statement which reveals immortality in a negative way, by coupling it with the power to bring about the destruction of others. Once again, Dickinson writes of the ability 'to kill' as a magical power, one that is only available to a chosen few – and in this instance, females.

Poem J754/F764 has much in common with Benjamin Robert Haydon's *Diary* (1846) extract which recounts a forest hunt in the same loving detail as Dickinson's poem:

I was walking in the woods of Copy near Norwich with my Friend Hawkes, who carried his gun to amuse himself with, whatever pain it might inflict on others, equally susceptible to pain & pleasure himself... His back was bent, his gun cocked, his neck stretched, and like an assassin he was creeping to his innocent victims... (Haydon, 1990, 72)

This same attitude to killing as Haydon – albeit magnified – can be found in J118/F103, in which the sadist persona is no longer content to inflict pain upon – or kill – one single person, but expresses the desire to commit genocide:

My friend attacks my friend!
Oh Battle picturesque!...
How martial is this place!
Had I a mighty gun
I think I'd shoot the human race
And then to glory run! (J118/F103)

The sadist in this poem finds the violence of a 'Battle picturesque'; her sadism is in accord with the 'martial' nature of the world or 'place' that the sadist persona inhabits, which in 1859 – the approximate year in which the poem was written – would be an America stricken and divided by the beginnings of the Civil War.

With regards to how the Civil War manifested itself in Emily Dickinson's poetry, Drew Gilpin Faust states:

In Amherst, Massachusetts, where she rarely left her father's house, Emily Dickinson lived... removed from the war... Dickinson is renowned as a poet preoccupied with death. Yet curiously any relationship between her work and the Civil War was long rejected by most literary critics, even though she wrote almost half her oeuvre, at a rate of four poems a week, during those years. (Faust, 2008, 204)

Despite Dickinson's overt lack of reference to the Civil War in her poetry and letters, some aesthetic aspects of it are utilised in a few of her poems;

military metaphors, battle similes, war adjectives and references to bullets, guns and dead bodies are just some of the devices utilised by Dickinson in order to make her points. Awareness of the Civil War as the background to poem J118/F103 means that the sadism in this poem can be interpreted as the wishes of someone glutted with the reality of war and wanting only to bring an end to it, even if it means the destruction of the entire 'human race', rather than being seen as a portrayal of a poetic persona brutalised by war and willing to join in and contribute to the mass destruction to be found in the 'martial' nature of the 'place' in which she lives.

The sadist persona's stated desire to commit mass-murder on a world-wide scale is one which offers the promise of 'glory' as its reward. As 'the human race' would be extinct, the only 'glory' the poetic persona would have would be a life of absolute solitude. Therefore, in the hands of the sadist/poet, genocide – the ultimate in destruction; the 'Battle picturesque' (J118/F103) – is a means of ending the destruction caused by war, and in this way, becomes a convoluted form of creation – one which brings about total solitude for the poet, with the resultant time and quiet that are necessary for creation.

The Danse Macabre

In several of Emily Dickinson's poems, sexuality, sadism and death are linked in markedly different ways to the 'Gun' poems, and can be seen to be precursors to the many necrophilia poems which Dickinson wrote. For Dickinson, death was often personified into the skeletal figure of 'Death' from the 'Danse Macabre' – a late-medieval allegory on the universality of death: no matter one's station in life, the dance of death unites all.

La Danse Macabre consists of the personified death leading a row of dancing figures from all walks of life to the grave, typically with an emperor, king, youngster, and beautiful girl – all skeletal. They were produced to remind people of how fragile their lives and how vain the glories of earthly life were. Its origins are postulated from illustrated sermon texts; the earliest artistic examples are in a cemetery in Paris from 1424. Dance of Death – a life amidst death motif which was popular during the Middle Ages (Biederman, 1992, 309) eventually metamorphosed into the adage: 'in the midst of life, we are in death', which can be found in the 'Burial of the Dead' litany in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Dickinson's linking of sadism with the figure of 'Death' is most evident in poem J1049/F1119, in which the sadist persona states:

Pain has but one Acquaintance
And that is Death –
Each one unto the other
Society enough.

Pain is the Junior Party
By Just a Second's right –
Death tenderly assists Him

And then absconds from Sight. (J1049/F1119)

In poem J1049/F1119, 'Pain' and 'Death' are personified and given 'Acquaintance' status, with 'Each one' dependent upon 'the other'. However, as the second stanza reveals, despite the high status usually conferred upon 'Pain' by Dickinson in her sadism poems, it is the figure of 'Death' which is given superior status in this poem, with pain presented as 'the Junior Party'. This hierarchical arrangement, with each persona an entity unto itself, but also dependent upon its 'Acquaintance' is examined by Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he notes that there is 'the presence of a sadist element in the sexual instinct', and that it is 'plausible to suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct' (Freud, 1991a, 259). For Freud, as for Dickinson's sadist, death, manifesting itself as sadism, enclosed by – or within – life is 'plausible' due to the governing factor of the 'Pleasure Principle'.

Dickinson's 'Pleasure' was in writing poetry – a 'Principle' which overrode all other considerations, including non-publication. This is expressed particularly well in poem J1049/F1119, in which the personified figures of 'Pain' and 'Death' are separate beings, but ones who are connected by vocation. 'Pain' is not only 'the Junior Party', but is also the act of the creation of poetry by a writer who had not published. 'Death', the one who 'tenderly assists' 'Pain' is the motivation for writing, be it the fear of mortality, a love of life, or even, as has been suggested, a literary 'path to death' (Freud, 1991a, 247).

For these reasons, poem J1049/F1119 can be seen as a transitional poem which spans the considerable differences between Emily Dickinson's sadist poems and her death poems, which it does – in part – by using a third-person sadist narrator to synthesise the sadist with the necrophile – in the guise of 'Pain' and 'Death' – then give the superior role – that of creative inspiration – to 'Death'.

The linking of sexuality to sadism, death and necrophilia is a literary connection which Dickinson, like Sade before her, makes. In *Juliette*, Sade describes a scene in which necrophilia takes place within a graveyard:

'Let us take off our clothes,' Durand proposes, 'with naked flesh we must roll upon this carrion, the sensation is voluptuous.'

'It occurs to me,' said I, 'that these bones, shaped as they are, might serve in the stead of pricks.'

And Clairwil, finding the idea greatly to her taste, snatched up a femur and stowed it in her cunt... What now shall I say, my friends? Delirium and extravagance were at their height, we invented, we enacted a hundred things more infamous, more morbid yet. (Sade, 1968, 539)

Sade's description of sexual intercourse between living people, corpses and the bones of corpses clearly delineates the links between sexuality and death via necrophilia. Although the narrative voice – Juliette's – describes the necrophilia as 'morbid', the tone of the writing is clearly celebratory, and in praise of 'Delirium and extravagance', as it is in many of the poems of Emily Dickinson in which the persona of the necrophile is used.

Jael and Durga

In one poem, Dickinson describes how the sadistic 'She': 'Impaled Him on Her fiercest stakes.../She stung Him – sapped His firm Advance –' (J1031/F1084).

Here Dickinson presents her female sadist as an aggressive, murderous female dominatrix. The prototypes for such a persona are the biblical figure of Jael, and the Hindu goddess, Durga. Both of them murdered men by impalement.

Dickinson's impaling sadist is a formidable 'She' with a powerful libido, who fiercely 'impaled' and 'stung' her male lover and then 'sapped His firm Advance'. Despite calling the sadist persona 'She', Dickinson has given her the characteristics of several creatures, including the scorpion, which kills its prey by impaling it on its venomous tail stinger; and the shrike, which impales its prey on thorns or the spikes of plants or trees. Dickinson's female sadist emasculates her male victim by sapping his 'firm advance'. As noted by Camille Paglia, there is an inherent cruelty in Dickinson's use of the word, 'Fiercest', for as Paglia asserts, 'Fiercest may mean sharpest, but it could also mean bluntest, to maximize pain' (Paglia, 1990, 627).

The impalement of a man by a woman on a wooden stake is told in the biblical story of Jael and Sisera, in which Jael murders Sisera by hammering a wooden tent peg into his skull. This story is told in *The Book of Judges* in a poem known as 'Deborah's Song', which refers explicitly to the death of Sisera:

Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
most blessed of tent-dwelling women.
Sisera asked for water, and she gave him milk;
she brought him cream in a bowl fit for nobles.
Her left hand reached for the tent peg,
her right hand for the workman's hammer.
She struck Sisera; she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
He sank, he fell,
at her feet he lay still.
At her feet he lay still;
where he fell, there he fell dead. (*Judges*, 5, 24-27)

As a result of Jael killing Sisera, God gave the victory to Israel. Because of her action, Jael is considered 'Most blessed', according to the text.

In Hindu myth, Durga is a female who impales males on the prongs of her trident. In the Hindu myth of Durga, a popular fierce form of the Hindu goddess. Durga, meaning 'the inaccessible' or 'the invincible', is depicted as a goddess with multiple arms, carrying various weapons and riding a ferocious lion. She is often depicted as battling or slaying demons, particularly Mahishasura, the buffalo demon, who she impaled on the savage prongs of her trident. Durga's triumph as 'Slayer of the Buffalo Demon' is a central episode of the scripture *Devi Mahatmya*:

After wrestling with him for a while, the Mother Goddess Ambika lifted him up, whirled him around and flung him down to the earth. Thus thrown to the ground, the wicked asura rose swiftly on reaching the ground, and rushed forward raising his fist, intending to kill Chandika. Seeing the lord of all the asura-folks approaching, the Goddess (Durga) pinned him to the earth by piercing him in the chest with a spear. Pierced by the pointed spear of the Goddess, he fell lifeless on the ground, shaking the entire earth with its oceans, its islands and its mountains. (Leelamma, 1998, 24).

Emily Dickinson utilizes aspects of these female murderers as prototypes for her own 'She'. In poem J1031/F1084, Dickinson's female sadist becomes a monstrous impaling murderer of men. Dickinson out-Sades Sade, for her 'She' is far more sadistic than any of Sade's sadistic females, primarily because Sade's women remain within human parameters, whereas Dickinson creates a hybrid creature that is part woman, part scorpion, part shrike, part mantis and part black widow spider – which kills its male mate after copulation.

Dickinson's 'She' 'slew Him', 'felled – He', 'Impaled Him', 'stung Him', 'sapped His firm Advance' and did 'Her Worst' to 'Him', and then, in a final twist of sadistic irony, 'Acknowledged Him a Man'. Dickinson's sadist appears to need the male's complete emasculation, surrender and subjugation in order to achieve sadistic satisfaction.

Sadism and Sorcery

In several of her poems, sadism is presented by Emily Dickinson as analogous to witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, or magic – supernatural powers which can only be learned from one who is qualified to teach them. Often the sadist persona utilised by Dickinson in her poems and letters is that of a witch, sorceress or enchantress, significant because the witch is an immediately recognisable figure in Western society, (usually) female, and initially perceived and presented as cruel and/or malevolent. As pointed out by Burford and Schulman:

It is impossible to record the history of female punishment without reference to witchcraft since those accused of this crime were chiefly women. However much society managed to control its female members through law or custom there remained an underlying suspicion and fear that the weaker vessel was corrupt and open to the blandishments of the Devil, and might by demonic power overturn the authority of church and state...

How the belief arose that woman, the mother and nurturer, was also woman the destroyer and spoiler suggests a primeval fear of feminine influence... Woman was the centre of life. That her body bled on a regular basis without suffering any hurt must have seemed powerful magic... procreation was seen as the special power of women working in conjunction with such agencies as the wind, the river, or even eating beans.

The desire to assist such powers by practicing magic through charms, incantations, and ritual antedates formal religion; and is apparently world-wide with women healers and priestesses playing significant roles in most ancient cultures. When death, disease or disaster struck, the cause was in a converse power of evil. Women, with access to so much power, might be suspected of using it for negative as well as positive ends. Greeks and Romans linked witches with death, darkness and night. The moon goddess Selene, Hecate or Diana, was the deity most often invoked by witches, since she ruled ghosts, tombs, blood, dogs, terror, night and cross roads. (Burford & Shulman, 1994, 201-2)

Rather than ignore or deny the fear of witches; a fear that the patriarchal 'church and state' clearly felt, Emily Dickinson appropriated the figure as a positive metaphor in her poetry. She accepted and celebrated the notion of the cruel or sadistic witch, as well as the linking of 'witches with death, darkness and night'.

The witch, a powerful symbol in Western mythology, has at various times been feared, vilified, ridiculed and idealised by differing sectors of society. The witch has been used by feminist critics as a metaphor for a transgressive, powerful and/or independent woman, and the persecution of witches is often interpreted as the brutal subjugation of women by a patriarchy that feared women with any form of power.

Dickinson lived in a 'nineteenth-century Congregational community within which [she] received her Christian formation' (Eberwein, 1998, 89), and because it was a time of 'Puritan orthodoxy' (Bolt and Lee, 1989, 99), when biblical interdicts were heeded and adhered to, Dickinson's use of a witch persona can be seen as a form of transgression and subversion. The Bible's Deuteronomy interdict makes the Puritan view of witchcraft quite clear:

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so. (*Deuteronomy*, 18, 17-22)

Dickinson's representations of the witch, the sorceress, the enchantress in her poems and letters therefore depict the evolution of past and contemporary representations of witchcraft and paganism from the popular imaginings of witchcraft in nineteenth-century America. In her poems, Dickinson reconstructs the potent symbol of the witch in order to deploy it as a persona; as a metaphor; as a symbol, to indicate the broader social, political and cultural issues arising out of the interaction of Romantic and Enlightenment

epistemes in Western society. Dickinson also uses representations of witchcraft to examine how the witch is transformed during the Enlightenment from a symbol of fear to an idealised and/or romanticised symbol of rebellion. She uses the metaphor of the witch to pose questions about aspects of nineteenth-century morality, specifically the role of women in Victorian American society, and its adoption by legal, religious and political movements. Specifically, Dickinson utilises the witch persona as an archetype of feminine creative power at a time when feminine power was confined to the home and channelled (by a dominant patriarchy) into the management and education of children and servants. Also, Dickinson, like some other Victorian women, lived an unconventional (by the standards of the day) life. It is a combination of these factors that makes Dickinson's deployment of the witch persona powerful.

The literary precursors of witch, sorceress and/or enchantress Dickinson utilises as personae (and which are investigated in this chapter) include Medea from Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*; from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*; and from Euripedes' *Medea*; the witch of Endor from the book of Samuel in the *King James Bible*; the weird sisters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; Sycorax from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; Madame Durand from Sade's *Juliette*; 'The Witch-Mother' from Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*, and the 'soft enchantress', the 'ebony sorceress', the 'obi' and the 'Queen of Hell' from Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* (1857).

Poe and Baudelaire

In American literature, a precursor to Dickinson's poetic use of the witch as 'Enchantress' is Edgar Allan Poe's 'To Isadore':

...I saw thee stand,
Like queenly nymph from Fairy-land –
Enchantress of the flowery wand,
Most beauteous Isadore! (Poe, 1985, 1024)

Poe's uses of the 'Enchantress' influenced Charles Baudelaire, who integrates the 'enchantress', the 'witch', and the 'sorceress' into his seminal poetry collection, *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), in which he uses a 'witch' (Baudelaire, 2008, 58), a 'lovely witch' (61), a 'soft enchantress' (58), a 'sweet sorceress' (62) an 'ebony sorceress' (37), an 'obi' (37), and the 'Queen of Hell' (37), as well as gatherings of 'scrawny witches' (72) at 'witches' sabbats' (23).

Dickinson, reader of Poe and a contemporary of Baudelaire, appropriated the figure of the witch and sometimes re-gendered it into a 'Wizard'. In a number of poems, Dickinson uses the 'Wizard' as a persona as well as a metaphor for an 'erudite' someone who can 'teach' her 'skill', knowledge and power. Dickinson's linking of sadism with witchcraft – or, as in this instance, with 'Necromancy' – can be seen most clearly in poem J177/F168, in which the sadist demands:

Ah, Necromancy Sweet!
Ah, Wizard erudite!

Teach me the skill,

That I instil the pain
Surgeons assuage in vain,
Nor Herb of all the plain
Can heal! (J177/F168)

In this poem, 'the pain' itself is spoken of as something that cannot be stopped, healed or assuaged, either by 'Surgeons' or by 'Herb'. In line with Sade's philosophy, Dickinson's sadist appears to be suggesting that pain is never banished from the world, and rather than allowing it to continue to be administered by amateurs, she would prefer to be taught the 'Sweet' ability or 'the skill' to inflict or 'instil the pain' by a skilled necromancer or 'Wizard erudite', presumably in order to be sure of administering the pain correctly.

In poem J177/F168, Dickinson appears to be deliberately misusing the term 'Necromancy', or rather, she appears to be using 'Necromancy' as a synonym for witchcraft or sorcery. Necromancy is the name given to the act of 'attempting to contact the dead' and the 'art of necromancy, has been a part of witchcraft since earliest times' (Haining, 1971, 78). Necromancy then is the practice of conjuring the spirits of the dead for the purpose of divination or prophecy – although the term has also been applied to raising the dead for other purposes.

Of Dickinson's deliberate misuse of the particular and specific words relating to magic, sorcery, witchcraft and necromancy, Montague Summers points out:

[it is] a waste of time... to argue that technically and etymologically a sorcerer differs from a witch, a witch from a necromancer, a necromancer from a satanist. In actual fact and practice all these names are correlative; in use, synonymous... To sum up, sorcerer, witch, necromancer are essentially all one, so it is convenient, as well as... perfectly correct to employ the word 'witch' to cover them all, whilst witchcraft is the cult, together with the practices, of a witch. (Summers, 1974, 11-12)

Madame Durand (in Sade's Juliette)

Dickinson's own poetic combination of sadism and sorcery or necromancy has another literary precursor in the fictional works of the Marquis de Sade, in particular his novel, *Juliette*, in which his eponymous narrator speaks of 'a most unusual woman' named 'Madame Durand' (Sade, 1968, 523), a 'sorceress' who has the power conjure corpses from out of the ground:

'I believe I read your thoughts,' said the sorceress.

From her pocket she pulls out a box, opens it, sprinkles some powder upon the soil; and the plot beneath our feet suddenly becomes strewn with cadavers. (Sade, 1968, 539)

Apart from her power over the dead, Durand is also able to 'say what the future holds in store' (Sade, 1968, 527), and possesses the ability of the alchemist to blend 'poisons of all sorts' (Sade, 1968, 523) from a 'garden of venomous plants' (Sade, 1968, 527). According to Juliette, Durand the sorceress was able to 'be of service... by what magic we could not guess' (Sade, 1968, 538).

As Roland Barthes points out in *A Lover's Discourse*: 'Magic consultations, secret rites and votive actions are not absent from the amorous subject's life' (Barthes, 1991, 263). This is as true for many of Dickinson's sexual personae as it is for Sade's narrators. However, Emily Dickinson's combination of sadism and 'sorcery' takes a synthesis of the two a stage further than Sade by emphasising the fact that the 'skill' necessary to 'instil the pain' can also be associated with the literary ability needed to create poetry. For Dickinson's sadist, sorcery or witchcraft is an ordinary, everyday phenomenon. In poem J1583/F1612, she has her sadist persona state:

Witchcraft was hung, in History,
But History and I
Find all the Witchcraft that we need
Around us, Every Day – (J1583/F1612)

Dickinson utilises a number of techniques in poem J1583/F1612. Firstly, Dickinson capitalises the words 'Witchcraft', 'History', 'Every' and 'Day'. Capitalising certain words that do not necessarily need capitalising, in order to draw attention to their importance, is a recognised Dickinson linguistic technique. After making the point that witchcraft was hunted down and eradicated in New England in the past – 'Witchcraft was hung, in History', Dickinson then allies her sadist narrator with history: 'History and I', thereby presenting herself as a witch-finder, one such as Matthew Hopkins, the self-proclaimed 'witch-finder general'; someone who is able to recognise 'Witchcraft', or 'Find all the Witchcraft' that she and her cohorts ('we') need 'Around' them ('us') 'Every Day'. The distinction created by Dickinson's use of the word 'Day' is also important. It is not claimed by Dickinson's persona or 'supposed' 'I' that Witchcraft is *used* 'Every Day', but that it is *able to be found* 'Every Day' by those that know where to look and what to look for. This implies that the 'I' has significant knowledge of the supernatural – it suggests someone who is in possession of supernatural or esoteric knowledge acquired over time throughout 'History'. The use of the word 'Day' instead of 'night' is also significant, insofar as witches are known to hold their meetings or 'sabbats' (Summers, 1974, 272) at night, particularly on Walpurgis Night (Walpurgisnacht), Halloween, and other significant and notable pagan dates of celebration throughout the year. The significance of Dickinson's choice of 'Day' over night reveals a distinction between white and black magic, or magic used for good or evil purposes. In poem J1583/F1612, Dickinson uses a singular narrator ('I'), and multiple subjects ('we') who 'need' 'the Witchcraft' (which is capitalised to show its importance). This suggests that the 'we' who 'need' the 'Witchcraft' are a group of witch-finders, seeking out witches, in order to torture and kill them.

Dickinson's utilisation of sorcery or witchcraft as a metaphor for sadism can be found in several of her poems, particularly poem J1708/F1712 in which she writes:

Witchcraft has not a Pedigree
'Tis early as our Breath
And mourners meet it going out
The moment of our death – (J1708/F1712)

In poem J1708/F1712, when Dickinson's sadist speaks of 'Witchcraft... not [having] a Pedigree', she is not referring to witchcraft having no documented (therefore provable) lineage or genealogical descent. Such a statement would be in direct contradiction to known facts: witchcraft has existed as a documented phenomenon for thousands of years; in New England, witchcraft was something of a controversial subject, due to the notoriety of what has become known as the Salem witch trials.

Sadism, Sorcery and Salem

In 1645, Springfield, Massachusetts experienced America's first accusations of witchcraft when husband and wife Hugh and Mary Parsons accused each other of witchcraft. At America's first witch trial, Hugh was found innocent, while Mary was acquitted of witchcraft, but sentenced to be hanged for the death of her child. She died in prison. From 1645-1663, about eighty people throughout New England's Massachusetts Bay Colony were accused of practising witchcraft; thirteen women and two men were executed in a witch-hunt that lasted from 1645-1663.

The Salem witch trials followed in 1692-93 and became the most famous witchcraft incident in New England. The trials took place near Salem, Massachusetts. The Salem witch trials were a series of hearings before local magistrates, followed by county court trials, to prosecute people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts, between February 1692 and May 1693. Over one hundred and fifty people were arrested and imprisoned. The two courts convicted twenty-nine people of the capital felony of witchcraft. Nineteen of the accused (fourteen women and five men) were hanged. At least five more of the accused died in prison.

Although generally known as the 'Salem' witch trials, the preliminary hearings in 1692 were conducted in a variety of towns across the province: Salem Village, Ipswich, Andover, and Salem Town, Massachusetts. The most publicised trials were conducted in 1692 in Salem Town. All twenty-six people on trial before this court were convicted.

When Dickinson's sadist states: 'Witchcraft has not a Pedigree' (J1708/F1712), she is suggesting that witchcraft in New England is perceived as having no good, noble, or aristocratic origins, despite it having been around for centuries, or at least from a time as 'early as our Breath'. Her use of the word 'Witchcraft' is partly a socio-historical observation and also a possible criticism of New England's attitude to witchcraft.

Dickinson's own attitude to witchcraft is almost impossible to determine, for she presents multiple (and shifting) points of view regarding the phenomenon in her poems and her letters. In Letter 562, a letter to Otis Lord, a sixty-eight year old Salem judge she may have been romantically involved with, she writes: 'Witchcraft is wiser than we – ' (Dickinson, 1958, 617).

It is with this comment that Emily Dickinson – by sending a provocative statement regarding witchcraft to an elderly Salem judge – can be seen to be questioning Victorian New England's intolerant attitude to witchcraft. Unfortunately, Otis Lord's response to Dickinson's loaded comment is not known. Dickinson's sadist's second point regarding witchcraft in poem J1708/F1712 is that witchcraft is an ever-present and inevitable phenomenon, encountered at 'The moment of our death'.

Witchcraft has not a Pedigree
'Tis early as our Breath
And mourners meet it going out
The moment of our death – (J1708/F1712)

According to Dickinson's sadist, 'mourners meet it going out', and by 'going out' Dickinson is referring to it as leaving the human body, at the precise 'moment of our death'. Witchcraft, whether Dickinson calls it 'Witchcraft' (J1583/F1612), 'magic' (letter 890), 'enchantment' (letter 966), 'sorcery' (J191/F213), 'necromancy' (J177/F168), 'charm' (letter 57), 'spell' (letter 389), or 'a little more Alchimy' (*sic*) (letter 799), is a prevalent presence in her poems and letters.

The sadist's 'binding' commitment to witchcraft or 'obligation to enchantment' is set out by Dickinson in letter 565: 'the obligation to enchantment is always binding' (Dickinson, 1958, 619). This is also outlined in poem J593/F627 when the sadist/witch states:

'Tis antidote to turn –

To Tomes of solid Witchcraft –
Magicians be asleep –
But Magic – hath an Element
Like Deity – to keep – (J593/F627)

In poem J593/F627, Dickinson presents her sadist/witch as a Prospero-like figure, one who is 'rapt in secret study' (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 1,2,77), so as to obtain knowledge from her 'Tomes of solid Witchcraft'. As a Prospero-like reader of 'enchanted' books, Dickinson's female sadist/witch is clearly awake and acquiring arcane 'Magic' knowledge, while rival male 'Magicians be asleep'. Dickinson has her witch learn enough magic to cause her to undergo a 'Conversion of the Mind', and it is here that Dickinson's witch challenges and usurps Shakespeare's most powerful magician, Prospero.

Sadism, Witchcraft, Geometry and Bataille

In letter 350, Dickinson's witch persona presents the notion of an aesthetic of witchcraft and what witchcraft might mean to its practitioner in terms of questions of geometry; that is aesthetics pertaining to shape, size, form, structure, relative position of figures, and the properties of space: 'Best Witchcraft is Geometry/To a magician's eye' (Dickinson, 1958, 478).

Dickinson has revised these two lines and rewritten them as a poem. The words of the second line are revised in poem J1158/F1158 to: 'Best Witchcraft is Geometry/To the magician's mind...' (J1158/F1158).

Dickinson's decision to alter the form of the lines – that is, to revise the lines of letter 350 and rewrite them as the lines of poem J1158/F1158 – is highly significant. Her decision to then alter the epistolary words 'a magician's eye' – with the said eye's connotations of visual aesthetics, geometric patterns and interlocking shapes and colours, to the poetic words 'the magician's mind' – with the said mind's connotations of arcane knowledge, magic thought, epistemology, and aesthetics, causes a number of profound changes in the interpretation of the form, the subjects and the meanings of the poem. The primary shift is from the realm of the visual ('eye') to that of the cerebral ('mind'); that is, 'Witchcraft' is removed from the sensory world of the visual and placed in the abstract realm of thought.

In this, Emily Dickinson has carried out a process of revision and rewriting which echoes, repeats, mirrors the fate of witchcraft in New England. Witchcraft was visible, a tangible thing... something that could be sought out, known of, spoken of, comprehended, feared; its rituals could be observed, its practitioners captured, tortured, imprisoned, executed, until witchcraft was eradicated, made no longer visible, but merely something abstract, a memory, an imaginative figment or fragment, a 'History', until 'Magic' becomes almost non-existent or 'our most frugal Meal' (Dickinson, 1958, 619).

The fate of a New England witch, as it is chronicled by Emily Dickinson's poetic personae, and as it was in 'History' is inevitable. Dickinson's allying of 'Geometry' to 'Witchcraft' is another radical rethinking of the subjects of witchcraft and of geometry itself: 'Best Witchcraft is Geometry' (J1158/F1158).

For Dickinson, geometry and witchcraft are allied; witchcraft is a geometric art and geometry has a sexual element; patterns, shapes and angles are described as 'A Geometric Joy' (J652/F456). This notion of geometry as a form of sexual pleasure is a subject written about by several authors, particularly George Bataille, who, in *The Story of the Eye* (1928), writes:

...the goal of my sexual licentiousness: a geometric incandescence (among other things, the coinciding point of life and death, being and nothingness), perfectly fulgurating. (Bataille, 1979, 30)

Like Dickinson, Bataille links geometry ('geometric incandescence'), sex ('sexual licentiousness') and sorcery – in this instance, the magic of 'fulgurating', which is the ability to emit flashes of light or lightning.

Dickinson's equates 'Witchcraft' (pagan or primitive power) with 'Geometry' (a branch of mathematics), and the result is a poetic alliance or synthesis of the two opposing forces – superstition and science. By yoking these two opposing disciplines – or systems of thought – together, Dickinson

can be seen to be proposing that the 'best' kind of supernatural power ('Witchcraft') is simply a form of mathematics ('Geometry'). As an aesthetic act, Dickinson's literary strategy reveals the poet's attempt to stave off her narrator's fear of 'the changing world of urbanization and industrialization' (Bolt and Lee, 1989, 84), and therefore her romanticization of the primitive or pagan is achieved by metaphorising the death of witchcraft into the birth of science. In this way, Dickinson comments on the process of New England's industrialization and scientific process, during which, the realms of magic and witchcraft were generally forgotten.

Medea

In some of her sadist poems, Emily Dickinson appropriates the figure of 'Medea... a barbarian princess and... a sorceress' (Euripides, 1993, 57) from Euripides' ancient Greek play, *Medea*, in order to link the sorceress, the sadist and the poet, or more specifically, to link the sorceress and the sadist to the writer, and to link acts of sorcery and sadism with the act of creation and the writing of poetry. Such alchemic blending of function can be seen in poem J479/F458, in which Dickinson utilises 'the king's daughter, Medea, a beautiful young sorceress' (Guerber, 1994, 236), from the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes, and has 'Medea... chanting a spell' (Apollonius, 1971, 151) in order to convey a unique blending of sadism, sorcery, and the creating of poetry:

She dealt her pretty words like Blades
How glittering they shone –
And every One unbared a Nerve
Or wantoned with a Bone –

She never deemed – she hurt –
That is not Steel's Affair –
A vulgar grimace in the Flesh –
How ill the Creatures bear –

The ache is Human – not polite –
The Film upon the eye
Mortality's old Custom –
Just looking up – to Die. (J479/F458)

In poem J479/F458, Dickinson utilises a precursory example of Bullough's notion of aesthetic 'distance' (Bullough, 2007, 243) to present a sadist persona talking about the Medea-like third-person, female witch-sadist-poet who wants her 'pretty words' to be 'dealt' (meaning written, set out, or uttered) words to have an effect upon the 'Human' reader – wants them to 'hurt... /The Film upon the eye' of the reader who is reading the 'pretty words' which are 'like Blades'. Once read, 'every One' of the 'pretty words' will have 'unbared a Nerve' and 'wantoned with a Bone', thereby reducing the reader not only to a pitiful state of mental dismemberment, but also – as indicated by the use of the words 'unbared' and 'wantoned' – stripped and aroused. The inflicted

sadistic 'hurt' thereby induces a state of arousal in the sadist, and a simultaneous state of arousal and fear in the victim. The implication is that the words the witch-sadist/poet has written are so powerfully sensual that although they can 'hurt', the reader, the result will also be 'pretty' or aesthetically pleasing. For Dickinson, poetry was always linked to physical pain – 'If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry', she (rather literally) claims (Dickinson, 1958, 474).

Dickinson frequently equates sadism with the creative act of writing poetry, and here Dickinson has explicitly harnessed the destructive sadist to the creative poet, and she has provided a third-person narratee who presents the 'Sadeian Woman' (Carter, 1993, 1) as an aristocratic, haughty, disdainful, arrogant being uncaring of reaction, interest, critical reception or legacy.

The Necrophile

Emily Dickinson's necrophile personae are more multi-faceted than the necrophile personae deployed by Swinburne, Poe, and Baudelaire. Like many other poets, Dickinson has written poems that contain themes of – or references to – necrophilia, which is not an unusual subject in literature, whether poetry or prose. One of the earliest references to necrophilia is in Herodotus' *The Histories* (c. 440 BCE), which contains a reference to it as a widely-recognised cultural phenomenon. Herodotus writes:

When the wife of a distinguished man dies, or any woman who happens to be beautiful or well-known, her body is not given to the embalmers immediately, but only after the lapse of three or four days. This is a precautionary measure to prevent the embalmers from violating the corpse... (Herodotus, 1996, 116)

Necrophilia is also mentioned in relation to a specific episode in *The Iliad*, in which:

The Amazon Queen Penthesileia... drove Achilles from the field on several occasions... but at last he ran her through, fell in love with her dead body, and committed necrophilia upon it there and then. When he later called for volunteers to bury Penthesileia, Thersites, a son of Aetolian Agrius, and the ugliest Greek at Troy, who had gouged out [Penthesileia's] eyes with his spear as she lay dying, jeeringly accused Achilles of filthy and unnatural lust. (Graves, 1962, 313)

Robert Graves adapted this tale into a poem about necrophilia and the Roman public's reaction to it.

Penthesilea

Penthesileia, dead of profuse wounds,
Was despoiled of her arms by Prince Achilles
Who, for love of that fierce white naked corpse,
Necrophily on her committed
In the public view.

Some gasped, some groaned, some bawled their indignation,
Achilles nothing cared, distraught by grief,
But suddenly caught Thersites' obscene snigger
And with one vengeful buffet to the jaw
Dashed out his life.

This was a fury few might understand,
Yet Penthesileia, hailed by Prince Achilles
On the Elysian plain, paused to thank him

For avenging her insulted womanhood
With sacrifice. (Graves, 2013, 93-94)

Graves' poem raises serious questions about the etiquette regarding necrophilia – about whether it is morally wrong, ethically wrong, or socially wrong, or whether it is a violation of trust, memory, or property rights, or just a matter of personal taste.

According to Lisa Downing, necrophilia 'becomes explicable as a desirous and idealizing relation to death, manifest in actual perversion or in representation' (Downing, 2003, 3). Necrophilia, then, to many the most taboo of the sexual perversions, is not an uncommon subject for nineteenth-century literature or art, and is often incorporated into nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle decadent writing as a theme testifying to the strength of a passion that defies corruption and endures forever. Rather than involving any depictions of ghoulishness or descriptions of the desecration of graves, fin-de-siècle fictional accounts of necrophilia tend to euphemize (and eulogise) the emotional attachment of a living person to a corpse as an expression of pathological mourning, as is clearly the case in poems by Edgar Allan Poe, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Maurice Rollinat, Emily Dickinson and Charles Baudelaire.

There is an example of this type of emotional attachment to the dead in Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô*. (1862). In that novel, Flaubert describes the effect death can have on loved ones, and how a dead loved one can remain an object of desire and longing. For Flaubert, necrophilia is merely a sexual desire which has been sublimated into a desire to (literally) put life back into the dead body.

After a battle in which many men are killed and their bodies 'lay stretched out in long lines, on their backs, their mouths open' (Flaubert 1977, 196), Flaubert then describes:

Women stretched out on the corpses, mouth to mouth, brow to brow;
they had to be beaten to drive them back, when the earth was thrown
over the dead (Flaubert, 1977, 196).

That many writers personify, eroticise, sexualise and/or romanticise death is simply an artistic method of metaphorizing mortality into something less fearful than it might be; of making death into a friend, a companion, a lover, in order to negate the fears that can be attendant to aging and the notion of one's own mortality. The images of 'beautiful dead women' prevalent in the works of Victorian writers and artists 'create idealized representations removed from the frightening abysmal reality of decay and decomposition' (Downing, 2003, 7).

Necrophilia is an activity that is considered to be a combination of destruction and eroticism – in other words, an activity that contains its own negation. However, in the works of some poets, necrophilia is presented as a positive act, used to demystify and disempower death.

These destructive erotic themes which lie at the heart of necrophilia are turned by Baudelaire into voyeurism. Baudelaire's necrophile persona is a narcissistic narrator whose real subject in a poem such as 'A Martyr' is himself:

the dead beloved is an internalized, highly idealized, eroticised object of desire that forms part of the poet's psyche and with which there is strong identification:

On the bed, the nude body is spread out
in abandon and shameless,
showing its splendours; the fatal beauty
of its perfect naturalness... (Baudelaire, 2008, 115)

Ultimately, the narcissistic necrophile turns away from dead flesh and addresses the real theme of the poem:

Despite your love, that evil man you could
not, whilst living, satisfy,
did he, on your inert, compliant flesh,
his vast desires, gratify?

Answer! Did he grip your flowing tresses
in his feverish grip? Tell
me, gory head, did he, in your cold mouth,
place the ultimate farewell? (Baudelaire, 2008, 115)

Baudelaire then returns his gaze to the corpse and amalgamates the murderer and the murdered, the living and the dead, the necrophile and the corpse, with the necrophile narrator, and states:

– Far from the impure crowd, the mocking world...
your bridegroom roams the world, and you stand guard
over him, watching his rest;
as much as you, no doubt, he is faithful
and constant even in Death. (Baudelaire, 2008, 116)

Baudelaire's necrophile narrator borrows the identity of the dead woman, in fact, so as to do to her what he cannot do to himself; in necrophiliac representation there is a desire to vicariously enjoy the experience of the recognition of one's own death.

Brian Masters' statement: 'A necrophiliac is not *only* a man who violates a corpse sexually (as popular belief holds), but a man for whom death is the ultimate beauty' (Masters, 1995, 278), condemns a number of authors, including Edgar Allan Poe, who in his essay *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846), writes: 'the death... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world' (Poe, 1985, 170). In *Axel's Castle* (1931), Edmund Wilson claims that it was Poe's 'interest in aesthetic theory' which made him 'particularly acceptable to the French' (Wilson, 1979, 21) and it was this European connection which helped make his poetical theory popular during the nineteenth century, and resulted in 'a whole tradition of sleeping or dead ladies' (Farr, 1992, 93) in the literature and art of the period.

In his poetry and fiction, Poe personifies death, making death into a series of 'Dead Brides' (Reed, 1999, 2), ranging from 'Berenice' and 'Ulalume', to Lenore in 'The Raven', and Madeline Usher in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and this method has provided a model for other poets to work from in their own necrophiliac poems, although only a few poets have deliberately chosen to use the persona of the necrophile in order to examine the subject of necrophilia from the closest possible perspective.

Emily Dickinson's decision to use the necrophile persona was therefore not a particularly unusual one, although most of the poets who decided to use a necrophile persona were men. It was a specific persona which was only deployed by a very small number of poets. Other poets writing at the same time as Dickinson who also used the persona of the necrophile include Poe, Baudelaire, Rollinat, Swinburne and Coleridge, but as will be illustrated, it is Dickinson who uses it the most effectively, and in the most varied of possible ways. Her willingness to experiment with the necrophile persona – and the harrowing beauty of many of the resulting poems that are written out of the 'collision of sensuality and death' (Barker, 1986, 15) – has caused some critics to term Emily Dickinson 'the poet of Death' (Bolt & Lee, 1989, 99). In contrast to the poems of Poe, Baudelaire, Swinburne, Keats and Coleridge, Dickinson's poems catalogue and utilise not just one, but several different types of necrophile personae, including the dead lover with another dead lover; the living necrophile with the dead lover; the dead lover with the living lover; the mythical figure of Death as a love rival; Death as an inexperienced lover; Death as a courtly lover; and Death as a molester or rapist.

In the poems which portray the living lover with a dead lover, Dickinson had a contemporary in Charles Baudelaire, who has the necrophile narrator of 'Une nuit que j'étais près...' ('After a night spent with...') state:

After a night spent with a Jewish whore,
as we lay sprawled like corpses side by side,
I dreamt, not of the slatternly, hired bride
but of the lovely woman I adored. (Baudelaire, 2008, 42)

In this poem, Baudelaire's narrator is 'sprawled' at the 'side' of his 'hired bride', obviously a prostitute, who is 'like' a corpse. Here Baudelaire is juxtaposing notions of the sacred and the profane: he accurately refers to the prostitute as 'hired', but then refers to her as a 'bride'. The noun 'bride' is used ironically, as it has connotations of legality, entitlement and state approval, whereas 'hired' indicates her status as a paid-for commodity. Necrophilia, whilst the predominant theme, remains only hinted at, not described.

Some of Emily Dickinson's poems have a narrator who has adopted the persona of the living necrophile who is either longing to be with, or is with, the dead lover. Continuing his 'aesthetic theory' (Wilson, 1979, 21), Edgar Allen Poe asked: 'is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such [a] topic are those of a bereaved lover...?' (Poe, 1985, 170), and for Dickinson (who once claimed 'Of Poe – I know too little' – Dickinson, 1958, 649), the answer to his question is emphatically in the negative.

The most famous of Poe's poems in which he attempted to answer his own question by putting on the persona of this particular necrophile is probably 'Annabel Lee', the final stanza of which reads:

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling, – my darling, – my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea... (Poe, 1985, 89)

The necrophile narrator/ lover is in the 'tomb' lying 'down by the side' of the dead Annabel Lee. Anything and everything else is left to the reader's imagination. Poe, a writer famous (or infamous) for his macabre imagination, is only able to hint at necrophilia, presenting it in a non-physical way.

Charles Baudelaire's necrophile in 'Une nuit que j'étais près...' ('After a night spent with...'), does something similar:

After a night spent with a Jewish whore,
as we lay sprawled like corpses side by side,
I dreamt, not of the girl for whom I'd paid,
but of the lovely woman I adored.

I thought of her beauty, her majesty,
her candid gaze, her strength, her sinuous grace,
her hair, hanging perfumed around her face;
I grew aroused at this sweet memory...
How I desire your body here to kiss
from your feet and right up to your dark hair;
to unearth the deep treasures of your flesh. (Baudelaire, 2008, 42)

Baudelaire, like Poe, retreats from any physical description of sexual intimacy and transforms his desire into 'thought', remembering a past lover whose 'deep treasure' he wishes to 'unearth', while lying 'sprawled' next to 'a Jewish whore'. Both Poe and Baudelaire shy away from writing of actual physical contact with the dead.

Emily Dickinson, on the other hand, is far from squeamish when it comes to describing her living necrophile's physical contact with the dead; in fact, Dickinson's necrophile speaks with a positively celebratory tone: 'There are those in the morgue that bewitch us with sweetness...' (Dickinson, 1958, 484)

She also uses this type of necrophile persona, most notably in poem J577/F431:

If I may have it, when it's dead,
I'll be contented—so—
If just as soon as Breath is out
It shall belong to me—

Until they lock it in the Grave,
'Tis Bliss I cannot weigh—

For tho' they lock Thee in the Grave,
Myself—can own the key—

Think of it Lover! I and Thee
Permitted—face to face to be—
After a Life—a Death—we'll say—
For Death was That—
And this—is Thee...

Forgive me, if the Grave come slow—
For Coveting to look at Thee—
Forgive me, if to stroke thy frost
Outvisions Paradise! (J577/F431)

In just four of Dickinson's lines:

For tho' they lock Thee in the Grave,
Myself – can own the key –

Think of it Lover! I and Thee
Permitted – face to face to be – (J577/F431)

both Poe's and Baudelaire's guarded hints and sanitised allusions to necrophilia – in which it is acceptable to lie either 'Beside' or 'down by the side' of the dead lover, but in which no touching is 'Permitted' – have been revealed as the safe, pure, chaste, and ultimately conservative visions that they are. In the world of Dickinson's living and dead lovers, lying 'face to face' is readily 'Permitted' – obviously not by the conventions or the social mores of the day, but by the sexual desires of the lovers, the singular nature of which denies the necessity of permission by any other type of authority.

In poem J577/F431, the living necrophile also urges the dead 'Lover' to 'Think of', that is, to imagine or to fantasise about the physical unions which are going to take place between them in the future. Dickinson, like Flaubert, presents physical contact between a living and a dead person as a positive union – a continuation of the relationship despite the advent of death. By the end of the same poem, the necrophile persona has become celebratory about necrophilia, telling the dead lover that: '...to stroke thy frost/Outvisions Paradise!' For this particular necrophile persona, nothing, not even 'Paradise' can offer anything which 'Outvisions' the opportunity 'to stroke' the coldness or the 'frost' of the dead 'Lover'.

Also in poem J577/F431, the use of the word 'it' and 'it's' is a clear indication that the narrator is talking about a corpse – a body with no personalising gender identity, either male, female, or named. The dead 'Lover' is simply a non-gendered 'dead' love object.

It is in a poem such as J577/F431 that Dickinson's unpublished transgressive challenge to contemporary social morality can be seen to be more powerful than the known challenges of Poe and Baudelaire. Both Poe and Baudelaire's use of matrimony can be seen to be another social convention to

which they adhere. Both Poe's 'my darling – my bride', and Baudelaire's 'hired bride' are examples of perfectly idealised and/or married dead lovers.

Marriage between the necrophile and the 'bride' seems to be present in order to provide some legitimacy to the unlawful union which it is hinted at as taking place between the living and the dead. Dickinson does not need matrimony to permit her necrophile to be a 'Lover'. The wedding band – even one of a temporary nature – is rejected in favour of a 'key' which will give access to the chamber of the 'Lover'.

Part of Dickinson's poetic strength, particularly in the necrophilia poems, comes from her being at home among the dead. In poem J607/F337 for example, she utilises the image of 'the living dead' (Romero, 1983, 5) – a 'Mouldering Playmate' – who has returned from the grave. This is a literary image, borrowed from the New Testament of the Bible, in particular the story of Lazarus:

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes... (John 11:43-44)

Emily Dickinson's poetic version of this story contains the lines:

The Shapes we buried, dwell about,
Familiar, in the Rooms –
Untarnished by the Sepulchre,
The Mouldering Playmate comes –

In just the Jacket that he wore –
Long buttoned in the Mold... (J607/F337)

In poem J607/F337, 'The Mouldering Playmate' of former years returns, like Lazarus, from 'The Grave', not as a threat, but to play. He is a 'Familiar' figure, a 'Playmate' who has remained 'Untarnished by the Sepulchre', and is still wearing 'the Jacket that he wore' before he died. It is this easy familiarity with the dead (a familiarity that extends to several other poems) which elevates Dickinson's necrophile poems above those of her contemporaries. She describes the dead as 'Safe in their Alabaster Chambers' (J216/F124), and then confesses in poem J577/F431 that she has 'the key' to the chamber and can 'enter as she pleases'. The dead are 'Safe' from everything and everyone except the necrophile who is the holder of the crypt 'key'. 'The Soul selects her own Society –/ Then – shuts the door' (J303/F409) Dickinson also writes, not needing to explain that the 'Society' which the female necrophile always 'selects' is the 'Society of the Dead' (Ochoa 1) – once with whom he or she 'Then – shuts' and locks 'the door' in order not to be disturbed.

Here Emily Dickinson's necrophile persona is a very similar type to the one utilised by Algernon Swinburne in 'The Leper'. In that poem, Swinburne's necrophile persona states:

Nothing is better, I well think,
Than love... Yea, though God always hated me,
And hates me now that I can kiss
Her eyes, plait up her hair to see

How she then wore it on the brows,
Yet am I glad to have her dead
Here in this wretched wattled house
Where I can kiss her eyes and head.

Six months, and now my sweet is dead
A trouble takes me; I know not
If all were done well, all well said,
No word or tender deed forgot.

Too sweet, for the least part in her,
To have shed life out by fragments; yet,
Could the close mouth catch breath and stir,
I might see something I forget.

Six months, and I sit still and hold
In two cold palms her cold two feet.
Her hair, half grey half ruined gold,
Thrills me and burns me in kissing it.

Love bites and stings me through, to see
Her keen face made of sunken bones.
Her worn-off eyelids madden me,
That were shot through with purple once.

I took too much upon my love,
Having for such mean service done
Her beauty and all the ways thereof,
Her face and all the sweet thereon. (Swinburne, 1927, 120-123)

Like Dickinson, Swinburne is explicit in his descriptions of necrophilia and presents a necrophile persona that is able to speak eloquently about his necrophilia and his feelings regarding necrophilia without any tone of regret or contrition. In fact, like many of Dickinson's necrophiles, Swinburne's necrophile 'speaks' using an almost celebratory tone to describe aspects of necrophilia.

Maurice Rollinat's necrophiles are often thwarted lovers for whom necrophilia is a way of showing the undiminished strength and unquenched power of their love for lovers who have died. In *The Embalmed Beauty*, the necrophile narrator explains how after embalming the dead former lover, he gazes on

... her nude body...
and slowly, gently, untied her long hair,

and on my knees I went from ecstasy
to a state of delirious despair. (Rollinat, 2012, 250)

Rollinat's necrophile narrator uses his state of 'delirious despair' to delude himself into thinking of his 'dead beloved' – now a 'sweet mummified thing' – as merely 'sleeping', or 'resting, asleep'. Within the dichotomy created by the simultaneous acceptance of, and the denial of, death, the necrophile narrator removes the notion of any illegal union with the dead, and thereby imbues the act of necrophilia with a romanticised eroticism:

As I gazed on this sweet mummified thing
and her innate beauty once more restored,
I dared to imagine she was sleeping;
rocked in the arms of delightful pleasure...

my dead beloved, in her open coffin,
lies resting, asleep, mocking putrefaction,
intact, amorous, guileless and serene,
as I gaze at her in stunned stupefaction. (Rollinat, 2012, 250)

The method of presenting romanticised eroticism in literary works extends to drama. Salomé in Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* (1894) also speaks of aspects of necrophilia (and vampirism and cannibalism) in a celebratory way. After Iokannan's murder and beheading at her request, Salomé talks to his severed head, stating:

Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth Iokannan. Well! I kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit... I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor apples can appease my desire... there was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood? (Wilde, 1988, 61-64)

Dickinson utilises variants of this type of necrophile persona in her poetry, specifically the necrophile who has the personified figure of Death as a lover or suitor. For this particular persona, it is likely that Emily Dickinson was familiar with – and drew on – the various representations of the mythical skeletal 'reaper' figure, an iconographic image familiar from the Bible – in particular the book of *Revelations*, in which it is written: 'behold a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death' (*Revelations* 6.8) – and from the Sixteenth-Century morality play *Everyman*, with its dramatic figures of 'Death' and 'Beauty', who interact with the central character of 'Everyman', (quoted in McNiff, 1961, 123). 'Death' is a major character in some of the poems of George Herbert, in particular 'A Dialogue-Anthem', which has 'Death' as a personified being. However, unlike *Everyman* or some of Herbert's poems, Dickinson gave the figure of Death her own poetic 'slant' by utilising another iconographic image which can be found in art, music and literature – that of 'Death and the Maiden' (Dorfman, 1990, 1), which features in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime the Ancient Mariner*, in which the narrator upon spying

two figures asks: 'Is that a DEATH? and are there two?/Is DEATH that woman's mate?' (Coleridge, 1997, 9)

This presentation of 'Death' as a figure of horror or revulsion is not the case in many of Dickinson's poems or in the poems of some of the poets writing at the same time as her. Of her contemporaries, Baudelaire also writes of dead lovers who inspire adoration, rather than revulsion. In his poem, 'I adore you as I adore the night...' the necrophile lover declares to his 'harsh and cruel' dead mistress:

I adore you as I adore the night,
yet you seem so sad, beautiful, silent.
The more you elude me, the more I love
you, ornament of my night, there above,
you fill ironic space, separate me
from the immensity of the blue sky.

I writhe beneath your body like a worm,
feeding upon your perfect, corpse-like form,
and cherish you, though you are harsh and cruel –
a coldness that I find so beautiful. (Baudelaire, 2008, 36)

Not only is there no trace of revulsion in 'I adore you as I adore the night...', but the necrophile's claims that he 'adore[s]' and 'cherish[es]' his 'harsh and cruel' mistress, and finds in her 'a coldness that [he] find[s] so beautiful', indicate a very strong masochistic element to the poem – and a very strong masochistic streak in the narrator.

Another of Dickinson's near contemporaries, John Keats, can also be seen to be a major influence on this type of necrophile poem, in particular his 'Ode to a Nightingale', in which the narrator states:

...I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die... (Keats, 1994, 178)

Like Keats's narrator, Dickinson's necrophile can also be seen to be 'half in love with... Death', for like Keats's narrator, she also uses 'soft names', as can be seen in the first two stanzas of poem J479/F712:

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 – (J479/F712)

In this poem, 'Death' is presented as a 'kindly' figure, who shows 'no haste' and is full of 'Civility' as 'He' drives the necrophile persona in his 'Carriage' 'slowly... towards eternity'. The same intimate deference towards Death can be seen in poem J897/F1079, where Death is described as the necrophile persona's 'First Suitor'. A more obvious acceptance of 'Death' as a lover is in poem J1445/F1470, in which Death is presented as 'the supple suitor'; one 'That wins at last' through the sheer persistence of his 'Wooing'. In all of these poems, Dickinson writes using words and phrases which would not be out of place in the description of a honeymoon or a romantic tryst between lovers.

Another form of necrophile persona used by Emily Dickinson in her poems is that of a living lover who has the personified male figure of 'Death' as a love rival. An example of this can be seen in poem J718/F881, where the necrophile states:

I meant to find Her when I Came –
Death – had the same design –
But the Success – was His – it seems –
And the Surrender – Mine –

I meant to tell Her how I longed
For just this single time –
But Death had told Her so the first –
And she had past, with Him – (J718/F881)

In this poem, Dickinson merges the sexual persona of the necrophile who has the figure of Death as a love rival, with that of the lesbian, another type of sexual persona which she uses for several poems. According to the necrophile persona/narrator, the final two lines of the first stanza state that the resulting 'success – was His .../ ...the Surrender – Mine' (J718/F881). This 'Surrender' is presented in the form of a two-fold subjugated femininity, with the one who is 'longed/ For' by the narrator gone 'past, with Him', the male figure of 'Death'. The necrophile, who had intended 'to tell Her' dead lover how she 'longed/ For' her, ends up acknowledging 'the success' of Death's 'design', which was to be 'the first'. The poem reveals that the figure of Death, in the guise of a male heterosexual lover, has defeated the necrophile of her own necrophilic lesbian designs.

However, in some poems, such as poems J1230/F1221 and J1296/F1315, it is not so much Death's usurping which is the cause of resentment, but the 'Peace' (J1230/F1221) and the 'Silence' (J1296/F1315) of the nothingness which remains after Death has taken away a life, which are the cause of the narrator's pain, and which result in the scathing comments regarding the actual lack of power Death has, when compared to the pain of loss:

Death's Waylaying not the sharpest

Of the thefts of Time –
There Marauds a sorer Robber,
Silence – is his name – (J1296/F1315)

Dickinson's criticism of Death in these poems foreshadows her use of another type of necrophile persona, in which the figure of Death is presented as an inexperienced or timid lover of the living or dead necrophile persona. A notable example of this type is in poem J315/F477:

He fumbles at your Soul
As Players at the Keys
Before they drop full Music on
He stuns you by degrees –
Prepares your brittle Nature
For the Ethereal Blow (J315/F477)

In the above poem, the figure of Death undergoes the indignity of being presented – in an almost humorous manner – as a timorous male, fumbling at the 'Soul' and groping for the 'Nature' of the necrophile persona. The use of musical terms such as 'Players', 'keys', and 'Music' gives the impression of Death being an unskilled, almost amateurish musician with a clumsy and heavy-handed technique. In the second half of the poem, Dickinson's necrophile persona also implies that this inexperience and lack of technique extends to Death's sexual technique, which is so clumsy, he is only capable of stunning 'by degrees', rather than being able to fully satisfy, as an accomplished lover might. The same can be said of poem J1445/F1470, in which the musical terms 'Conducted' and 'bugles' are juxtaposed with the phrases 'pallid innuendoes' and a 'dim approach', in order to imply a lack of subtlety and gracefulness. The 'Troth' which takes place between the experienced necrophile and the inexperienced figure of 'Death' is again marred by the awkward clumsiness of the 'Suitor'.

In poem J1480/F1511, the narrator speaks of the same figure as 'A fine – estranging creature –/... wooing us'. Again, the lack of warmth between the necrophile persona and the wooing 'creature' is an 'estranging' one, with the potential relationship marred by a 'fascinating chill'. The necrophile narrator of these poems presents the figure of Death in a way that can be seen to be a precursor of the inexperienced 'young man carbuncular', of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, who clumsily attempts to seduce the 'typist home at teatime' with whom he has been dining:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference. (Eliot, 1985, 235-242)

Like Emily Dickinson's personification of 'Death', Eliot's 'young man carbuncular' is presented as a slightly ridiculous figure, a ridiculousness emphasised by the 'bored and tired... indifference' expressed by the 'typist' to his quickly concluded amorous advances, with her 'one halfformed thought' being only that she is 'glad it's over'. Death as a nonentity is a recurrent theme in Emily Dickinson's poetry, with Death being constantly negated to the status of a mere inconvenience – not a threat or anything that any of the personae personally fear. To present death in such a manner can be seen as another of Dickinson's techniques, this one for negating the fear of death by making it appear ridiculous. However, this can be seen as mock bravado on Dickinson's part, for she also wrote many poems which described the innumerable terrors and pains of death.

One specific – and very ominous – way in which Emily Dickinson sometimes presents the figure of Death, is as a molester or rapist. There are indications of this in poem J1445/F1470, where Dickinson utilises the word 'stealthy' whilst describing Death's 'wooing', which helps to negate the humour of the poem and indicates the darker and more menacing nature of the courtship with the personified Death:

It is a stealthy Wooing
Conducted first
By pallid innuendoes (J1445/F1470)

The humour has vanished from the poems that deal with death in this manner, as can be seen by the complete absence of humour in poem J286/F143, the horrific poem in which the figure of Death is no longer the type of suitor whom Dickinson described as a 'kindly' offerer of 'Civility' in poem J712/F479; the type of genteel figure who would later be referred to by Tennessee Williams as 'a gentleman caller' (Williams, 1984, 27). In poem J286/F143, Death's gentlemanly 'Civility' has been replaced with 'Cordiality', but it is 'Cordiality' of a deceptive nature, for it contains no kindness towards strangers, being the inhuman 'Cordiality' of the predatorily smiling conqueror. In poem J286/F143, Dickinson's necrophile persona presents the figure of Death as a rapist with:

...a Face of Steel –
That suddenly looks into ours
With a metallic grin –
The Cordiality of Death –
Who drills his Welcome in – (J286/F143)

The human figure and the machine in human form are juxtaposed as the necrophile persona describes the opposing states of attraction and repulsion taking place between them, with the language of human civility – 'Face', 'grin', 'Cordiality' and 'Welcome' (most of which are capitalised for emphasis) being subservient to the more dominant mechanistic imagery of 'Steel', 'metallic' and 'drills'. This contrasting of inhumanity and the violence

associated with it, with the human(istic), is apparent in the link between 'Death' the rapist 'Who drills his Welcome in', and the 'metallic grin' on the 'Face of Steel' of the male humanoid robot, a fictional figure written about at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A female version of the robot or automaton can also be found, particularly in the short stories or 'Tales' of E.T.A. Hoffmann, in the 'Juliets of cast iron' (Huysmans, 1986, 183) in J-K. Huysmans's *La-Bas* (1891), and in the 'Tomorrow's Eve' (L'Isle-Adam, 2000, 4) of Comte de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *Tomorrow's Eve* (1886), all stories in which the 'female automaton provides a lifeless object of sexual desire' (Downing, 2003, 13).

Probably the most well-known of the *Tales of Hoffmann*, 'The Sandman', describes the problems caused by the narrator becoming attracted to Olympia, a woman who unknown to him is an 'automaton' in 'human form' (Hoffmann 121), a 'beautiful' creation who 'walks with a curiously measured gait' and whose 'every movement seems as if controlled by clockwork' and who 'plays... with the unpleasant soulless regularity of a machine' (Hoffmann, 1982, 116). The fictional leap from Hoffmann's robotic 'automaton', or 'unpleasant soulless... machine' as a potential lover to the far more sinister notion of the machine as a rapist was one which became prevalent during the final years of the nineteenth century, and was symptomatic of the spread of industrialism, as has been chronicled by the writers of the decadent/aesthetic movement, in particular J-K. Huysmans, who has a leading character in his novel *La-Bas* exclaim: 'Look at the machines, the action of the piston and cylinder; Romeos of steel' (Huysmans, 1986, 183).

This amalgam of types – Death, the robot and the rapist, which through a process of metamorphosis are hybridised into Huysmans's 'Romeos of steel' – gives multiple emphasis to the humanity or human-ness of the narrator, as well as to the alien characteristics of the menacingly ominous figure of the robot 'Death' in 'Human form'. The humanistic/mechanistic, attraction/repulsion dichotomies of the poem are given full expression in the final two lines, with each line consisting of an oxymoronic phrase which gives the poem the tone of menace and violence it would otherwise lack, due to the scarcity of any overly negative words or phrases in the poem itself. The death-as-rape ending is given further emphasis in the final line where the robot 'Death... drills his Welcome in' (J286/F143). The rape of life takes place and Death, as always, is the final conqueror.

For Emily Dickinson, this manipulation of the personified figure of Death, who is made to serve a poetic vision, is clearly a way of attempting to combat mortality. 'Some – Work for Immortality –' (J406/F536), she writes, clearly delineating her own role of poet – one who is unrecognised during her own lifetime.

In *Desiring the Dead* (2003), Lisa Downing suggests that

When an artist chooses to work with a particular type of material that appears initially disturbing or disgusting, s/he is entering into a conscious project of idealizing transformation. (Downing, 2003, 123)

This theme of transforming the finite nature of mortality by eroticising or romanticising or ridiculing or diminishing death in order to demystify death or to reduce the fear of death is recognised by Dickinson.

In poem J449/F448, Emily Dickinson adopts the persona of a corpse, joined in the tomb by another corpse. In poem J449/F448, Dickinson has her necrophile persona state:

I died for Beauty – but was scarce
Adjusted in the Tomb
When One who died for Truth, was lain
In an adjoining Room – (J449/F448)

In the final stanza of the poem, the necrophile persona who 'died for Beauty' describes how she 'met a Night' with the 'One who died for Truth'. The relationship progresses and begins to take on domestic characteristics, with the lovers moving back and forth 'between rooms'. Also noticeable in poem 448 is Dickinson's use of 'Beauty' and 'Truth', which are familiar from the final two lines of John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," – that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know' (Keats, 1994, 234).

By using words from the penultimate line of Keats's ode, the narrator appears to be suggesting that her dead lover might either be the narrator of 'Ode to a Grecian Urn', or perhaps the poet John Keats himself, who 'died for Truth'. 'For poets – I have Keats' (Dickinson, 1958, 404), Dickinson writes in one of her letters (letter 172), and in poem J449/F448 she appears to be letting her necrophile persona claim him as a lover. However, as the final lines of J449/F448 reveal, it is the onset of moss and its steady growth and spread which causes the relationship to end when '...the Moss had reached our lips – /And covered up – our names – (J449/F448).

Due to the 'lips' being 'covered up', the 'names' of those who possess 'Beauty' and 'Truth' are no longer able to be mentioned and the relationship is unable to survive. Bodily decomposition is finally able to end the relationship, but the poetic identity of the poem's speaker is able to defeat mortality by making the lover the subject of the poem she utters.

Poem J449/F448 of Emily Dickinson's has necrophilia echoes in Algernon Swinburne's poem, 'The Triumph of Time', from *Poems and Ballads* (1866), in which Swinburne writes:

...we were dead together to-day,
Lost sight of, hidden away out of sight,
Clasped and clothed in the cloven clay,
Out of the world's way, out of the light,
Out of the ages of worldly weather,
Forgotten of all men altogether,
As the world's first dead, taken wholly away,
Made one with death, filled full of the night.

How we would slumber, how we would sleep,

Far in the dark with the dreams and the dew!
And dreaming, grow to each other, and weep,
Laugh low, live softly, murmur and muse;
Yea, and it may be, struck through by the dream,
Feel the dust quicken and quiver, and seem
Alive as of old to the lips, and leap
Spirit to spirit as lovers use. (Swinburne, 1927, 37-38)

Swinburne's necrophile persona reiterates many of the concerns of Dickinson's necrophile persona and describes a lover's idyll, in which the two dead necrophiles meet in the dark of 'the cloven clay', where they 'grow to each other, and weep,/ Laugh low, live softly, murmur and muse...', just as any living domestic couple would do. The necrophile couple's actions cause them to 'seem/ Alive as of old' (Swinburne, 1927, 38). Swinburne also invests his necrophiles with a sense of uniqueness by making them 'the world's first dead'; a necrophiliac Adam and Eve, first to die as a couple, in short, banished from life as the biblical Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Swinburne's combination of the sacred and the profane gives this particular poem a subversive edge regarding conventional morality as it relates to relationships, but also to religious piety and to legality as it pertains to necrophilia.

Judith Farr has suggested that Dickinson's early readers 'did not guess how deeply Emily Dickinson had meditated on the significance of death and, in particular, on the process by where the living become the dead' (Farr, 1992, 4).

Sometimes Dickinson's necrophile adopts a tone of indifference regarding death. In poem J1296/F1315, she has her necrophile say:

Death's Waylaying not the sharpest
Of the thefts of Time –
There Marauds a sorer Robber,
Silence – is his name – (J1296/F1315).

Here the necrophile acknowledges that 'Death' has 'Silence' as a rival for being a 'Robber' of the passing of 'Time' in one's life. A comparison has been made by the necrophile and death has been diminished and removed from its more dangerous or 'sorer' place in a hierarchy of what is fatal to human life.

However, Dickinson also acknowledges the ultimate futility of eroticising, romanticising, ridiculing or attempting to avoid death:

All but Death, can be Adjusted...
Death – unto itself – Exception –
Is exempt from Change – (J749/F789)

It is in this poem that Dickinson's acceptance of the finality of death is readily apparent. Gone are the notions of death as fellow poet; a skilled or inept lover; death as a courtier, death as a gentleman, death as anything kind

at all – in poem J749/F789 Dickinson acknowledges that death is an absolute – an all-pervading, all-powerful and unavoidable end.

Dickinson readily admitted to an interest in 'the secret of Death' (Dickinson, 1958, 667). She was also interested in immortality, a theme found in several of her poems, notably in poem J1365/F1390, in which the poetic persona states:

Take all away –
The only thing worth larceny
Is left – the Immortality – (J1365/F1390)

The only immortality a writer can achieve is the posthumous success of his or her writing. Emily Dickinson has achieved a literary immortality, thereby ultimately conquering death.

Conclusion

In *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception*, Domhnall Mitchell makes the point 'that Dickinson is less speaking her poems than that the conflicts of her times are being spoken through them' (Mitchell, 2000, 230).

In her wide-ranging and insightful study of Dickinson's work, *Emily Dickinson* (1986), Helen McNeil has written:

A hundred years after her death, [Emily Dickinson's] work is under-going tremendous shifts in its perceived significance. One reason, as we are seeing, is painfully simple: it was literally impossible to read Dickinson's poetry in full until thirty years ago. (McNeil, 1986, 35)

Through her sophisticated use of sexual personae, and due to her decision to not publish her poetry, Emily Dickinson was able to write quite candidly and descriptively about female sexual pleasure. Her poetry detailing female sexual pleasure was written during an era in Victorian America when such depictions were not considered acceptable subjects for poetry.

The first professional editor to read Emily Dickinson's work was a man, and when Thomas Wentworth Higginson was confronted with the highly-charged eroticism of poem J249/F269 (Wild Nights – Wild Nights!:

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! (Dickinson, 1981, 222)

he wrote that he did not want 'the malignant to read into it more than that virgin recluse ever dreamed of putting there' (qtd in Smith, 1992, 4). When he was asked by Dickinson for his opinion of her poetry, he quickly wrote and told her that her poetry was 'wayward', 'spasmodic' and 'uncontrolled' and advised her to 'delay "to publish"' (Dickinson, 1958, 408).

Helen Hunt Jackson, Dickinson's school-friend from Amherst Academy, owned 'a little manuscript volume' of some of Dickinson's poems (Dickinson, 1958, 545) and was very much aware that Dickinson's 'speakers exist in a state of animated sensuality' (Burbick, 1996, 78). She wrote to Dickinson, praising

her as 'a great poet' (Dickinson, 1958, 545), and admonishing her for not publishing her work.

Therefore Emily Dickinson's poetic project, based on her refusal to type her work, or to have it printed or published, has other purposes: she uses masks and voices and persona in her poetry to question and explore aspects of Victorian American life, specifically, sexuality and sexual pleasure.

Dickinson's writings can be seen as expressing... an extravagant wealth and joyful consumption of pleasure without regulation; delight becomes an end in itself, producing nothing other than its own 'greedy' enjoyment. (Burbick, 1996, 78)

Due to the delay in publication of Emily Dickinson's *Complete Poems* (her 1, 775 poems were finally published in their entirety in 1955), and her *Complete Letters* (her 888 letters were finally published in 1958), her writing (poetry and letters) despite being written in a Victorian America, can only be read by post-Freudian, post-Darwinian, Post-Nietzschean readers. The time difference between when the poems were written and when they were properly published means that Dickinson's poetry cannot (if it ever could) be read innocently.

In her poetry, Emily Dickinson deployed far more than the seven types of sexual personae identified in this thesis. Analysis of Dickinson's deployment of the heterosexual female, the heterosexual male, the lesbian, the autoeroticist, the sadist, the masochist and the necrophile personae have produced rich readings of Dickinson's poems by Marianne Noble, Camille Paglia, Susan Howe, Helen McNeil, Judith Farr, Martha Nell Smith, Janet Mason, and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, amongst others, all of which have provided starting points for this thesis. 'To say that Dickinson is alert to sexual personae in her poetry is to understate the case' (McNeil, 1986, 176).

Several other types of sexual personae are used by Dickinson in her poetry: the exhibitionist, the bisexual, the incestuous daughter/sister, and the bestialist are four of the more easily-identifiable. Regrettably, due to space and time constraints, apart from a brief reference (in the introduction to this thesis) to the incestuous daughter, these particular personae have had to remain unresearched, unexamined and unanalysed.

Dickinson puts on and takes off a variety of personae in different ways to Robert Browning or Ezra Pound. Browning and Pound used personae in poetry to give us the voices of historical personages. Dickinson eschews historic figures and instead uses the personae to investigate and question sexual mores and sexual taboos in 'Victorian America' (Schlereth, 1981, xii). Dickinson's personae are often more extreme than theirs due to her choice to remain unpublished. Pound and Browning were professional poets, each of them writing for a paying audience, and so their poetic output is written with the market very much in mind. For Dickinson, publication and book sales were not a consideration. Emily Dickinson had no interest in publishing her poetry or in being a professional poet. The choice to remain unpublished ultimately meant Dickinson could (and did) write about anything she wished with impunity.

The refusal to publish and the skilful deployment of sexual personae also meant that Dickinson, as Sade had done before her, could privilege her fictional females and give them a sexual autonomy that women did not actually have in Victorian North America (a sexual autonomy that – some would argue – women still do not have in the twenty-first century). All of Sade's females are sexually active, not passive, and the author 'declares himself unequivocally for the right of women to fuck' (Carter, 1993, 27). Like Juliette and Justine, Dickinson's sexually active wo/men 'fuck in the active sense' (Carter, 1993, 27). As Paula Bennett states, Emily Dickinson experienced:

bliss (or transport or ecstasy) and she experienced it with astonishing regularity... writing poetry that left her 'bare and charred'... loving her own body... For it was this experience – explosive, transformative, bewitching, erotic, wondrous, shattering – from which Dickinson produced her poetry. It marked her as the agent of her own desire and the creator of her own discourse, allowing her to reach an orgasm that was an act of poetry and an act of love together. (Bennett, 1990, 181-2)

Despite the huge steps taken in Dickinson studies in the last thirty years, Emily Dickinson's 'explosive, transformative, bewitching, erotic, wondrous, shattering' literary legacy is still waiting to be discovered amongst the mass of unpublished handwritten manuscripts. The last words are hers:

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

Or Love – the two coeval come – (J1247/F1353).

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'gender is a performance' GT190
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'gender is a project' GT190
Gender is not a fact gt190

Introduction

Everyone's Emily Dickinson

In *My Emily Dickinson*, Susan Howe makes the point that everyone has their own Emily Dickinson. Ellen Louise Hart and Marta Nell Smith note that 'To editors of the time, the most marketable image of Dickinson the poet was that of the eccentric, reclusive, asexual woman in white' (Hart and Smith, 1998, xv). Unfortunately, Hart and Smith are prescient as well as correct; that particular 'eccentric... woman in white' image has remained the dominant clichéd image of Emily Dickinson – and it is one that very often underpins and shapes the analysis of her poetry.

Judith Farr's Emily Dickinson is 'a cult figure' (Farr, 1996, 1); Helen McNeil's Dickinson is a 'poet of what is broken and absent' (McNeil, 1986, 9); Marianne Noble's Dickinson embodies 'female masochistic desire' (Noble, 2000, 192); Janet Mason's Dickinson is a lesbian 'American Sappho' (Mason, 2002, 91). For Mabel Loomis Todd, Dickinson is simultaneously 'the *character*' and 'the *Myth*' (qtd in Pollack, 1998, 335); for John Crowe Ransom 'a kind of Cinderella' (Ransom, 1977, 31). Camilla Paglia's Emily Dickinson is 'the female Sade [...] a virtuoso of sadomasochistic surrealism' (Paglia, 1990, 624); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's Emily Dickinson is 'a helpless agoraphobic, trapped in a room in her father's house' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 583), while Paula Bennett's Emily Dickinson is 'obsessed with death' (Bennett, 1990, 72). Ted Hughes' Emily Dickinson is a woman suffering a 'great and final disappointment in her love' for a 'lost man' (Hughes, 1991, 11); Sandra Gilbert's Emily Dickinson is a 'wayward nun' (Gilbert, 1996, 20) and Ellen Louise Hart and Marta Nell Smith's Emily Dickinson is a 'passionate and playful' poet (Hart & Smith, 1998, 4) who enjoys an important epistolary relationship with her friend and mentor, Susan Gilbert.

It is possible to acknowledge that, despite each of the above critics having their own – often contradictory – ideas regarding who and what Emily Dickinson is, their assessments of Dickinson are insightful in terms of their readings of Emily Dickinson's poetry – although some of them are not entirely accurate when they imply that their readings are *the only* correct readings. There is also the problem that some critics and scholars analyse Dickinson's fiction in order to ascertain biographical truths, which is akin to reading

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623) in order to understand what Shakespeare actually thought of Stratford.

This study posits Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters as fiction, and not as biographical statements of fact. As Thomas Higginson notes, Emily Dickinson is 'a wholly new and original poetic genius' (Higginson, 2000, 545). One aspect of her genius is her skill as a ventriloquist. Like Robert Browning, she uses multiple voices, many masks and unusual narrators. Like Baudelaire, she adopts different genders, alters viewpoints, switches perspectives and adopts a variety of personae in order to create beautiful poetry. Because of these deliberate techniques and strategies, it is not productive to draw biographical conclusions from Emily Dickinson's fictions, since her poems are deliberately and carefully designed to be open to simultaneous and contradictory interpretations. Dickinson's writing is multi-faceted and multi-voiced by design.

Cultural Background

A number of contextual elements do have to be taken into consideration when analysing Dickinson's work. She was a New England, American, Victorian, unmarried, bourgeois, female poet, and these factors contribute to some degree to the uniqueness of her writing and need to be addressed.

First of all, Emily Dickinson was what Carroll Smith Rosenberg, Daniel Walker Howe, Camille Paglia, Helen McNeil and Thomas J. Schlereth refer to as an '*American Victorian*' writer. As such, she was different from *English Victorian* writers. This particular distinction needs to be made, as scholars of nineteenth-century culture (such as Daniel Walker Howe) have pointed to significant differences between English Victorianism and American Victorianism, even down to the start and finish dates of the eras. The duration of English Victorianism is throughout Queen Victoria's reign – that is, from 1837-1901; the duration of American Victorianism is generally held to be from 1875-1910, although Schlereth posits that 'Victorian America... ended not at the English monarch's death in 1901 but with the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914' (Schlereth, 1991, xii). American Victorianism was an offshoot of the period and lifestyle that developed in the United States after the American Civil War (1861-1865), chiefly in well-established regions such as New England. The use of the term 'American Victorianism' reflects the significant British cultural influence on some parts of America during this period.

As American business people of the Second Industrial Revolution created sprawling industrial towns and cities in the north-east, the growing upper class of 'the Gilded Age' (Twain and Warner, 1873, 1) mimicked the high society of their former mother country in dress, morality and mannerisms. The period was marked by various phenomena – the Second Industrial Revolution (1870), the Women's Suffrage Movement (1848), and Republican Party political domination (1860). This notion that America was prone to 'mimic' various aspects of English life is important in the study of Emily Dickinson's writing, which often mimics, imitates, parodies or pastiches the writing of English and European writers.

New England and Emily Dickinson

Secondly, there is the fact that Emily Dickinson is a native New Englander. This is another geographical factor that has a bearing on her literary outlook and output. Emily Dickinson's claim that she wrote the way she wrote 'Because I see – New Englandly' (J285/F256), is a claim that contains elements of regional individuality, pride, and identity; a claim that suggests a mode of seeing or comprehending that is not available to anyone living in any other region of North America. The validity of this claim is reflected in Dickinson's work, specifically in the complicated form and the uncompromising content of her writing.

New England is located in the north-eastern corner of the United States, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Canada and New York State, and consisting of the modern states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts. New England has been described as 'an especially eccentric corner of America' (Dickenson, 1985, 31), and as a 'cultivated, quaint and wholly unique' region (Higginson, 2000, 544). It was one of the earliest English settlements in the New World, a place in which the English pilgrims from Europe first settled in 1620, in the colony of Plymouth. In the late eighteenth century, the New England colonies were among the first North American British colonies to demonstrate ambitions of independence from the British Crown, although they would later oppose the war of 1812 between the United States and Britain.

In the nineteenth century, New England, which was the first region of the United States to be transformed by the Industrial Revolution, played a prominent role in the movement to abolish slavery in the United States. New England also produced the first works of American literature and philosophy, and it was home to the beginnings of free public education. There is a very specific New England attitude, or way of viewing things from a New England perspective. 'New England... has been the focus of a number of key ideas – Puritanism, Zeal, Mission, Reform, Transcendentalism – that have fed the American sense of "exceptional" personal and national destiny. New England ideas shaped national ideas' (Bolt and Lee, 1989, 78).

The 'clannish' Dickinson family

Third, there is the fact that Emily Dickinson was a member of the 'strict and involuted' (Dickenson, 1985, 23) Dickinson family. The Dickinson family was an American 'Victorian bourgeois family' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 198), significant because the Dickinsons were, according to one biographer, 'a clannish family... with a fair degree of snobbery towards outsiders... a family whose members kept themselves strictly to themselves' (Dickenson, 1985, 14-19). An attempt to analyse Dickinson's unique contribution to literature has to acknowledge the unusual aspects of her background and her family life, including 'the independence characteristic of the Dickinsons, who paid little heed to other people's rules' (Johnson, 1986, xii). That Emily Dickinson 'led a privileged life with a financially comfortable and well-respected family in a

deeply Calvinist New England community' (Martin, 2002, 1) inevitably impacted on her writing, as she had an abundance of time to experiment with her writing, free from any financial concerns, constraints or obligations.

Non-publication

Fourth, there is the matter of Dickinson's non-publication of her work during her lifetime. This issue is complex, since apart from the ten poems and the one letter-poem that Dickinson specifically sent to newspapers or magazines to be published, all of her works are 'private writings' (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, 28) and were not intended for public scrutiny. However, as all of Dickinson's letters and poems have been available in book form since 1955, they can no longer be considered 'private writings', despite the fact that all of the letters except for one, and all of the poems except for ten, were written by Emily Dickinson without any thought for future publication, reproduction or public dissemination in any form.

Dickinson's own (initially private, now published) words in a letter to Thomas Higginson, an essayist for the *Atlantic Monthly* who became her life-long correspondent and literary mentor, seem to verify this lack of interest in publication: 'I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish" – that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin' (Dickinson, 1958, 408).

On 15th April 1862, Emily Dickinson sent some of her poems to Thomas Higginson, asking for literary advice and wanting to know if her poetry was 'alive'. She was advised by Higginson to 'delay to publish' (Dickinson: Letter 265). In the 1870s, Higginson showed Dickinson's poems to Helen Hunt Jackson, who had coincidentally been at Amherst Academy with Dickinson when they were girls. Jackson was deeply involved in the publishing world, and managed to convince Dickinson to again publish poem J67/F112 ('Success is counted sweetest') anonymously in an 1878 anthology she (Jackson) was editing called *A Masque of Poets* (1878). The poem, however, was again altered in alignment with contemporary taste, and given the title 'Success'. It was the last poem published during Emily Dickinson's lifetime.

Dickinson and Whitman

In April 1862, when Dickinson was writing some of her most sexually explicit poetry, she was asked by her literary advisor Thomas Wentworth Higginson if she'd read Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Dickinson's swift response was: 'You speak of Mr Whitman – I never read his Book – but was told that he was disgraceful' (Dickinson, 1958, 404).

Dickinson's answer is interesting for a number of reasons. Walt Whitman was a controversial figure with his sexuality explicit poetry and his references to 'the body electric' (Whitman, 1996, 127). He was also regarded with trepidation by many for rejecting the idea that a woman's proper role was to be supportive of and dependent on a husband or a father. On its publication, 'his Book', *Leaves of Grass* (1855) caused considerable controversy in America. A *Criterion* review of *Leaves of Grass* labelled it 'a mass of stupid filth' (qtd in Kaplan, 1980, 103). J.P. Lesley found *Leaves of*

Grass 'trashy, profane & obscene', and considered Whitman 'a pretentious ass, without decency' (qtd in Kaplan, 1980, 211). Urged by the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, District Attorney, Lesley Stevens insisted on the withdrawal from circulation of *Leaves of Grass* and 'the suppression of all editions.' Stevens also demanded the removal of two poems from the collection, as well as changes to several of the poems, including 'Song of Myself', 'I Sing the Body Electric', 'The Dalliance of the Eagles', 'By Blue Ontario's Shore', and 'The Sleepers'.

In light of her knowledge of the censorship, the legal troubles and the mostly hostile critical response Whitman had encountered with the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Emily Dickinson's response to Higginson's enquiry can be seen as a shrewd exercise in damage limitation regarding her own writing, which consisted of a great amount of poetic material that would (had it been published at the time) have been considered far more controversial, scandalous, taboo, transgressive, shocking or obscene than anything Whitman had written.

The wording of Dickinson's tri-part response is carefully understated, and she makes some very subtle and important distinctions. In the first part of her answer, she politely refers to the author of *Leaves of Grass* as 'Mr Whitman'. In the second part of her answer, she does not deny that she has read any of Whitman's poetry, but she does deny having read 'his Book'. Strategically, she also refrains from using the book's title, although she does capitalize the word 'Book'; capitalization being a grammatical and orthographical technique Dickinson frequently uses for signalling subjects or concepts she feels to be important. In the final part of her answer she states: 'I was told that he was disgraceful'. Here her emphasis is very much on 'was told' and 'he was', not he *is*. Her refusal to comment on Whitman's work or on him personally, and to only comment on hearsay – that she '*was told* that *he was* disgraceful' is a masterful study in the act or art of dissembling. Here she is giving someone else's opinion; an opinion she '*was told*'. Dickinson's use of 'he *was*' carefully places Whitman in the past, implying that at one time, he may personally have been considered 'disgraceful', but that was in another era, another time, and not really relevant to his poetry or to the present moment.

The source of this gossip about Walt Whitman being 'disgraceful' may have been Ralph Waldo Emerson, who 'visited Amherst in December 1857' (MacNeil, 1986, 99), which was two years after the publication of *Leaves of Grass*. On his visit, Emerson 'stayed at The Evergreens' (MacNeil, 1986, 99), the Dickinson home. Emerson was initially a champion of Whitman's poetry, but 'later, disapproving of Whitman's conduct, he would change his mind' (Cowley, 2000, ix), and agree with Reverend Rufus W. Griswold's description of Whitman as 'the dirtiest beast of the age' (Fiedler, 1982, 263).

In her carefully-worded response, Dickinson reveals nothing of her own opinion of Whitman or of Whitman's poetry. The 'he' she refers to is clearly Whitman himself and not his poetry. Dickinson's avoidance of commenting on Whitman or his poetry directly is skilful, for she appears to answer Higginson's question, but in fact she does not offer her own opinion, nor does she actually say anything tangible, other than that she hasn't read 'his Book' in its entirety.

In view of the moral climate of America, and the general reaction of Victorian America to challenging literature, Dickinson's response to Higginson's enquiry can be seen as her way of finding out Higginson's own response to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and by analogy, his likely response to the sexual content of her own poetry. Higginson had written a review of *Leaves of Grass* in which he'd stated: 'It is no discredit to Walt Whitman that he wrote "Leaves of Grass," only that he did not burn it afterwards' (Higginson, 2000, 45).

Sexual themes and subjects

Both Steven Marcus and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have specific agendas and views of the subterranean (or attic-dwelling) life of literary expression. Like Whitman, and also like Baudelaire and Swinburne, Emily Dickinson uses her writings to depict a 'secret life of sexuality' (Marcus, 1966, 100) and to deal with sexuality and sexual identity, and to tackle such subject matter as sexual intercourse, masturbation, voyeurism and lesbianism, as well as using different sexual personae – in particular the sadist, the masochist, and the necrophile – to ask questions and impart specific information about sexuality. As Gilbert and Gubar state in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979):

Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning [...] by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, 73)

There is a prevalent theory – given credence by the sexual subject matter and taboo themes of many of the poems – that non-publication was 'a silent but major rebellion' (Reynolds, 1994, 169), which enabled Emily Dickinson to write about anything she wanted, from any perspective she wished. In her powerful use of a variety of sexual personae, Emily Dickinson can be seen to be one

of the great late nineteenth-century [...] artists [who] characterised the world [she] inhabited [...] endorsed a freer sexual life as good in itself; and [...] depicted the sexual anguish of modern persons and the sexual hypocrisies and contradictions of modern society. (Marcus, 1966, 284-5)

Publication

With regards to the poems that Emily Dickinson did send out for publication, historians, biographers, critics and editors seem unable to agree on the number of poems Dickinson actually published in her lifetime. It has been variously suggested that Dickinson 'saw her name in print only once' (Dickenson, 1985, 1); that she had 'only two of her almost 1,800 poems [...] published [...] before her death' (Tindall and Shi, 1992, 494); that she 'only ever saw six of [her poems] in print' (Hughes, 1991, 10); that 'only seven

poems were published during her lifetime' (Fitzgibbon, 1984, 10); that 'Only about one per cent of her 1,775 known poems were published during her lifetime' (McNeil, 1997, xviii); that 'at least ten of them appeared in her lifetime' (Franklin, 1999, 4); 'that only 11 of Dickinson's poems are currently known to have been published during her lifetime' (Emily Dickinson Online); that 'fewer than a dozen of her poems were published during her lifetime' (Wikipedia); that she 'did not publish in her day' (Kirkby, 1991, 15).

The publication of Emily Dickinson's poetry during her lifetime is as follows: Dickinson's letter-poem 'Magnum bonum' (Dickinson: Letter 34), was published in February, 1850, as 'Valentine Eve' in the Amherst College *Indicator*. In 1864, three poems were editorially altered and published in *Drum Beat*, a weekly magazine of poetry published to raise funds for the medical care of Union soldiers in the war. They were: poem J137/F95 (Flowers – Well – if anybody) which was published as 'Flowers' on 2nd March 1864; poem J130/F122 (These are the days when birds come back) which was published as 'October' on 11th March 1864; and poem J228/F321 (Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple) which was published as 'Sunset' on 29th February 1864. Another poem, poem J67/F112 (Success is counted sweetest) was published in the 27th April 1864 issue of the *Brooklyn Daily Union*, and poem J324/F236 (Some keep the Sabbath going to Church) was published as 'My Sabbath' in the 12th March 1864 issue of *The Round Table*.

Seven of Emily Dickinson's poems appeared in Samuel Bowles' *Springfield Republican* between 1858 and 1866. The poems were published anonymously and heavily edited – all of them were punctuated conventionally and given formal titles. One of the poems, poem J35/F11, (Nobody knows this little rose), appeared on 2nd August 1858 as 'To Mrs ----, with a Rose'. The *Republican* also published poem J3/F2 (Sic Transit Gloria Mundi) on 20th February 1852 as 'A Valentine'; poem J137/F95 (Flowers – Well – if anybody) on 9th March 1864 as 'Flowers'; poem J216/F124 (Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –) on 1st March 1862 as 'The Sleeping'; poem J228/F321 (Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple) on 30th March 1864 as 'Sunset'; and poem J986/F1096 (A narrow Fellow in the Grass) on 14th February 1866 as 'The Snake'.

Editorial tampering

Often, some of the meanings of Dickinson's poems are distorted, altered or lost because Dickinson's editors simply put into print their own approximations, versions or equivalents of the texts that Dickinson actually handwrote. Because of this, it makes impossible *any* accurate analysis of the formal and/or spatial qualities of *Dickinson's* poetic writing, because editorial rewriting nullifies any attempt to analyse or assess the aesthetic choices Dickinson made regarding the placing of a certain word in a certain place on a certain line for poetic effect. In this respect, because Dickinson's editors have rewritten or over-written Dickinson's work, they have contributed to negating – in some cases, obliterating – many of the specific formal poetic effects that Dickinson has attempted to achieve in her original hand-written drafts – drafts that are still not available to the general reader.

Dickinson's poem J214/F207 (I taste a liquor never brewed –), which appeared in the *Springfield Republican* on 4th May 1861 as 'The May-Wine', is printed below as an example of one of the edited versions; the last two lines in the first stanza were completely rewritten by the newspaper's editor for the sake of conventional rhyme.

Original poem (J214/F207)

Republican (edited) version

The May-Wine

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not Frankfort Berries yield the sense
Such a delirious whirl!

The last two lines in the first stanza were completely rewritten by the newspaper's editor, possibly to remove the reference to alcohol, possibly for the sake of conventional rhyme. Dickinson's point about the different types of alcohol (vodka, rum, gin, mead, wine, beer, and lager) that are obtained from the wild blue-'Berries' of 'Frankfort', Kentucky, (where distilling from such berries is renowned) is totally lost in the *Republican* version. Due to the editorial differences of opinion regarding presentation, layout punctuation, line-breaks and typography of her poetry and letters, past misreadings of Dickinson's poems seem almost inevitable.

A case in point is the poem 'Would you like Summer?', which appeared as poem 691 in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, and published by The Belknap Press in 1955. The poem is tentatively dated 1863 by Johnson. Below is 'Would you like Summer?' as it appeared in 1955:

Would you like summer? Taste of ours.
Spices? Buy here!
Ill! We have berries, for the parching!
Weary! Furloughs of down!
Perplexed! Estates of violet trouble ne'er looked on!
Captive! We bring reprieve of roses!
Fainting! Flasks of air!
Even for Death, a fairy medicine.
But, which is it, sir? (J691)

Three years later, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, in three volumes, also edited by Thomas H. Johnson, was published by The Belknap Press. Here readers could see that the poem 'Would you like Summer?' was originally included (as a poetic finale) by Emily Dickinson in her 1861 letter to her friend Samuel Bowles. The letter was published as Letter 229 in Volume Two of *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Here is Letter 229 (with the poem) as it appears in the 1958 Johnson-edited *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*:

To Samuel Bowles

about February 1861

Dear friend.

You remember the little "Meeting" – we held for you – last spring?
We meet again – Saturday – 'Twas May – when we "adjourned" – but
then Adjourns – are all – The meetings wore alike – Mr Bowles – The
Topic – did not tire us – so we chose no new – We voted to remember
you – so long as both should live – including Immortality. To count
you as ourselves – except sometimes more tenderly – as now – when you
are ill – and we – the haler of the two – and so I bring the Bond – we
sign so many times – for you to read, when Chaos comes – or Treason –
or Decay – still witnessing for Morning.

We hope – it is a tri-Hope – composed of Vinnie's – Sue's – and
mine – that you took no more pain – riding in the sleigh.

We hope our joy to see you – gave of it's own degree – to you – We
pray for your new health – the prayer that goes not down – when they
shut the church – We offer you our cups – stintless – as to the Bee –
the Lily, her new Liquors –

Would you like Summer? Taste of our's –
Spices? Buy, here!

Ill! We have Berries, for the parching!

Weary! Furloughs of Down!

Perplexed! Estates of Violet – Trouble ne'er looked on!

Captive! We bring Reprieve of Roses!

Fainting! Flasks of Air!

Even for Death – A Fairy Medicine –

But, which is it – Sir?

Emily (Dickinson, 1958, 371)

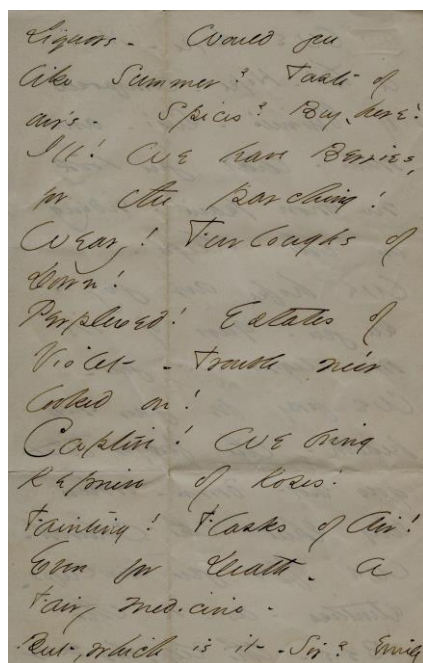
Despite the fact that both versions (poem and letter) are edited by Thomas H. Johnson, the tentatively-dated (1863?) 'poem' that appeared in 1955's *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* is markedly different to the original 1861 letter version found in Letter 229. In the letter version, the words: 'Summer', 'Down', 'Violet', 'Trouble', 'Roses', 'Air', 'Fairy Medicine', and 'Sir' have all been capitalized. Dickinson's dashes have been removed from the 'poem' version, but have been left intact in the letter version. The letter was the original source of the poem, and a 'poem' version of 'Would you like Summer?' only exists because the poetic finale of Dickinson's letter to Bowles has been editorially separated from the main body of the letter. It also suggests that Johnson's punctuation in one of the versions is inaccurate.

To complicate matters further, in 1998, R. W. Franklin edited and published *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. In his edition of Dickinson's poems, 'Would you like Summer?' was numbered poem 272 and dated 1862. The Franklin-edited version of 'Would you like Summer?' was again different to both the Johnson-edited version in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, and Johnson-edited version in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Below is 'Would you like Summer' as it appears in the 1999 R. W. Franklin-edited version of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*:

Would you like Summer? Taste of our's –
 Spices? Buy – here!
 Ill! We have Berries, for the parching!
 Weary! Furloughs of Down!
 Perplexed! Estates of Violet – Trouble ne'er looked on!
 Captive! We bring Reprieve of Roses!
 Fainting! Flasks of Air!
 Even for Death – A Fairy medicine –
 But, which is it – Sir? (F272)

Again, the differences from Johnson's 'poem' version are significant. There are marked similarities to the letter version, although there is a dash, not a comma on line two of the Franklin-edited version, and 'medicine' has been de-capitalized.

Because there are now three different versions of 'Would you like Summer?' in print, referring back to Emily Dickinson's original handwritten 'letter' seemed essential for the sake of clarity. It has not been published. Currently, the letter is in the Emily Dickinson Collection, Box 8, Folder 49, in the Archives & Special Collections, at Amherst College in Massachusetts. Below is a facsimile of the relevant (page 4) extract from Emily Dickinson's hand-written 4-page 'letter' to Samuel Bowles, set out as it appears in its original manuscript form, with Dickinson's line-breaks, punctuation, and capitalization intact:



Liquors – Would you
 like Summer? Taste of
 our's – Spices – Buy, here!
 Ill! We have berries,
 for the parching!

Weary! Furloughs of
down!
Perplexed! Estates of
Violet – trouble ne'er
looked on!
Captive! We bring
Reprieve of Roses!
Fainting! Flasks of Air!
Even for Death – a
Fairy medicine –
But, which is it – Sir? Emily

The original manuscript shows that both of Johnson's versions of 'Would you like Summer?' are inaccurate, as is Franklin's version. Both editors have altered the text.

When Emily Dickinson wrote: 'I smile when you suggest that I delay 'to publish' – that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin.', and when she wrote: 'I... told you I did not print' (Dickinson, 1958, 316), she meant it – literally. She was stating that she created and revised and circulated and archived and presented and preferred her poems and letters in their handwritten form. She did not write them in order that they be published or printed. Whenever the poems appeared in print they were and are (as has been demonstrated by the 'Would you like Summer' example) disfigured. As Jerome McGann points out:

Dickinson's scripts cannot be read as if they were "printer's copy" or as if they were composed with an eye toward some state beyond their handcrafted textual condition [...] Her poetry was not written for a print medium, even though it was written in an age of print. (McGann, 1996, 259)

This is because in the process of typesetting a handwritten manuscript, the meaning often becomes lost because the conventions of print remove examples of logographic ambiguity, whereas handwriting retains it. For example, Dickinson's line breaks in the above letter have been removed in the printed versions because the editor assumed that Dickinson meant each line to continue but was forced to write on the next line simply because the width of the page acted as a restraint and governed the length of each line.

The considerable liberties that the various editors have taken with Emily Dickinson's texts are immediately apparent. This tampering goes far beyond the discrete or silent correction of a few grammatical errors – in Dickinson's case it is a process of 'editorial translation' (Erkkila, 2002, 20), a recreating of poetic form from literary materials that do not need recreating – a process that makes any analysis of the aesthetics of grammar or syntax, orthography or word placement in Dickinson's poetic/epistolary form virtually impossible.

In 1883, a publisher, Thomas Niles, wrote to Emily Dickinson offering to 'take... a M.S. collection of [her] poems', and publish them, provided that Dickinson was willing 'to give them to the world through the medium of a

publisher'. A few years prior to this, Niles had 'slightly changed in phraseology' (Johnson: qtd in Dickinson, 1958, 573d) a poem of Dickinson's which was published in an anthology he had edited, after which Dickinson refused to send him any more poems. The editorial footnote to Niles's final letter notes that 'ED made no response to this request' (qtd in Dickinson, 1958, 287-288). There might of course be any number of reasons why Dickinson refused to respond to Niles' request, all of them supposition. The most likely reason is that despite knowing of her poetic ability, Niles did not bother to write to Dickinson until 1883, thirty-three years after she had first started writing poetry. In light of this, Dickinson's reluctance to publish 'a M.S. collection' is perhaps understandable, and the reason 'she chose not to publish' (McIntosh & Hart, 1994, 323), is not merely the subject matter of many of the poems, but can be seen, at best, as Emily Dickinson having slowly adapted to a lifetime of repressive editorial behaviour, and then simply refusing to compromise – in order to retain her poetic integrity.

It is also very possible that the poetry of Emily Dickinson was 'produced absolutely without the thought of publication' (Erkkila, 2002, 12). Helen McNeil considers Dickinson's choice to remain unpublished to have been a deliberate 'strategy' (McNeil, 1986, 160) used by Dickinson to reveal 'awesomely accurate inside pictures of taboo subjects' (McNeil, 1986, 4). However, this 'strategy' of non-publication, whether deliberate or otherwise, did mean that many of the subject areas which could then be investigated by Dickinson in her poems were ones which were often considered 'taboo' (Freud, 1977b, 272), especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Taboo-breaking often resulted in criminalization, as revealed by the prosecution and prolonged imprisonment of the Marquis de Sade during the eighteenth century, the prosecution – and the banning of some of the poems – of Charles Baudelaire and Walt Whitman, the public castigation of Algernon Swinburne and the neglect of Edgar Allen Poe. As Paula Bennett points out, 'by the early 1860s, Dickinson knew that she had passed beyond the safe limits of nineteenth-century America thought' (Bennett, 1990, 36).

Time lapse

There is an issue relating to a time lapse in the writing, the dissemination and the publication of Emily Dickinson's poetry. She was very prolific and wrote 1,789 poems between the years 1850 and 1886. The first collection of 115 of her poems was published in 1890. A second selection of a further 166 poems was published in 1891. A third selection of a further 155 poems was published in 1896. Although 436 poems were made available in six years, the 1353 remaining poems were not made available in print to be read until 1955.

The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, which brought all of Dickinson's known poems together for the first time was a scholarly edition published in 1955. It was a three-volume set edited by Thomas H. Johnson. This causes a time-lapse in Dickinson studies, as most of the poems, written in the 1860s were unavailable in their entirety for decades, during which time huge changes took place within the literary landscape. Dickinson's *Complete Poems* and her

Complete Letters, were not available to be read until *after* the publication of the *Complete Works* of Freud, Nietzsche, Darwin, and Einstein, despite being written in a pre-Freudian, pre-Nietzschean, pre-Darwinian, pre-Einsteinian world. This has an effect on reading Dickinson.

The issue this causes is that Dickinson wrote many of her poems using a sadist or a masochist persona in the 1860s. She used the masochist and sadist personae to question aspects of sexuality. Richard Krafft-Ebing published his *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. In that work he named and categorized masochism and sadism as sexual pathologies, or perversions, rather than simply aspects of sexuality. Dickinson's poems were all written before the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, when sadism and masochism were simply sexual desires or needs, and not examples of pathologised perversions.

Her first selection of poems, entitled *Poems*, was published in 1890. The time lapse causes a dichotomy – the poems were *written before* sadism and masochism were considered perversions, but were *published after* they were considered as such.

Genre and form

Finally, there are the inherent difficulties involved in accurately analysing the formal qualities – that is, the literary form – of Emily Dickinson's texts. Dickinson's poetic strategy includes a 'defiance of form' (Higginson, 2000, 547). It is a strategy utilised because she refuses to conform or submit to the 'received typographical conventions' (McGann, 1996, 254) of poetry or of letter writing.

One result of Dickinson's decision is that all editors of her work have merely put into print their own approximations, versions or equivalents of the 1,789 poems and the 1,049 letters that Emily Dickinson actually wrote. As Paula Bennett has accurately stated: 'All published versions of Dickinson's poems, even those in critical texts... represent editorial revisions' (Bennett, 1990, xiii).

With regard to the 1,789 poems (including the 12 published in her lifetime), and to the 1049 letters she wrote, even those numbers are contentious; as Jen Bervin points out in *The Gorgeous Nothings* (2013): 'Of the 3,507 poems, letters, drafts, and fragments Dickinson wrote, approximately a third has been published in facsimile thus far' (Bervin, 2013, 11).

Consequently, there are a number of difficulties involved in accurately analysing the formal qualities – that is, the literary form – of the published texts. One of the reasons for this is that Emily Dickinson never produced a typed or printed manuscript of her work. All of her poems and letters are handwritten, and the calligraphic orthography, the punctuation, the capitalization, and the line breaks are simply methods Dickinson used to help convey meaning.

Despite editorial liberties, what is apparent is that with regards to the form of her work, it is often difficult to categorise what Emily Dickinson's writing actually is: sometimes she writes poems and sometimes she writes letters – but very often, her letters segue into a form of prose-poetry or letter-poetry, and at

other times, the poems she includes in her letters become a form that could be called prose-poetry or poetry-prose, or the poem-letter – a form that is not poetry and not prose, but something that has the qualities and characteristics of both literary forms. Rather it is a hybridization of each of those various forms into a new type, genre or category of writing. This problematizes the two genres – poems and letters – it is claimed that Dickinson works in. The term 'letter' becomes inaccurate and inadequate, as does the term 'poem', since these are often not the forms Dickinson uses for her writing. This merging of genres into a new literary hybrid can be seen in Letter 41, where Dickinson writes:

I weave for the Lamp of Evening – but fairer colors than mine are twined
while stars are shining.
I know of a shuttle swift – I know of a fairy gift – mat for the 'Lamp of
Life' – the little Bachelor's wife! (Dickinson, 1958, 110)

The type of writing she uses has been described as 'Dickinson's experiments with a certain kind of what used to be called "free verse"' (McGann, 1996, 249); 'letter-poems' (Erkkila, 2002, 20); 'prose-formatted poems' (Erkkila, 2002, 20); or poetry created 'within writing conventions permitted and encouraged in the textuality of personal correspondence' (McGann, 1996, 251). What these many different attempts to categorize Dickinson's writing indicate is that there is not an existing recognisable category for Dickinson's type of writing.

It is nonetheless possible to analyse Emily Dickinson's poetry through her use of personae. This involves the distancing of the poetry from autobiography, away from 'the life story her poems narrate' (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, 625) and accepting the poems as the works of fiction that they are. In the past, critics and scholars have attempted to analyse Dickinson's poetry by equating it to events, situations and people in her life, which has led to some fairly conventional readings of Dickinson's poetry.

An example of this type of analysis can be seen in poem J61/F151:

Papa above!
Regard a Mouse
O'erpowered by the Cat!
Reserve within thy Kingdom
A 'Mansion' for the Rat!

Snug in seraphic Cupboards
To nibble all the day,
While unsuspecting Cycles
Wheel solemnly away! (J61/F151)

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that:

Obviously Dickinson's association of her earthly papa with a heavenly Papa, like her own identification with a dead mouse, represents what she genuinely believed was the power ratio between her father and herself, or even between all fathers and all daughters. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, 599)

The problem with this type of reading is that it closes down any other possible reading of Dickinson. It refuses to acknowledge that Dickinson may have been using a persona; that she may have been utilising a sexual persona to ask serious questions about taboo subjects.

If the poem is re-read through a lens which acknowledges that Emily Dickinson has donned the (fictional) persona of a daughter who is being subjected to incestual sex by her father, and when the words 'O'erpowered', 'Rat', 'nibble' and 'unsuspecting' are analysed carefully within that context, the poem can be seen to be offering a resulting reading that is very different to Gilbert & Gubar's reading:

Papa above!
Regard a Mouse
O'erpowered by the Cat!
Reserve within thy Kingdom
A 'Mansion' for the Rat!

Snug in seraphic Cupboards
To nibble all the day,
While unsuspecting Cycles
Wheel solemnly away! (J61/F151)

The use of masks or personae is one approach that a number of poets have adopted for the presentation of their poetry, and Dickinson uses a whole range of sexual personae with expertise and remarkable facility. Consequently, this thesis will not be focusing on any autobiographical data for its analysis of Emily Dickinson's fictions. The main thrust of the following chapters will instead focus on Dickinson's strategic use of sexual personae in her writing, and how her use of sexual personae enables her to create 'poetry that can ask anything' (McNeil, 1982, 32) about anything.

Emily Dickinson's Sexual Persona

Russell John Dent

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sussex

DATE

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, which I submit for examination in consideration of the award of a degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my own personal research, work and effort.

I have not already obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of this work.

Furthermore, I have taken all reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and, to the best of my knowledge, does not breach copyright law, and has not been taken from other sources except where such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text.

Signed:

Date:

Acknowledgements

I wrote this thesis with a considerable amount of invaluable support, encouragement, critical engagement and editorial advice from a small group of people. They are: Doug Haynes, Daniel Kane, Chris Ringrose, Sylvia Hardy, Stephen Barber and Lauren Dent. I'd like to thank each and every one of you. I could not have completed this work without you. Thank you.

A Note on Textual Conventions

With regards to the convention of attributing numbers or titles to Emily Dickinson's poems, there are now two versions of her *Complete Poems* available in print – one edited by Thomas H. Johnson, and one edited by R.W. Franklin. Due to Emily Dickinson's refusal to give her poems titles, each editor has assigned a number to each of her poems. These assigned numbers do not correspond from edition to edition; poem 10 in Johnson's edition is not the same poem as poem 10 in Franklin's edition. An example of this is Dickinson's poem that starts with the line 'Touch lightly Nature's sweet Guitar'. Johnson (J) has numbered this poem 1389; Franklin (F) has numbered this poem 1403. I have not privileged one edition of *Complete Poems* over the other. The convention I have used for attributing complete poems or lines from Dickinson poems quoted throughout this thesis is as follows: 'Touch lightly Nature's sweet Guitar' (J1389/F1403).