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## Sacred/Sacrilegious Tourism in Emily Dickinson's Poems

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*All the high positions and symbols, spiritual as well as profane, with which men adorn themselves with such importance and hypocritical falsity are transformed into masks in the presence of the rogue, into costumes for a masquerade, into buffoonery. A reformulation and loosening up of all these high symbols and positions, their radical re-accentuation, takes place in an atmosphere of gay deception (408).*

– M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981)

In his discussion of satirical humour in European novels, Mikhail Bakhtin points out the unstable relationship between the sacred and the sacrilegious in a textual space. The serious and the lofty can be satirized and reversed “into buffoonery” in a literary masquerade. David S. Reynolds applies what Bakhtin depicts as “carnavalesque” in European novels to his analysis of American renaissance literature in the mid-nineteenth century. For Reynolds, the satirical power of carnival culture, of blending the spiritual and the profane, represents a liberating force in language (444). As Reynolds argues, like other major American writers of her time, Emily Dickinson's poems exemplify the carnivalization of speech. Indeed, this linguistic force of democratization is especially embodied in Dickinson's metaphor of consumerism. Her metaphoric liberation, however, also serves as a form of violence that threatens to dismantle any spiritual equilibrium. This paper investigates Dickinson's poetic subversion by looking at her poems of spiritual tourism, examining how these poems challenge the definition of sacredness. Although she seldom travelled, her writing frequently uses metaphors of tourism to account for religious uncertainty in a rapidly secularized and commercialized society. Her depiction of spiritual quest, in particular, deploys what William Stowe suggests as an empowering process in travel, which exposes the problematic nature of received belief systems. Her poems of tourism open up a Bakhtinian carnivalesque space, in which religious and social hierarchy can be questioned and restructured.

The discussion will be divided into three sections. The first section looks at Dickinson's poems of spiritual tourism. Taking William Stowe's notion of travel and David S. Reynolds's concept of carnivalized language as a basis to read Dickinson, I explore her fusion of the sacred and the

sacrilegious, showing how this stylistic fusion creates both a liberating space and a force of entrapment within her poems. The second section examines more closely her poems of spiritual marketplace. Compared with Walt Whitman, Dickinson's poems reveal a more radical treatment of belief as a commercial transaction that highlights experiences of doubt and despair. I then examine the elements of transgression in Dickinson's poems and letters, explaining how her generic choice, theme and metaphor of consumerism are indicative of her ambivalent attitude towards patriotism and religion. The last section looks at Dickinson's notion of spectatorship. Based upon mercantile modes, her poems inform her understanding of viewing as both a process of enshrinement and a potentially sacrilegious form of visual intrusion. I conclude by suggesting that as an unorthodox poet, Dickinson deploys metaphors of tourism dexterously to disclose the unsteady boundary between the sacred and the sacrilegious.

#### **“With Holy Ghosts in Cages!”: Sacred Tourism and Enslavement**

Although Dickinson was brought up in an era of intense religious revivalism in the mid-nineteenth century (Wolff 95-104), a close investigation of her poems reveals her ambivalence towards human faith. Her spiritual quest constantly vacillates between hope and despair towards the invisible but divine other. As James McIntosh points out, Dickinson's Protestant heritage provides her with metaphors and textual strategies “to keep believing nimble” (3). Indeed, her poems of spiritual quest convey intense moments of religious uncertainty. In one 1862 letter, Dickinson told T. W. Higginson, her literary and spiritual mentor that her family members were “religious – except me – and address the Eclipse, every morning – whom they call their 'Father'” (L261). In another letter of the same year, she remarked upon her own withdrawal from society, stating that “Of 'shunning men and women,' they talk of hallowed things, aloud, and embarrass my dog. He and I don't object to them, if they'll exist their side” (L271). These backhanded comments indicate her suspicion that any institutionalized belief might turn into superstition or even sacrilege rather than a genuine expression of faith. She stopped attending church at around the same time (about the age of thirty) (Lundin 4), and later refused to cross her “Father's ground,” the Homestead in Amherst, Massachusetts, to any visit (L330). Although the reason for her seclusion in her later life is still unclear, as a deeply private person, Dickinson finds spiritual communication most effective on her

own terms.

Dickinson's obviation of publicity is indicative of her sharp awareness of the public use and abuse of sacred vision. Spiritual matters are not only internal and private, but also prone to secularization or even profanity in the process of ritualization, publication and transaction. She frequently appropriates commercial metaphors to highlight sacred quests going awry. The nineteenth century saw the rise of scenic tourism (Korte 84), and Dickinson's poems bear witness to this cultural craze to travel, to see and to purchase. Her heaven can morph from a sanctified forbidden city to a marketplace, and her altar of holy ghosts can switch into an auction house of spirituality. In a number of poems, Dickinson delineates the trip to the afterlife as tourism. Paradise becomes a public secret, a forbidden city that maintains its authority through invisibility and distance. Death is turned into a journey on a sightseeing bus. In "Just lost, when I was saved!" (Fr132), the speaker even advertises the afterlife by urging a revisit:

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

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

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

Unscrutinized by eye -

Next time, to tarry,

While the Ages steal -

Slow tramp the Centuries,

And the Cycles wheel!

Pale reporters and sailors both indicate literary conventions of adventure and travel stories. Images such as “the awful doors,” “the Seal,” “Odd secrets of the line to tell,” and things “unheard” and “unscrutinized” also suggest sensationalist reportage that whets the appetite of its readers. Excitement takes the place of reverence and solemnity, since death is a gateway to an exotic holiday.

To some extent, tourism brings a sense of empowerment. “The right of travel,” William Stowe remarks, “provides its votaries with an exhilarating sense of freedom and power. Travelling is as close as most people come to truly independent action [...]” (305). Dickinson cracks the sealed door of heaven open in portraying the liberating power of travel. The location of heaven, through endless projection and speculation, undergoes a process of exoticization. It exemplifies Dickinson's use of a “carnivalization of language,” which David S. Reynolds identifies as a sign of democratization in his discussion of antebellum American literature. As shown in the introduction, Reynolds alludes to Mikhail Bakhtin, pointing out that through this liberal blend of high and low languages, “inequality or distance between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect, whereby the sacred is united with the profane, the lofty with the lowly, the great with the insignificant” (444). Dickinson's tourist metaphor designates such an egalitarian force against God's secrecy. In “Ended, ere it begun -” (Fr1048), the speaker endeavours not only to read, but also to publish the book of the afterlife:

Ended, ere it begun -

The Title was scarcely told

When the Preface perished from Consciousness

The story, unrevealed -

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

As Shira Wolosky comments on the poem, “God's decree forbids the completion of the human text. Divine language counters human language” (xix). Indeed, the poem almost wages a war with God and fights for spiritual copyright. In a manner similar to “Just lost, when I was saved!”, the poem underscores the indulgence of humanity in the unreadable or the unreachable with the vigour of sensational reportage. The sacred scripture of God almost becomes printable and presumably saleable. In another poem “Endanger it, and the Demand” (Fr1688), death is turned into a lucrative daredevil business or a macabre festival:

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

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

In these poems, Dickinson deploys tropes of journalism and tourism, empiricism and sensationalism to dramatize either God's “humility” or tyranny. Similar to science, commerce becomes another denominator of democracy, levelling religious hierarchy and counterbalancing spiritual uncertainty. The emergence of tourism in the nineteenth century, according to Paul Fussell, exemplifies the force of egalitarianism: “it is difficult to be a snob and a tourist at the same time” (38). What Fussell writes about the rise of British tourism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can also be

applied to Dickinson's spiritual tourism. It illustrates this modern force of commercialization and democratization against the lack of religious certainty. In Dickinson's poetic space, immortality is not only a sacred space but also a profitable one. Commerce serves as a powerful metaphor to subvert spiritual certitude.

However, Dickinson's attitude toward the levelling power of commerce remains deeply ambiguous. Tourism as a symbol of egalitarianism also threatens to turn one's spiritual protest into a scandalous auction of faith. This spiritual transport to the afterlife can easily be deprived of its sacredness when death becomes a public spectacle and religious redemption is commercialized into a popular performance. In "A transport one cannot contain" (Fr212), the Holy ghost becomes a prisoner, and the speaker acts as a manager of a freak show:

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

A Diagram - of Rapture!  
A sixpence at a show -  
With Holy Ghosts in Cages!  
The *Universe* would go!

The poem transforms sacred pilgrimages into a phantasmagoric spectacle with its booming business. Death is not tragic, final or catastrophic. Readers can almost expect a corpse climbing out of the coffin from its fake death in the end, with its ghostly existence bowing for a sixpence charge each. The solemnity of a funeral scene is radically morphed into a Bakhtinian carnival, subverting the normality of power structures. Science and commerce, represented by "A Diagram - of Rapture" and "A sixpence at a show -," turn the afterlife into commodity for public consumption.

Dickinson's "A transport one cannot contain," as Victoria N. Morgan points out, suspends the

definition of the divine, opening up a “heterologous space,” a concept Michel de Certeau uses to account for a liberating space for the individual's diversity within a community (Morgan 76, 130 & 148-49). In her discussion of Dickinson's “humorous grotesquerie,” Cristanne Miller similarly remarks that her poems “attempt not just to violate norms (or taste) but to open up possibilities for new ways of perceiving [...]” (106). Indeed, the metaphor of tourism allows Dickinson to break away from religious and social conventions and to assert artistic individuality. Paradoxically, this poetic space of emancipation in “A transport one cannot contain” is based upon the enslavement of the holy other. In particular, this violation of sacredness reflects the reality of capitalism as another form of enslavement, caging the Holy spirit for entertainment. By doing so, the poem accentuates the tension between safeguarded rights to one's spiritual property on the one hand, and a carnivalized and commodified version of spirituality on the other. William Stowe points out that tourists are empowered “by exercising the economic power of the consumer” and by “treating their activities as ways of coming to know and hence to dominate the world” (307). This tourist process of empowerment in Dickinson's poem is soon turned into a subjugation of the other in its vehement power struggle. The master becomes the enslaved, and the holy becomes the freak.

### “Going, going, gone”: Sacrilege and the Auction of Faith

Dickinson's God and heaven are not only carnivalized and exoticized, but they can also become the orientalized other. This carnivalized power of subversion is conducted through the process of action and reaction, the empowerment of self and the enslavement of the other. However, this revolutionary force does not promise any form of spiritual liberation. On the contrary, it is exercised through mercantile modes that designate further potential oppression. In “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” (Fr1471), for example, God's mind is compared to eastern tapestries to stress spiritual anxiety:

His Mind like Fabrics of the East -  
Displayed to the despair  
Of everyone but here and there  
An humble Purchaser -

For though his price was not of Gold -  
More arduous there is -  
That one should comprehend the worth,  
Was all the price there was -

The Vanity Fair in *The Pilgrim's Progress* of John Bunyan, the seventeenth-century English puritan writer, is transformed into Dickinson's Fair of Despair in the poem, and faith becomes another type of consumerism, the connoisseurship of exotic art. As Hiroko Uno points out, the eastern fabrics in the poem indicate the incomprehensible mind of God (62). By mapping oriental fabrics onto God's mind, the poem illustrates a reversal of Edward Said's orientalism, turning God into the oriental other – confounding as well as dazzling to western viewers. John Rogers Haddad comments that the nineteenth century American literary approach towards the East was either romantic, or analytical (“Introduction”). Dickinson's spiritual buyers, alternatively, find it impossible either to romanticize God's mind or to demystify it. Through her oriental fantasy, her poem discloses spiritual wilderness.

“His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” reflects a modern anxiety, when viewers can no longer evaluate or appreciate the value of art that is taken out of its original context. When faith stays at its face value, the display of the sacred image only dazzles, confounds and then silences believers into despair. Percy Bysshe Shelley's “Ozymandias” is an instructive example to compare with Dickinson's orientalized God's mind. In the poem, the engravings on the pedestal of Ozymandias, a shattered visage of the third king of the nineteenth dynasty of Egypt, are equally disturbing and disorienting:

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

From Shelley's historical tourism to Dickinson's spiritual auction, visual consumption is turned into a recognition of historical decline or spiritual alienation. Facing eastern imagery, western viewers reflect upon their own physical and metaphysical limitation. The Romantic traveller “from an antique land” in Shelley's poem morphs into an urban consumer in Dickinson's “His Mind like Fabrics of the East -” who attempts to tag spiritual meanings with a market price to no avail.

Dickinson, like her puritan forebears, finds similarities between believing and purchasing. Both are operated on the mode of transaction for fundamental human needs. Dickinson experiments with this mercantile mode of human faith, pushing the boundary between materiality and spirituality to its extreme. In “The Auctioneer of Parting” (Fr1646), the crucified body of Jesus becomes a saleable commodity. The worker on the cross serves as an auctioneer, selling the death of Jesus, the sacred symbol of faith:

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

In contrast with the upbeat militarism in Walt Whitman's “Beat! Beat! Drum!” a poem written to aid the war effort during the American Civil War, the thrust of living force “going, going” in Dickinson's poem parallels the death drive to reveal the bleak prospect of faith. The vigour of life, like commerce, is sinisterly cut short by the verdict of death. With the hammer down, the bidder Death breaks “a single human Heart,” one's faith in God, open into two. Unlike the previous poem “A transport one cannot contain,” death in this poem is the final destination rather than an exotic show. Life does not go anywhere, “not any more.” It is an auction of no gain but all the pain and suffering of a spiritual desert.

These poems of Dickinson turn funerals and crucifixions into sacrilegious carnivals, radically out of place. The auction scene is mapped onto spiritual wilderness to accentuate the vehemence of human desperation. Her comic and grotesque sketches account for an intellectual understanding of faith and belief not as a sacred transportation and transcendence, but a secular, and mostly human, trade

of uncertainty and suffering. In comparison, Whitman, a poet with Dickinson held to be “disgraceful” (L404), is slightly more hopeful of spiritual redemption. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman's poetic voice is stunned into a momentary realization, and then again mesmerized by the visual representation of religious suffering:

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

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

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

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

Edward S. Cutler identifies this section in Whitman's “Song of Myself” as a rare moment in the poem “where the otherwise cocksure singer is haunted by the spectre of alienation.” By associating Whitman's moment of doubt with the 1853 Crystal Palace exhibition in New York, Cutler states that the exhibition “offers up a spectacular, metonymic world to the gaze, but a world whose significance and promise, the poet admits, might not properly be seen” (156). This dreaming and gaping individual is brought into a temporary realization of his separation from Jesus's suffering till the dream resumes and the healing occurs.

In a manner similar to Whitman, Dickinson was dazzled by the phantasmagoric site the antebellum exhibitions had to offer. Among others, she had visited the Boston Chinese Museum in 1846, an exhibition she called “a great curiosity” (L13). Compared with Whitman, however, Dickinson transforms her tourist experience into an exploration of more drastic spiritual despair. Turning God's mind to an eastern art and Jesus's suffering into an auction, Dickinson's poems deconstruct the meaning of sacredness. Although, by calling the identification with Jesus's suffering “the usual mistake,” Whitman's poetic voice can seem cynical, his sense of doubt is counterbalanced by the overall earnest and somehow messianic tone at the end of the section. The “separate look” remains temporary and relatively less disturbing. Dickinson, conversely, slits this mental wound open over and over again in her macabre poems. As Karl Keller remarks upon the similarity between Whitman and Dickinson, “What might surprise one about Emily Dickinson declaiming Whitman's disgracefulness is her own” (266). Dickinson's poems of spiritual tourism are no less “disgraceful” than Whitman's mental slippage. They transform the sacred images of God's brain and Christ's crucifixion into a burlesque potentially more subversive.

Dickinson appropriates metaphors of travelling, viewing and purchasing to reveal how faith is a precarious business rather than a spiritual promise. Her poems thus provoke transgression rather than transcendence, sacrilege instead of sacredness, and she does so emphatically through her experimentation with both form and content. George F. Whicher remarks that “in her religious lyrics she steadily brings the sacred to the level of the human” (238). This transmission from the sacred to the human is not limited to Dickinson's religious poems or lyrical voices. She plays with both genres and themes in her poems to wrench one's perception of sacredness. Her early medley “Sic transit gloria mundi” (Fr2), written for her sister's beau William Howland (Habegger 246), is a useful example to illuminate her stylistic strife for transgression. In a presumably valentine poem, Dickinson experiments with the epic genre by mixing Latin verses with English nursery rhymes in the first two stanzas, creating an incongruous poetic effect:

Sic transit gloria mundi

“How doth the busy bee”

Dum vivamus vivamus

I stay my enemy! –

Oh veni vidi vici!

Oh caput cap-a-pie!

And oh “memento mori”

When I am far from thee

The first two stanzas introduce what Victoria N. Morgan calls “a direct parody of [Isaac] Watts,” a famous eighteenth century English hymn-writer (181), by intermingling the battlefield with pedagogical scenes, before the speaker goes on to lampoon literary, social and religious authorities in her mock-heroic style. Throughout the poem, military recruitment is transformed into pageantry, and the soldier-speaker prepares Indian rubber as if going on a picnic. Her references to travellers such as Peter Parley, Christopher Columbus and Daniel Boone in the poem further present her speaker as more like an armchair traveller than an enlisted soldier, conjuring up scenarios of battlefields and escapades by reading travelogues and frontier tales. Presentations of gallantry and domesticity are juxtaposed and intertwined in a carousel-like fashion, rendering heroism and religion another comic show of fantasy. Dickinson's valentine is anything but romantic or heroic. In another early poem “My friend attacks my friend!” (Fr103), the battlefield becomes a scenic spot:

My friend attacks my friend!

Oh Battle picturesque!

Then I turn Soldier too,

And he turns Satirist!

How martial is this place!

Had I a mighty gun

I think I'd shoot the human race

And then to glory run!

Mixing the “picturesque” scenery with the grotesque potential of the genocide, the poem contrasts

the seemingly humanitarian speaker in the beginning with a potential rampage killer in the end. By bringing the patriotic and the lofty to the level of the human or even the frantic, the poem is turned into a self-parody, creating a carnivalesque effect that subverts the solemnity of heroic militarism. Interestingly, this transgressive act of “shoot[ing] the human race” coincides with an awareness of the large scale of senseless human suffering that continuously takes place in history. Written in the antebellum years around 1858, both “Sic transit gloria mundi” and “My friend attacks my friend!” become the premonition of what may be seen as the ugly realities of modern warfare in the following Civil War (1861-65).

#### “My Splendors, are Menagerie -”: Spectatorship and Visual Violence

For Dickinson, the sacred and the sublime also suggest their sacrilegious potential. These poems inform Dickinson's understanding of the spiritual other as both the consecrated and the desecrated, the mystified and the demystified. With her carnivalized language, Dickinson turns the pursuit of the Holy ghost or a unified national vision into a messy business of both glorification and vilification. The divine and the sacred become a great curiosity to be consumed as well as desired. The paradoxical process of sanctification through desecration is exemplified in “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” (Fr319), in which the speaker aspires to be part of the Aurora Borealis, while recognizing her own “dishonored” oblivion:

Of Bronze - and Blaze -  
The North - tonight -  
So adequate - it forms -  
So preconcerted with itself -  
So distant - to alarms -  
An Unconcern so sovereign  
To Universe, or me -  
Infects my simple spirit  
With Taints of Majesty -  
Till I take vaster attitudes -

And strut upon my stem -  
Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,  
For Arrogance of them -

My Splendors, are Menagerie -  
But their Competeless Show  
Will entertain the Centuries  
When I, am long ago,  
An Island in dishonored Grass -  
Whom none but Daisies, know -

From “vaster attitude” and “My Splendor” to “dishonored Grass,” the poem shifts the focus from the sublime experience of viewing the northern lights to the speaker's reflection upon her physical vulnerability. Her aspiration is described as an infection with “Taints of Majesty.” Her “Disdaining Men, and Oxygen” further suggests the fatal effect of tuberculosis, with taints of blood in the lung that prevent patients from breathing properly (Mamunes 2, 7 & 40). Although, by calling her works “menagerie,” exotic animals in captivity, the poem implies the experience of viewing as one of conquest, the speaker is eventually the subjugated and “dishonored” one in consumptive death. Jane Donahue Eberwein observes that Dickinson's poems “habitually linked her own small self with cosmic possibilities” (134). This connection with the cosmic, however daring, is both sacred and decaying, enshrining and entombing for Dickinson.

To some extent, the simple act of viewing designates transgression. Dickinson's poems reveal her keen consciousness of this visual violence. The power of spectatorship is made explicit in “The Show is not the Show” (Fr1270), in which the unseen speaker is the eventual dominator and arbiter of this viewing game:

The Show is not the Show  
But they that go -  
Menagerie to me

My Neighbor be -

Fair Play -

Both went to see -

The seeing/being seen and sacred/sacrilegious dyad is literally reversed by the radical visual exercise in the poem. The object in view, whether it is the audience or the show, becomes the speaker's "Menagerie." The "Fair" play is achieved when the hunter is turned into the prey and the holy becomes the enslaved. Her all-seeing speaker breaks down the division between the menagerie and the owner, the sacred and the sacrilegious in the power game between "both" who "went to see." Dickinson's 1852 account of the performance of Jenny Lind, a Swedish opera singer, dubbed as the "Swedish Nightingale," illustrates this visual practice by deviating from Lind's performance to her father's response:

Father sat all the evening looking mad, and *silly*, and yet so much amused you would have *died* laughing – when the performers bowed, he said "Good evening Sir" – and when they retired, "very well – that will do," it was'nt *sarcasm* exactly, nor it was'nt *disdain*, it was infinitely funnier than either of those virtues, as if old Abraham had come to see the show, and thought it was all very well, but a little excess of *Monkey!* (L121)

Both Jenny Lind's singing and her father's behaviour are satirically turned into another "excess of Monkey" for display. This humour of excess characterizes Dickinson's playfulness with and deconstruction of the power of viewing at the same time. Being an unseen but all-seeing spectator, like being God, is the ultimate gesture of subversion. This subversive power of viewing is elaborated in "Dew - is the Freshet in the Grass -" (Fr1102). Humans become an intruder of nature by simply seeing:

Dew - is the Freshet in the Grass -

'Tis many a tiny Mill

Turns unperceived beneath - our feet

And Artisan lies still -

We spy the Forests and the Hills  
The Tents to Nature's Show  
Mistake the Outside for the in  
And mention what we saw.

Could Commentators on the Sign  
Of Nature's Caravan  
Obtain "admission" as a Child  
Some Wednesday Afternoon.

The "Mistake" is exacerbated when the speaker proposes to "Obtain 'admission'" to nature's show. By charging what is sacred and private in nature, the poem highlights the imperial power of viewing and its profitable and thus sacrilegious potential. God, nature, or Dickinson's own poetry, can all be turned into menagerie and commodities to be purchased and consumed.

### **Conclusion: Dickinson's God as "our Old Neighbor"**

[I]t may be observed generally that, wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other (126).

Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821)

Famous for being an opium eater, Thomas De Quincey turns opium into a most sacred but also most sacrilegious object in his confessions. In a similar manner, Dickinson's poems of tourism play out the intricate relation between the sacred and the sacrilegious in various scenarios. From the fabrics of God's mind to the auction of faith, from the caged Holy ghost to Dickinson's menagerie, from the book of the afterlife to the tents to nature's show, from the patriotic pageantry to the picturesque battlefield, Dickinson maps the secular and the vulgar onto the sacred space in nation, nature and heaven to emphasize the connectedness between these two seemingly opposite thoughts. Although Dickinson condemns "Disgrace of Price" that reduces human spirit in one poem

“Publication - is the Auction” (Fr788), she also adopts this mercantile mode pervasively and effectively in other poems to capture the otherwise elusive nature of spiritual property. Michael T. Gilmore observes that towards the mid-nineteenth century, “the commodity form ... solidified its hold on literature” (17). This solidarity between art and commerce, for Dickinson, can also be applied to the exercise of human faith. Through her appropriation of commercial metaphors, Dickinson stresses the fact that the one's spiritual or national quest is also a violent process that “one cannot contain.”

Dickinson's poems of spiritual tourism rewrite the Latin motto “veni vidi vici,” as quoted in her valentine poem, into a caricature of her own: “I travel, I see, I purchase.” Seeing symbolizes conquest, but it also threatens to turn any sacred act into cacophonous experiences of blasphemy, enslavement, and transgression. The division between the sacred and the sacrilegious, the high and the low, the heavenly and the earthly, is never stable. The definition of sacredness, for Dickinson, seems to be its very earthliness. In “It was too late for Man -” (Fr689), she argues that heaven is more formidable and inhospitable than the earth:

How excellent the Heaven -  
When Earth - cannot be had -  
How hospitable - then - the face  
Of our Old Neighbor - God -

Dickinson prefers the earthly and the quotidian individual experiences over the heroic and the holy. As she states in a letter, “When Jesus tells us about his Father, we distrust him. When he shows us his Home, we turn away, but when he confides to us that he is 'acquainted with Grief,' we listen, for that also is an Acquaintance of our own” (L932). Dickinson adopts a seemingly sacrilegious poetic strategy to explore the boundaries between the lofty and the profane in her poems. By transgressing these boundaries, her poems remind us that the most sacred place does not exist in heaven, but on earth, “an Acquaintance of our own.”

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