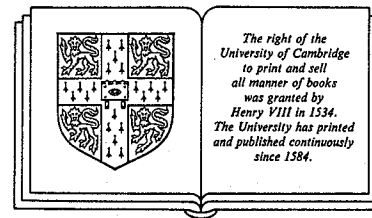


This exotic Victorian "Still Life" by the great British photographer Roger Fenton can serve as a symbolic portrait of Emily Dickinson's art. An albumen print of about the year 1857, Fenton's photograph delights in exploring the tactile values of diverse objects that are both rare and strange—coral beads, artificial flowers, Chinese embroideries—yet are also bound together by a seductive and harmonious chiaroscuro. At the left we note the presence of one of Dickinson's favorite fabrics, diaphanous folds of tulle, and at the center of the whole meticulous composition, an enigmatic locked box of heavily carved ivory. Yet to the right of this focal point there is a conspicuous technical flaw, most probably caused by damage to the negative from an accidental spill of fluids during the long process of fixing the image. That Fenton signed and exhibited the finished print in spite of this idiosyncrasy is a tribute to his pride in his own work and to his audience's tolerance for the limitations as well as the possibilities of a new aesthetic medium. The more retiring Dickinson chose to preserve the materiality of her culture in a way decidedly more private, but no less hauntingly beautiful. (Reproduced by permission of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.)

Emily Dickinson and Her Culture

The Soul's Society

BARTON LEVI ST. ARMAND
*Department of English
Brown University*



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to print and sell
all manner of books
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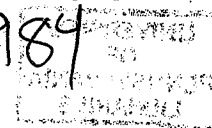
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Dickinson absorbed largely through Susan and Austin Dickinson and their superb collection of prints and paintings, both American and European. The Warner scrapbook enters here as a kind of chorus, reaffirming the study of sublime cloudscapes and landscapes as a new book of revelation open to all. For though its presence and authority may flame or fade as our investigation continues, this antique portfolio remains a potent keepsake. Through it we can still find some of the clay and the bricks Dickinson used to build her own house of poetic "Possibility" (J 657), fairer and more enduring than the prosy models she was genius enough not to spurn entirely.

Chapter 2

DARK PARADE

Dickinson, Sigourney, and the Victorian Way of Death

It was a sabbath afternoon, when a dead infant was brought into the church. The children of the small congregation, wished to sit near it, and fixed their eyes upon its placid brow, as on a fair piece of sculpture. The sermon of the clergyman, was to them. It was a paternal address, humbling itself to their simplicity . . . Earnestly and tenderly they listened, as he told them how the baby went from its mother's arms, to those of the compassionate Redeemer. When the worship closed, and the procession was formed, the children, two and two, followed the mourners, leading each other by the hand, the little girls clothed in white.

Lydia H. Sigourney

Have not ribbons, cast-off flowers, soiled bits of gauzé, trivial, trashy fragments of millinery, sometimes had an awful meaning, a deadly power, when they belonged to one who should wear them no more, and whose beautiful form, frail and crushed as they, is a hidden and a vanished thing for all time?

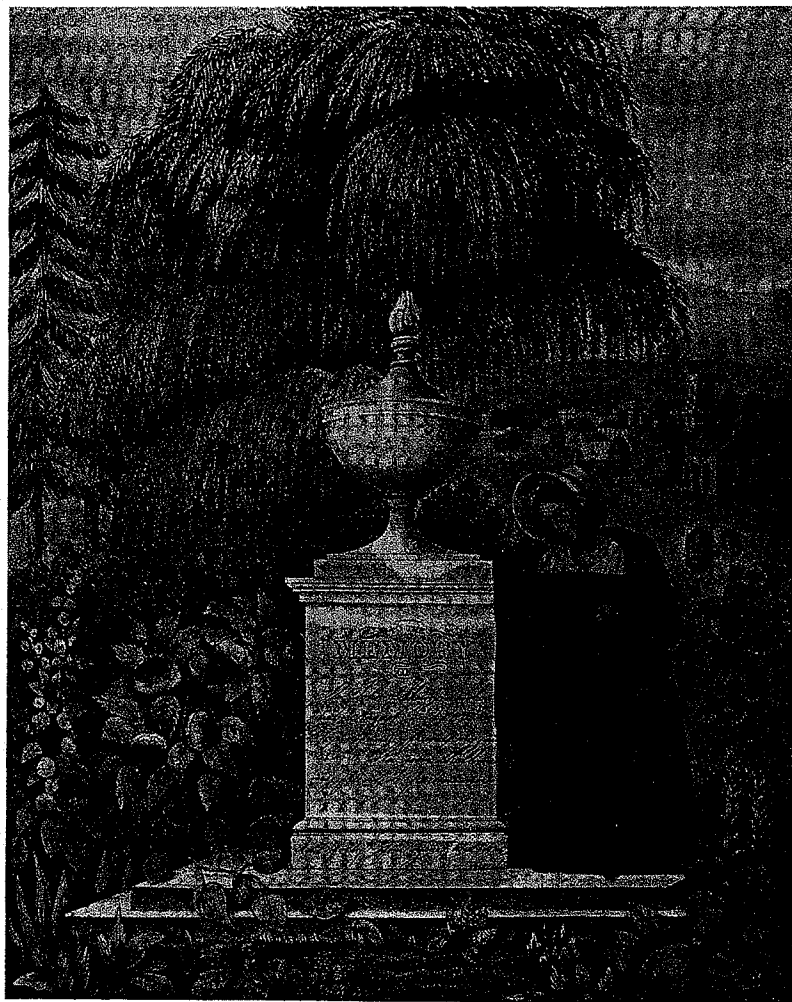
Harriet Beecher Stowe

*Death sets a Thing significant
The Eye had hurried by
Except a perished Creature
Entreat us tenderly*

*To ponder little Workmanships
In Crayon, or in Wool,
With "This was last Her fingers did" –
Industrious until –*

*The Thimble weighed too heavy –
The stitches stopped – themselves –
And then 'twas put among the Dust
Upon the Closet Shelves –*

Emily Dickinson



Kellogg mourning print, lithograph, ca. 1835. (From the author's collection.)

On March seventeenth, 1896, Mary Warner Crowell sent Susan Dickinson a loving acknowledgment for "the little package of notes, scribbled so long ago," written to her by the recently deceased Austin, who was once her beau. She added, "These bright March days bring back so many reminiscences of sugaring parties and such pleasures in which Austin was always the leader, and looking over these little billet-doux makes me forget how long ago it was." Thirteen years earlier, she had responded to the sudden death of Susan's son, Gilbert Dickinson, by writing, "You had one thing for which always to be thankful, that you had the dear boy so long," and she enclosed a poem of consolation, carefully transcribed, entitled "The Alpine Shepherd."¹ The poem was by Mrs. James Russell Lowell,² and in this way, Mary Crowell partially repaid a debt to the Dickinson family that had been tendered in a similar bereavement. For in April of 1856 Emily Dickinson had sent her "Dear Mary" a copy of James Pierpont's popular consolation verse entitled "My Child," which contained stanzas such as

I know his face is hid
Under the coffin lid,
Closed are his eyes, cold is his forehead;
My hand that marble felt—
O'er it in prayer I knelt,
Yet my heart whispers that, he is not there! [L 2:325]

Dickinson offered her specimen of *Kinder-Totienlieder* on the third anniversary of the death of Mary Warner's sister, Anna Charlotte Warner, writing, "I send the verses of which I spoke one day—I think them very sweet—I'm sure that you will love them—They make me think beside, of a Little Girl at *your* house, who stole away one morning, and tho' I cannot find her, I'm sure she 'is there' " (L 2:326-7). Richard Sewall notes that as late as 1881, Dickinson referred to George Parson Lathrop's "very similar elegy," entitled "The Child's Wish Granted," as "piteously sweet" in a letter to the beloved Norcross cousins (LED 2:673). It is obvious, then, that Mary Warner and Emily Dickinson shared a sensibility, and that a portion of this sensibility remained firm and unchanging long after they took their separate paths of private poet and public matron. Neither "The Alpine Shepherd" nor "My Child" nor "The Child's Wish Granted" appears in Mary Warner's scrapbook, though as I have noted there is no lack of poems on death—especially poems on the death of children. Rather than dismiss such an interest as a low and perverse morbidity, ascribing it to a general or particular psychopathology, we must acknowledge that Dickinson's fascination with death was an authentic response to a popular cultural genre that had its own unique strength and purpose. For the type of mortuary poetry that can be found

so often in Mary Warner's scrapbook had a profound effect on Emily Dickinson's sensibility. It set standards of taste, provided models of behavior, refined images of grief, and developed strategies of consolation that the poet would test in her own individual manner.

When I have lost, you'll know by this—
A Bonnet black—A dusk surplice—
A little tremor in my voice
Like this!

[J 104]

I

The image of the mourning maiden had archetypal resonances for the popular culture of Dickinson's time, though now it survives only as a quaint device carved, stitched, or etched on early Victorian gravestones, samplers, and prints. Even by Mark Twain's day this dominant icon of the American version of English graveyard poetry, the Mount Auburn school, had begun to degenerate into what today we would term "kitsch." Henry Glassie writes that "Huck Finn at the Grangerfords' provides the modern reader with a flood-lit view into the home of a mid-nineteenth century carrier of the popular culture" ("Folk Art," 260), though his very use of the noun "carrier" seems to connote an infectious disease of epidemic proportions. He joins Twain in burlesquing this "art in the neo-classical-maudlin mode" that so spooked the impressionable Huck and gave him a severe case of the "fantods." After contemplating the crayons produced by the deceased Emmeline Grangerford, Huck mused:

They was different from any pictures I ever see before; blacker, mostly, than is common. One was a woman in a slim black dress, belted small under the arm-pits, with bulges like a cabbage in the middle of the sleeves, and a large black scoop-shovel bonnet with a black veil, and white slim ankles crossed about with black tape, and very wee black slippers, like a chisel, and she was leaning pensive on a tombstone on her right elbow, under a weeping willow, and her other hand hanging down her side holding a white handkerchief and a reticule, and underneath the picture it said "Shall I Never See Thee More Alas." [*Huckleberry Finn*, 137–8]

Although this formulaic rendering had become a grotesque stereotype by 1884, the part of Mark Twain that was still a boy back in the Hannibal, Missouri, of the 1830s responded deeply and appropriately to what was the main heraldic device of consolation. Ann Douglas notes

that only a decade later, Mount Auburn Cemetery itself was thronged by "statues of what one popular graveyard guidebook calls 'weeping female figures,'"³ and we tend to forget sometimes just how "weepy" and "girlish" and sensitive Huck is, and how often he faints or gets the fantods throughout the course of his adventures. Moreover, our laughter at his gullibility tends to obscure Huck's role as the naive representative of a holistic folk world, who gets into real trouble only when he swallows entire and with relish the fashionable modes that are presented to him by a duplicitous popular culture. Huck's resistance to bourgeois acculturation is one of the great moral strengths of Twain's book, yet his innocent acceptance of "carriers" of the normative, like Emmeline Grangerford, is also one of its enduring charms. "Poor Emmeline made poetry about all the dead people when she was alive," Huck muses, "and it didn't seem right that there warn't nobody to make some about her, now she was gone; so I tried to sweat out a verse or two myself, but I couldn't seem to make it go, somehow" (141).

Huck responds as the sentimental gospel of death dictates that he should; by sedulous imitation he hopes to produce a "tribute," just as Emmeline Grangerford's crayon is itself only an awkward copy of somebody else's sketch, silk embroidery, or tinted lithograph. And when he admits that he "liked all that family, dead ones and all," Huck is expressing another one of the main tenets of the new Sentimental Love Religion: the unbreakable bond of kinship, the family circle eventually reunited in heaven.⁴ This motif can be found as early as William Wordsworth's poem "We Are Seven" (1798), in which the poet hears about the certainty of family ties between the dead and the living from the innocently trusting lips of a simple child, who stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that two of her siblings are really gone.⁵

The idea of the child as oracle was central not only to Wordsworthian romanticism but to the popular culture that it encouraged. Huckleberry Finn is an ironic capstone of this tradition, providing an unconscious commentary on its stereotypes—a different kind of spiritual truth—by the varying degrees of his reactions to external appearance and inner reality. But Emily Dickinson, too, manipulated the stance of the child for her own particular purposes, speaking with childhood's prophetic voice even as she donned (like Mark Twain in his old age) its prescribed garb of spotless white. In an 1852 letter to Susan Gilbert, Dickinson adapted the refrain of "We Are Seven" for her own personal use (L 1:215), and in poems such as "I met a King This Afternoon!" (J 166), she affirmed childhood's regal authority as much as Lydia Sigourney did in her retelling of the biblical story of Samuel, who provided American Victorians with an archetype of the child-mourner:

Instruct us, prophet-child!
 Amid the watches of the night to say—
 "Speak, Lord! thy servants hear;" and at the dawn
 Rise up and light the soul-lamps; and go forth,
 Our brow still beaming with the smile of heaven.⁶

Lydia Hunt Sigourney, "widely hailed as 'the sweet singer of Hartford' and the most popular poetess in America before the Civil War,"⁷ uneasily assumed the mantle of the adult seer in poems such as "Imitation of the Prophet Amos." Emily Dickinson dared to become herself the child in the temple, lecturing its chief priests and scribes in deliberately naive accents borrowed from Isaac Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1720). Dickinson also knew, however, that the soul lamps lit by both poets and prophets had to shine forth with a "Vital Light" (J 883) in order to attain the "Circumference" of lasting rather than momentary meaning. She reacted selectively to the popular gospel of consolation. Sometimes she accepted its formulas without question; sometimes she subverted them through exaggeration, burlesque, and distortion; sometimes she used them only as pretexts for outright skepticism and satire. In doing so Dickinson was continuing a process of transformation that had long appropriated classical means for romantic ends. We can see this process by examining in more detail the ruling sentimental icon of mourning maiden, mute tombstone, and melancholy weeping willow.⁸

The blank marble plinth of the tomb, for example, where the names of the loved dead were stitched in needlework or drawn on paper or printed on mass-produced lithographs (see the illustration at the beginning of this chapter); represented the neoclassical, stoical base of the paradigm. In American culture this "Granitic Base" (J 789) had its foundation in the death of George Washington on December fourteenth, 1799, for Washington epitomized classical ideals of balance, reason, and virtue. The extraordinary outburst of public mourning for this austere father figure, who was a national monument even before his death, made private grief legitimate and justified a more open posture of bereavement and consolation. As Anita Schorsch writes, "To mourn [Washington] was, in true Roman spirit, an act of patriotism, the love of one's country and its beloved founder being equated with the love of God" (*Mourning Becomes America*, 8). The marble tombstone itself, usually topped by an urn, was borrowed from Greek and Etruscan art. Washington's death coincided with the high tide of European neoclassicism, and its iconography contrasted radically with the grim death's-heads, dancing skeletons, and winged skulls of Puritan stone carving. Significantly enough, in "Unto like Story" (J 295) Dickinson

herself refers to death as a "Beckoning—Etruscan invitation— / Toward Light." Here was a clean, well-lighted place for the soul to dwell in, an "Alabaster Chamber" where the spirit of the deceased could be safely housed and revered.

Unlike the cinerary urn borne by the noble Roman matron in Benjamin West's great neoclassic history painting *Agrippina with the Ashes of Germanicus* (1769), the fanciful urn of the popular marble tombstone held memories rather than ashes, and was often itself surmounted by a finial made in the image of a petrified eternal flame. The tombstone or tomb house was set in a gardenlike environment, soon to be reproduced on a grand scale in such famous rural cemeteries as Brooklyn's Greenwood and Cambridge's Mount Auburn. In prints, samplers, and imitative crayons like those of Emmeline Grangerford, this garden was formal and severely stylized to indicate further classical control and balance. Sometimes it shrank to the compass of a single weeping willow tree. The willow in turn was a traditional emblem of Christian mourning, since it shed its leaves like tears, seemed perpetually drooped in thoughtful reverie, and had the power to regenerate itself after being cut down (thereby foretelling the resurrection of the dead). Moreover, the weeping willow's ability to thrive in wet areas and soak up excess moisture made it a natural embodiment of those sanitary concerns that prompted so much nineteenth-century cemetery reform.⁹ Lydia Sigourney, who was the author of a tiny but formidable book of consolation verses entitled *The Weeping Willow* (1847), summed up the spiritual resonances of this living emblem in a poem included in her last collection, *Gleanings*:

Pale Willow, drooping low,
 In gentle sympathy—
 Thy flexile branches wave
 Like broken harp-strings o'er the grave
 Where our lost treasures lie.

[37]

If the tombstone represented art, and the weeping willow nature, the mourning maiden herself, drawn from an ancient iconography of diaphanous classical nymphs revived in designs, sculptures, and paintings by such artists as John Flaxman, Antonio Canova, and Angelica Kauffman, gradually became a symbol of sublime Christian hope. This veiled figure, who finally exchanged the flimsy raiment of classical Greece or Napoleon's empire for the heavy black mourning dress of Victoria's reign, might be termed "Woman Weeping," in contrast to Emerson's galvanic and frankly masculine image of "Man Thinking" (*Works* 1:84). With her penchant for unrestrained sympathy and unending sentiment—"Shall I Never See Thee More Alas"—Woman Weeping at first

substituted stoical resignation for self-reliance, and brooding recollection for active thought. Yet as her presence came to dominate the triptych, she also symbolized (the triumph of an age of feeling over an age of reason.) Beginning as an allegory of unalloyed remorse, of inconsolable and perpetual grief in the pagan manner, Woman Weeping was Christianized and romanticized until she took on a Madonna-like calm. The growing power of the Sentimental Love Religion answered Emmeline Grangerford's despairing question with an unfaltering "Yes!" The loved dead would be seen again in a domesticated heaven, and sometimes their angelic voices even whispered warnings in the ears of those who were left below, or at least of those who were spiritually attuned to such higher communications.

The new gospel of consolation preached spiritual elevation as the cure for psychological depression, developing its own set of uplifting responses to the fact of sudden death. Ann Douglas notes that this changed attitude also gave birth to a new secular scripture of consolation literature, an "enormously popular genre" that "included obituary poems and memoirs, mourners' manuals, prayer guide-books, hymns and books about heaven." She adds that "such writings inflated the importance of dying and the dead by every possible means; they sponsored elaborate methods of burial and commemoration, communication with the next world, and microscopic viewings of a sentimentalized afterlife" (*Feminization*, 201-2). Once again, the child was at the center of this new revelation; infant salvation replaced a Calvinistic emphasis on infant damnation, and justification by death and suffering overcame the capriciousness of justification by grace.¹⁰ Sigourney, who practiced nearly every form of consolation literature, both prosaic and poetic, reiterated these doctrines in her epistle "Loss of Children" in *Letters to Mothers* (1838), a typical specimen of the genre. "Sometimes," she wrote,

grief loses itself in gratitude, that those who once called forth so much solicitude, are free from the hazards of this changeful life. Here temptations may foil the strongest, and sins overshadow those, whose opening course was most fair. From all such dangers, the early smitten, and the "lambs whom the Savior taketh untask'd, untried," have forever escaped. To be sinless, and at rest, is a glorious heritage.¹¹

The concept of the sinless child countered orthodox ideas of natural depravity and was gradually extended to include all Christian adults who struggled valiantly with disease and against the brutal embraces of "The Spoiler," Death. Since human nature was now seen as basically angelic rather than demonic, the doctrine of eventual reunion in heaven

became a logical corollary of the gospel of consolation. Speaking of the death of twin infants, Sigourney remarked for example that "a family broken up on earth, [is] re-assembled in Heaven. Those who dwelt for a little time in the same tent of clay, are gathered together, around the altar of immortality (*Letters to Mothers*, 220-1). Because the family circle was never really broken, even by death, there was no reason to suppose that the loved dead were not still with us, in the form of invisible presences and guardian angels who attempted to guide our steps along the weary pilgrimage that remained.

In contemplating the death of a child, Emily Dickinson accepted and practiced this popular gospel of consolation, and she seems to have believed fully in its allied doctrines of infant salvation and the guardian presence of the angel-child. Sigourney had written that "the glorified spirit of the infant, is as a star to guide the mother to her own blissful clime," so that as a result "the thoughts and affections are drawn upward" (*Letters to Mothers*, 206). In attempting to console Susan upon the sudden death of eight-year-old Gilbert in October 1883, Dickinson declared, "I see him in the Star, and meet his sweet velocity in everything that flies," while she affirmed, "now my ascended Playmate must instruct me." And she prayerfully added: "Show us, prattling Preceptor, but the way to thee!" (*L* 3:799). To Dickinson as to Sigourney, the loved dead were astral guides and spiritual mediums to a better world. The asterisk traditionally added to a roster of names in order to denote the deceased became a concrete emblem of their starry destiny,¹² as in the consolation poem Emily sent to the son of her close friend Samuel Bowles:

Who abdicated Ambush
And went the way of Dusk,
And now against his subtle Name
There stands an Asterisk
As confident of him as we—
Impregnable we are—
The whole of Immortality
Secreted in a Star.

[J 1616]

Like the ultimate Protestant that she was, however, Dickinson modified other tenets of the popular gospel of consolation to suit her own wavering belief. She had always been uncertain about the concept of immortality, which even in the poem just quoted remains enigmatic, "Secreted" in the physical reality of the star. "Is immortality true?" she anxiously inquired of Washington Gladden as late as 1882, when disturbed by the death of Charles Wadsworth and the illness of Otis P. Lord, but even this famous Christian soldier's resoundingly positive

answer could not have satisfied all her nagging doubts (L 3:731). Dickinson was raised with a respect for facts, and as the one rebel against orthodoxy in a family all of whom eventually became church members, affirming some kind of "operation of the spirit" on their immortal souls, she could not entirely swallow the candied placebo of a family reunion in heaven or the idea that afflictions were an inevitable means to sanctifying grace. Caught between the stern rock of her Calvinist upbringing and the hard place created by her own uncompromising conscience, Dickinson was forced to wonder if her childlike impudence would be any more welcome in heaven than it was in Amherst:

On such a night, or such a night,
 Would anybody care
 If such a little figure
 Slipped quiet from its chair— [J 146]

As we shall see, Dickinson solved this problem by imagining a purely conjugal heaven built not for the restoration of old family ties but for the fulfillment of new personal relationships that had been thwarted on earth. Dickinson's heaven was not static but progressive, and it remained her only hope of abandoning a self-imposed state of spiritual infancy for complete sexual and psychic maturation. Similarly, in "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (J 216) she questioned whether death was in fact the terrible call to judgment preached by the religious heirs of Jonathan Edwards. Yet neither could she accept it as the expectant slumber exalted by sentimentalists who fondly quoted Christ's words to the ruler of the synagogue whose daughter had suddenly died: "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth" (Luke 8:52). Rather, to Dickinson, death was

A long—long Sleep—a famous—Sleep—
 That makes no show for Morn—
 By stretch of Limb—or stir of Lid—
 An independant One—
 Was ever idleness like This?
 Upon a Bank of Stone
 To bask the Centuries away—
 Nor once look up—for Noon? [J 654]

Death might be a sleeping so profound that no Christ or last trump or pearly gate could tempt an awakening. In spite of her early admiration for Mount Auburn, Sigourney's "most sacred city of the dead," Dickinson invariably set her graveyard poetry not amid a landscaped garden cemetery but in neglected country burying grounds. She re-

mained skeptical that storied urn and animated bust could truly preserve the memory of the beloved:

After a hundred years
 Nobody knows the Place
 Agony that enacted there
 Motionless as Peace
 Weeds triumphant ranged
 Strangers strolled and spelled
 At the lone Orthography
 Of the Elder Dead [J 1147]

Rather than lasting memorials to human grief, tombstones themselves became pathetic testaments to the inconstancy of affection, mute emblems¹³ without expression:

She laid her docile Crescent down
 And this confiding Stone
 Still states to Dates that have forgot
 The News that she is gone—
 So Constant to its stolid trust,
 The Shaft that never knew—
 It shames the Constancy that fled
 Before its emblem flew— [J 1396]

If we compare Dickinson's focus on the shameful flight of human constancy from its hollow mortuary token to the concluding passage of Sigourney's "Tomb of a Young Friend at Mount Auburn," we can begin to see just how Dickinson went about transforming the popular paradigm of Woman Weeping. Sigourney writes:

The granite obelisk and the pale flower
 Reveal thy couch. Fit emblems of the frail
 and the immortal.
 But that bitter grief
 Which holds stern vigil o'er the mouldering clay,
 Keeping long night-watch with its sullen lamp
 Had fled thy tomb, and faith did lift its eye
 Full of sweet tears; for when warm tear-drops gush
 From the pure memories of a love that wrought
 For others happiness, and rose to take
 Its own full share of happiness above,
 Are they not sweet?¹⁴

Dickinson's rendering of the motif is terse and ironic; the constancy of remorse decamps precisely because it is human and does not possess the obdurate quality of stone. The "bitter grief" of Sigourney's ode demonstrates the failure of old-fashioned pagan stoicism; classical attitudes and the "sullen lamp" of commemoration are replaced by a trustful Christian faith, as the tearful waters of feeling literally gush forth from the stern rock of resignation, melting all doubts. Unsure of what "happiness" may lie "above," Dickinson cannot follow Sigourney in the elevating flight of love up the ladder of belief while the cold facts of mortality continue to stare her in the face, paralyzing faith with a Medusa's glower. Whether death was memorialized by neoclassic columns and urns or by the exotic obelisks and cenotaphs popular in the new garden cemeteries, its "livid Surprise" still had the power to "Cool us to Shafts of Granite- / With just an Age-and Name- / And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian" to signify its own ultimate enigma (J 531).

Moreover, Dickinson's concept of herself as a perpetual child who would gain maturity and socialization in a private Eden rather than stay as she was, a second- or third-class spiritually retarded citizen, caused her to modify another one of the ideas sacred to the sentimentalists: the democratization of death. Death was the great leveler, the Jacksonian demagogue who equalized all estates with the sweep of his great scythe. In an early letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland, Dickinson appropriated this stance in a rather manic and affected fashion, seeing death everywhere and exclaiming, "Ah! dainty - dainty Death! Ah! democratic Death! Grasping the proudest zinnia from my purple garden, - then deep to his bosom calling the serf's child!" (L 2:341). Since the "serf" in question was one of her father's handymen, the letter is more revealing of Dickinson's aristocratic conception of her own status than of the mortuary open-door policy expressed in an appropriate passage from Sigourney's "Greenwood":

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

[*Gleanings*, 11]

Sigourney was merely updating the eighteenth-century egalitarianism that found its most prominent model in William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis," where the earth itself becomes "one mighty sepulchre"

in which the high and the humble assume an equal rank.¹⁵ Dickinson's own version of this idea can be found in a poem written about 1864:

Color - Caste - Denomination -
 These - are Time's Affair -
 Death's diviner Classifying
 Does not know they are -

 As in sleep - All Hue forgotten -
 Tenets - put behind -
 Death's large - Democratic fingers
 Rub away the Brand -

[J 970]

Since in Christian thought heaven was a "perfect - pauseless Monarchy" (J 721), death became a means of promotion as well as a mere bureaucratic reclassification. Thanatos conferred a regal degree that raised a commoner to the status of the titled nobility. "Courtiers quaint, in Kingdoms / Our departed are," Dickinson wrote of the loved dead (J 53), though gradually she trimmed her honors list of new aristocrats to only two candidates: herself and her lover. A poem written about 1860 emphasizes the exclusivity of her private mythology while it also may pun on the name of the man who was eventually to become the acknowledged Master of her later emotional life, Judge Otis P. Lord:

Wait till the Majesty of Death
 Invests so mean a brow!
 Almost a powdered Footman
 Might dare to touch it now!

 Wait till in Everlasting Robes
 This Democrat is dressed,
 Then prate about "Preferment" -
 And "Station", and the rest!

Around this quiet Courtier
 Obsequious Angels wait!
 Full royal is his Retinue!
 Full purple is his state!

A Lord, might dare to lift the Hat
 To such a Modest Clay,
 Since that My Lord, "the Lord of Lords"
 Receives unblushingly!

[J 171]

While her lover became successively a lord, an earl, and a king, Dickinson herself was promoted to duke, czar, and empress. She became "Queen of Calvary," a royal infanta who lifted her "childish

plumes" of mourning in "bereaved acknowledgement" of Nature's regimentals: the "unthinking Drums" of an all-too-punctual spring (J 348). Since both compensation and consummation could be attained only through death, dying was a way of being "born to the purple," a coronation as much as a crucifixion. Dickinson eagerly appropriated the Arminian heresy of justification through suffering that allowed sentimentalists to counter the Calvinist dogma of predestination, but in doing so she also was forced to confront the new gospel's emphasis on deathbed rituals and their weighty significance.

II

Emily Dickinson had been early schooled in this "science of the grave" (J 519) by her upbringing in a Calvinist community where deathbed behavior was taken as one of the barometers by which one could measure the rise or fall of the individual soul. If such behavior was characterized by calm acceptance and Christian composure, the chances were good that the soul could be sure of its election and that it was destined to join the Saints; if the dying person railed against death and abjured a hope of heaven, eternal hellfire and brimstone seemed equally imminent. Some orthodox ministers kept "Death Books" in which the circumstances attending a death and any special last words or actions were noted down as a basis for the funeral sermon, which often made an explicit comment on whether the deceased had died in the hope of the resurrection. For this reason one of the leitmotifs of Emily Dickinson's letters concerning death is her formulaic query, "Was he (or she) willing to die?" since willingness to die was a certain sign of one's confidence in a heavenly destiny.¹⁶

As early as 1854 Dickinson was asking for such details from the pastor of her father's late law clerk, Benjamin F. Newton, to whom she had been particularly close. This pastor, Edward Everett Hale, was not yet famous as the author of "The Man without a Country," and Dickinson's letter is unusual in its formality if not in its urgency. As if believing that an answer to the physical formula would give her the certainty of spiritual truth, Dickinson reiterated her request in her closing paragraph: "He often talked of God, but I do not know certainly if he was his Father in Heaven—Please Sir, to tell me if he was willing to die, and if you think him at Home, I should love so much to know certainly, that he was today in Heaven" (L 1:283). As late as 1878, Dickinson informed T. W. Higginson that "Mr. Bowles was not willing to die" (L 2:611), referring to another recently deceased friend, and in an early poem she had puckishly applied both the formula and the deathbed conventions it symbolized to the passing away of Summer:

We trust that she was willing—
We ask that we may be.
Summer—Sister—Seraph!
Let us go with thee!

[J 18]

By preaching justification through suffering, the popular gospel of consolation gradually drained the Calvinist tradition of its insistence on a deathbed conversion, but the pull toward Christian spiritualism still allowed for the possibility of ecstatic revelations and significant last words:

These—saw Visions—
Latch them softly—
These—held Dimples—
Smooth them slow—

[J 758]

As high priestess of the Mount Auburn school, Sigourney herself chose her own last words—"I love everybody"—with a craftsman's care, lifting them from one of her own works of fiction. In her *Letters to Mothers* she recorded a typically melodramatic closing scene. Describing a particularly pious man who in his last illness daily read and explained the Scriptures to his family, she wrote:

Once, while remarking upon a chapter, he suddenly exclaimed, "What brightness do I see? Have you lighted any candles?" They replied that they had not, for it was a summer's afternoon, and the twilight had not come. Then, in a clear, glad voice, he said, "now, farewell world! and welcome heaven! for the day-star on high, hath visited me. Oh, speak it when I am gone, and tell it at my funeral, that God dealeth familiarly with man. I feel his mercy, I see his majesty, whether in the body or out of the body. I cannot tell: God knoweth. But I behold things unutterable." And filled with joy, he expired. [238-9]

Many times Dickinson witnessed deathbed behavior, but she could never be sure exactly what "Visions" were vouchsafed the dying person:

I've see a Dying Eye
Run round and round a Room—
In search of Something—as it seemed—
Then Cloudier become—
And then—obscure with Fog—
And then—be soldered down
Without disclosing what it be
'Twere blessed to have seen—

[J 547]

She could trust only fact, the microscopic or clinical evidence of her own close observation. Though what the dying eye saw could not be seen by the living eye of the watcher, that watcher might still record as minutely and objectively as possible the behavior of the dying eye, that is, how things were rather than how they seemed to be. Yet as often as Dickinson could write, "She died—*this* was the way she died" (J 150), she knew that the private mythology she based on the public *ars moriendi*¹⁷ of the sentimental gospel of consolation required her own preparation for death. This was the chief "trial" of her initiation into the princely order composed solely of herself and her lover, that lone aristocracy of two:

The Test of Love—is Death—
Our Lord—"so loved"—it saith—
What Largest Lover—hath—
Another—doth—

[J 573]

Like Christ, Dickinson thought it "no / Extravagance / to pay—a Cross—" (J 571) for the privilege of eventual coronation in heaven. Grounded in a Calvinist scrupulousness and in a sentimental preparationism, Dickinson's poems on death became dress rehearsals for her own beatific vision of her lover's face, in which pain mixed with pleasure and anxiety jostled anticipation. Dickinson learned that "Looking at Death, is Dying" (J 281), whether she acted only as watcher ("As by the dead we love to sit" [J 88]) or as the chief actor in this drama of departure:

Dying! Dying in the night!
Wont somebody bring the light
So I can see which way to go
Into the everlasting snow?

And "Jesus"! Where is *Jesus* gone?
They said that Jesus—always came—
Perhaps he does'nt know the House—
This way, Jesus, Let him pass!

[J 158]

In this relatively early dress rehearsal for death, the Calvinist elements are more marked, as the dying soul has only two "ways" to trudge into the blankness of eternity, and the longed-for vision is that of Jesus, who will escort Dickinson along the dark road of death to a homelike heaven rather than to a prisonlike hell. The last verse of the poem is a plea that Susan, whose nickname was "Dollie," would preside over the deathbed ritual either in body or (if she has herself already passed through the "great gate" of heaven) in spirit, and help to bring Dickinson safely through the final agony:

Somebody run to the great gate
And see if Dollie's coming! Wait!
I hear her feet upon the stair!
Death wont hurt—now Dollie's here!

Yet as Dickinson became more and more an outcast in her own family, she could not depend on "saved" individuals like Susan to plead her case with higher powers, and her fashioning of a private cult out of the elements of the Sentimental Love Religion and the popular gospel of consolation made dying a much more ominous eventuality. While her identification of herself or her lover as a Christ figure was but a logical extension of the new doctrine of justification by suffering, the exclusivity of Dickinson's concept of the afterlife bordered on blasphemy. Death became literally an all-or-nothing proposition. Rather than a vision of light, of Jesus, or her lover, deathbed throes might bring only a trivial deliverance from pain; rather than a grand test of her philosophy of heavenly compensation, dying might be the ultimate indignity; rather than opening the door to Hades or paradise, "The Spoiler" might simply conduct her toward an oblivion that invalidated all faith as well as all reason:

I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air—
Between the Heaves of Storm—

The Eyes around—had wrung them dry—
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset—when the King
Be witnessed—in the Room—

I willed my Keepsakes—Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable—and then it was
There interposed a Fly—

With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz—
Between the light—and me—
And then the Windows failed—and then
I could not see to see—

[J 465]

Is the "light" obscured by the fly in the final stanza a "divine and supernatural light," the brightness of the day-star as seen by the pious Christian in Sigourney's anecdote, or is it merely the "light of common day" that illuminates the fallacy of hope? Compare Dickinson's insider's view of deathbed experience with Sigourney's own last mo-

ments, as "witnessed" by a pious, obedient, and supposedly trusting daughter:

The struggle for breath ended, and she lay for about ten minutes in apparent unconsciousness. Then her eye lighted up with unearthly brightness, as if a glimpse had been given her into the world beyond. Something unseen by our mortal eyes was doubtless revealed to her. It was but for an instant, and then, just at ten o'clock, without a struggle, the glad spirit was released. "Thanks be unto God, who giveth the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁸

Dickinson has taken the clichés of nineteenth-century popular culture and turned them in upon themselves: "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died" is similar to hundreds of mortuary effusions that dwell on the details of deathbed scenes, from Thomas Hood's use of the imagery of tempestuous struggle in "The Death-Bed":

We watched her breathing thro' the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her heart the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro,¹⁹

to the standard description of the clouding of earthly vision in Sigourney's "The Passing Bell":

To Beauty's shaded room
The Spoiler's step of gloom,
Hath darkly stole,
Her lips are ghastly white
A film is o'er her sight
Pray for the soul.²⁰

The telling difference is that Dickinson makes a shorthand of conventional imagery while also questioning the whole meaning of the spiritual significance of material things. While she boldly appropriates the fancy coffin furniture of her times, she uses it to construct her own streamlined poetics. Such images as the "violet-tinted eye" of Sigourney's poem on her dead son (*Gleanings*, 260) are repeated with vivid concreteness in

She bore it till the simple veins
Traced azure on her hand—
Till pleading, round her quiet eyes
The Purple Crayons stand.

[J 144]

The eyes increasingly became the focus of sentimental scrutiny, both the eye of the witness to deathbed torments and the eye of the dying person himself.²¹ As a "window of the soul," the eye absorbed all the attention that before had been directed at the entire passion drama of death:

Fight sternly in a Dying eye
Two Armies, Love and Certainty
And Love and the Reverse.

[J 831]

Now the spiritual was wholly merged in the material, and the very fact of physical deterioration became a rite of passage ensuring divine forgiveness. Atonement came through a personal crucifixion by fever or lingering disease: One's last days or hours were purgatory or hell enough to guarantee an instantaneous translation to heaven. Or at least one could hope so:

The Eyes glaze once—and that is Death—
Impossible to feign
The Beads upon the Forehead
By homely Anguish strung.

[J 241]

This doctrine of justification by death and suffering allows us to understand the great paradox of the popular gospel of consolation: the mingled emphasis on both the corporeal and the marmoreal—the fascination with a clinical report of excruciating pain, and an equal obsession with the calm, marble-like features of the corpse itself, petrified by rigor mortis:

'Twas warm—at first—like Us—
Until there crept upon
A Chill—like frost upon a Glass—
Till all the scene—be gone.

The Forehead copied Stone—
The Fingers grew too cold
To ache—and like a Skater's Brook—
The busy eyes—congealed—

[J 519]

The corporeal emphasis in popular mortuary poetry of the time recognized suffering as a necessary prelude to the transformation of the sanctified corpse into an icon. In turn, this icon and any "keepsakes" associated with its marmoreal permanence took the place of the Catholic crucifix that was denied to most American Protestants of Puritan heritage. The sculptural metaphors of these poems—death as spoiler, destroyer, reaper; death throes as spearpoints, shafts, and darts; brows

made of marble or ice or covered with the damp "dews" of fever; the grave as a house and heaven as a home—seem incomprehensible today unless we realize that they were a means of personalizing and universalizing Christ's own New Testament passion. As late as March of 1884 Emily Dickinson could write to one of her closest friends, "I hope your own are with you, and may not be taken—I hope there is no Dart advancing or in store" (L 3:816). While the dead become beautifully composed statues, serene icons of the resurrection, the dying by contrast are perspiring, writhing, and tortured creatures, nailed to a private rugged cross and subjected to an individualized scourging, mocking, and crowning with thorns. Hence Lydia Sigourney's poem "The Lost Sister," with its typical morbid anatomy of the closing eye as well as its insistence on immediate postmortem sanctification:

It's gather'd film
 Kindled one moment with a sudden glow
 Of tearless agony, —and fearful pangs,
 Racking the rigid features, told how strong
 A mother's love doth root itself. One cry
 Of bitter anguish, blent with fervent prayer,
 Went up the Heaven, —and, as its cadence sank
 Her spirit enter'd there. [Poems, 59]

Even those seemingly closest to God do not escape. Witness "Death of a Clergyman":

Death smote thee sore,
 And plung'd his keen shaft in the quivering nerve,
 Making the breath that stirr'd life's broken valve
 A torturing gasp, but with thy martyrdom
 Were smiles and songs of praise. [Sigourney, Poems, 83]

It is all too easy to dismiss such scenes as exercises in latent necrophilia or some kind of genteel Victorian pornography. Ann Douglas, in her discussion of the American "Domestication of Death," writes that "barred by external taboos and internal anxieties from elaboration on the overtly sexual acts of impregnation and childbirth," the sentimentalists instead "concentrated on illness and death: they were more interested in the moments at which crude energy failed than in those at which it accelerated" (*Feminization*, 202). In a post-Freudian world, this is a compelling argument, yet we must also acknowledge that these excruciating descriptions were based on a long tradition of meditation on "the last things" that eventually crystallized into a specific interest in "making a good ending," in learning how to die.

III

Nancy Lee Beaty has traced this tradition of the *ars moriendi* or "craft of dying" from an anonymous tractatus of the fifteenth century to Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Dying* of 1651. Calling the form of this craft a "liturgical drama," Beaty reminds us that Victorian deathbed scenes were equally ritualistic and formalized. As Dickinson herself writes, this frank theatricality had both internal and external associations:

What harm? Men die—externally—
 It is a truth—of Blood—
 But we—are dying in Drama—
 And Drama—is never dead— [J 531]

The ritualistic drama of the *ars moriendi* remained remarkably coherent in form up to the time of the Reformation, and in the three parts of Thomas Becon's *The Sicke Mannes Salve* (1561), which Beaty takes as an excellent example of a Calvinistic craft, we can see the basic three-act structure of expected deathbed drama that was transmitted to America through the Puritans. This structure later became firmly embedded in such sentimental versions of the craft as Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers*. The first act of the traditional paradigm stresses the uncertainty of life and proper Christian acceptance of afflictions; the second act celebrates triumph over the world through a forsaking of its material tokens, culminating in the making of a will and the recitation of a creed; the third act details the actual death agony itself, the fear of dissolution and pain, and an examination of as many as "seven signs which fully certify that one is predestinate to eternal salvation" (Beaty, *Craft*, 120). What might be called the supernatural denouement of the drama, an emphasis on visions and apparitions in the midst of the final struggle, then takes place:

As the final "extreme agony and conflicte" with the "infernal army" draws nearer . . . the dying man prays to Christ, gazes on his Lord with eyes of faith, and is assured of the presence of angels in his chamber to strengthen and defend him. The friends' commendations and intercessions alternate with their "comfortable exhortations" to faith and courage and with his own (weakening) signs of continued faith. In the coda following his death, an unexpected eulogy of the deceased precedes the usual prayers of thanksgiving and petition; and the treatise proceeds as far as the first preparations for the funeral. [Beaty, *Craft*, 120]

The final emphasis on the physical horrors of death is an exhortation to the living that they, too, will have to pass in pain and suffering

through the Valley of the Shadow. It also strengthens the relationship between the dying layman, Moriens, and the divine Christ, since both share a passion and a crucifixion. As we have seen, the popular gospel of consolation takes this relationship to its ultimate synthesis: The dying person becomes Christ, whether this person be man, woman, or child. All of the elements of the traditional *arts moriendi* are preserved, but sentimentalists like Sigourney at the same time strip away the heavy Calvinist emphasis on damnation, replacing it with the new and radical doctrines of justification by suffering, atonement through pain, and sanctification by death. They also elaborate the epilogue, coda, or denouement into a new fourth act complete in itself, as visions, eulogies, and funeral rites become extraordinarily concrete and self-validating. "No Cross, No Crown!" is one of the popular poems that Mary Warner clipped out for inclusion in her scrapbook, and Dickinson too was fully aware that she would have to play her part as "Empress of Calvary" in order to attain the desired consummation of a heavenly reunion.

But it is the new fourth act that sentimentalists added to this ancient tradition that accounts for the odd mixture of the "sculptural" adjectives we have noted, alternating with vivid descriptions of the dissolution of the flesh. John Morley reminds us that "Victorian beliefs, and especially Victorian religious beliefs, were corporeal; religion had little of the abstract quality of modern religious thought,"²² but this last act of the Victorian *ars moriendi* goes beyond the corporeal to what I have called the marmoreal. The marmoreal was in some sense only an extension of the faith of an intensely materialistic age, and the overwhelming Victorian desire to possess, preserve, and embalm things *as things* seems in marked contrast to our own contemporary emphasis on making them easily disposable, deliberately obsolescent, and annoyingly self-disintegrating. Yet we can understand the dark brilliance of Emily Dickinson's death poetry only by realizing that in the popular tradition from which she drew her imagery, the dead themselves were considered frozen emblems of the resurrection, actual tokens of the longed-for afterlife:

Too cold is this
To warm with Sun—
Too stiff to bended be,
To joint this Agate were a work—
Outstaring Masonry—

[J 1135]

This realization returns us once more to the concept of the keepsake, the memorial token that, owned, touched or bequeathed by the loved dead, took on the connotations of a sacred relic. In "I heard a Fly

buzz—when I died," Dickinson as a latter-day Moriens follows both the traditional craft of dying and its Victorian sentimental variations by abjuring the world and willing away her "Keepsakes," as well as signing away "What portion of me be / Assignable." But the expected vision of a delivering Christ and the "commendations and intercessions" of friends are frustrated, even ironically undercut, by the loud buzzing of the fly, and a final confession of faith is never achieved. A perfect and holy dying is spoiled by awkwardness, confusion, and doubt.

Wedding rings, Bibles, locks of hair, and other mementos of the dying weigh down the mortuary verses of the time as well as the sentimental novels that sprang from the same love religion. These objects were to be preserved and cherished as emblems of the new-made Saints as well as tokens of the covenant between the living and the dead. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Little Eva distributes portions of her golden curls on her deathbed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Huck Finn reports of the Grangerfords that "they kept Emmeline's room trim and nice and all the things fixed in it just the way she liked to have them when she was alive, and nobody ever slept there" (*Huckleberry Finn*, 141). The disuse of a perfectly good bedroom constitutes a true revelation of the sacred to the homeless Huck, but it is also an indication of the conspicuous consumption encouraged by a rising new bourgeois society. The dictates of popular culture soon overcame the down-to-earth practicality of the folk world, whose main motto had been "Use it up, wear it out, make it do." On the very first page of Mary Warner's scrapbook is a poem entitled "The Little Straw Hat," which begins:

The dear little hat, and it hangs there still—
And its voice of the past bids our heart-strings thrill,
For it seems like a shadow of days passed o'er,
Of the bright one gone who that hat once wore.

This poem goes on in seven more stanzas to contemplate the poignant meanings of this keepsake, whose child-owner now wears a "glittering crown" while his voice "blends . . . mid the cherub choir." "The Dainty Wardrobe" on page 32 expresses the same veneration for material relics of the deceased, in this case an infant who "died without a name":

There's a little drawer in my chamber
Guarded with tender care,
Where the dainty clothes are lying,
That my darling shall never wear;

And there, while the hours are waning
 Till the house is all at rest,
 I sit and fancy a baby
 Close to my aching breast.

In "Little Charlie," on page 13, Thomas Bailey Aldrich writes:

O rare pale lips! O clouded eyes!
 O violet eyes grown dim!
 Ah well! this little lock of hair
 Is all of him!
 Is all of him that we can keep
 For living kisses, and the thought
 Of him and Death may teach us more
 Than all our life hath taught!

As in her attitude toward tombstones, Dickinson was of her time in sharing a reverence for such tokens ("I keep your lock of hair as precious as gold and a great deal more so" (L 1:9), yet she remained suspicious of their ability to escape the dilapidations of time and memory:

In Ebon Box, when years have flown
 To reverently peer,
 Wiping away the velvet dust
 Summers have sprinkled there!
 To hold a letter to the light—
 Grown Tawny now, with time—
 To con the faded syllables
 That quickened us like Wine!
 Perhaps a Flower's shrivelled cheek
 Among it's stores to find—
 Plucked far away, some morning—
 By gallant—mouldering hand!
 A Curl, perhaps, from foreheads
 Our Constancy forgot—
 Perhaps, an Antique trinket—
 In vanished fashions set!
 And then to lay them quiet back—
 And go about it's care
 As if the little Ebon Box
 Were none of our affair!

[169]

In the popular gospel of consolation, the preciousness of the objects left by the deceased was elevated to include their earthly remains as

well, and as Ann Douglas observes, "It seems no accident that corpses were increasingly made to resemble dolls" (*Feminization*, 209). The loved dead themselves became keepsakes, as advances in embalming and the invention of waterproof tombs and airtight burial cases actually allowed sentimentalists to treat the corpse as the metaphorical gem, treasure, or idol it so often is in the lofty lamentations of mortuary verse.²³ Again Dickinson was skeptical about this extraordinarily concrete manifestation of the sentimental *ars moriendi*, even as she appropriated some of its most marmoreal aspects for her own cultic purposes:

I've dropped my Brain—My Soul is numb—
 The veins that used to run
 Stop palsied—'tis Paralysis
 Done Perfecter on stone.

Vitality is Carved and cool.
 My nerve in Marble lies—
 A Breathing Woman
 Yesterday—Endowed with Paradise.

Not dumb—I had a sort that moved—
 A Sense that smote and stirred—
 Instincts for Dance—a caper part—
 An Aptitude for Bird—

Who wrought Carrara in me
 And chiselled all my tune
 Were it a Witchcraft—were it Death—
 I've still a chance to strain

To Being, somewhere—Motion—Breath—
 Though Centuries beyond,
 And every limit a Decade—
 I'll shiver, satisfied.

[1046]

In her *Letters to Mothers*, Lydia Sigourney had asked, in the tradition of Moriens's abjuration of the world, "May not a christian be able to yield without repining, the dearest idols to Him who loved him and gave himself for him?" (210). A poem pasted on page 4 of Mary Warner's scrapbook answered this formulaic question with an equally formulaic "Yes," while also acknowledging Sigourney's truth that "to have their most precious treasures swept utterly away, and find that home desolate, which was wont to resound with the voice of young affection, and the tones of innocent mirth, is a sorrow which none can realize, save those who bear it" (*Letters to Mothers*, 210). The poem is entitled "Our Idol":

Close the door lightly,
 Bridle the breath,
 Our little earth-angel
 Is talking with death.
 Gently he woos her,
 She wishes to stay,
 His arms about her—
 He bears her away.

Music comes floating
 Down from the dome;
 Angels are chanting
 The sweet welcome home.
 Come, stricken weeper,
 Come to the bed,
 Gaze on the sleeper—
 Our idol is dead!

Smooth out the ringlets,
 Close the blue eye—
 No wonder such beauty
 Was claimed in the sky;
 Cross the hands gently
 O'er the white breast
 So like a wild spirit
 Strayed from the blest;
 Bear her out softly,
 This idol of ours,
 Let her grave slumbers
 Be 'mid the sweet flowers.

In a particularly plaintive letter to Susan written in 1854, Dickinson sighed that her friend need not fear for her loneliness, for "I often part with things I fancy I have loved, — sometimes to the grave, and sometimes to an oblivion rather bitterer than death," adding, "Few have been given me, and if love them so, that for *idolatry*, they are removed from me—I simply murmur *gone*, and the billow dies away into the boundless blue, and no one knows but me, that one went down today" (*L* 1:305–6). The reference to the corpse as an "idol" gradually became, as did all the nineteenth-century sentimental euphemisms, a cliché, yet once again it connotes the conflict between paganism and Christianity that was at the heart of the popular gospel of consolation. In "A Clock Stopped" (*J* 287), the human body becomes for Dickinson a "trinket," since her true treasure—transformation from human carbon to deific

diamond—lies in a heaven of her own imagining. And finally, in a poem written about 1872, Dickinson applied these popular conventions to the death of friendship itself:

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—

Henceforth to remember
 Nature took the Day
 I had paid so much for—
 His is Penury
 Not who toils for Freedom
 Or for Family
 But the Restitution
 Of [dolatry.

[J 1219]

The materiality represented by the mortuary poems of Sigourney and those that can be found in Mary Warner's scrapbook gives to Dickinson's art its feel for the rich stuffs and ebony surfaces of what Dickinson herself called the "eclat of Death" (*J* 1307). Such was the tone of the popular culture of her times, but paradoxically that culture was only following the lead of an elite personage who set the style for the mid-nineteenth-century's fascination with keepsakes, souvenirs, and memorial relics of all kinds. It is this climactic conjunction of high and low, as represented by the ritual imagery of the Victorian funeral, that I now attempt to explore.

IV

Queen Victoria kept marble replicas of the feet and hands of her children on her desk at Osborne on the Isle of Wight, and after the death of her beloved Prince Albert in 1861 her retreat into the soberest of widowhoods set a regal seal on the rituals of the Sentimental Love Reli-

gion. For years things were preserved just as Albert had left them, and every night his valet had orders to set out his evening clothes as if he were still going to descend to dinner. As John Morley observes, "Victoria, in her grand grief for the Prince Consort, assembled an array of mourning objects almost Egyptian in their comprehensiveness" (*Death*, 14). The bell-jar protection of loved objects from moth and rust merged with the concept of bodily remains as a precious cameo carved by the great sculptor, Death. As we have seen, the corpse became a gem to be cherished, preserved, and placed in an appropriate setting. Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamers write in their *History of American Funeral Directing* that

throughout the 19th-century in America, by means of experimentation carried out by a considerable number of people, the old fashioned coffin slowly became transformed into the modern casket. Coffin and casket makers sensed goals which at one time or other they tried especially to reach in their improvements: their product should have increased utility; it should better indicate the importance of the dead person and his family: it should provide more protection against grave robbers, and the forces of dissolution, and finally it should be more artistic, more beautiful, the better to harmonize with the aesthetic movement in burials. [259]

As the new Victorian tomb houses and garden cemeteries became more and more elaborate, approaching the status of small palaces, so did the actual receptacles in which the loved dead were placed reflect a growing material reverence for their "priceless" remains. The plain, utilitarian, wedge-shaped coffin of the Puritans, meant to return man to the dust from which he came and so emblemize his mortal corruptibility, was replaced by the shapely, luxurious casket, meant to frame, enhance, and show off its contents. This development was "distinctly American" and ran the gamut from improved wrought-iron coffins to patented airtight mummy cases inspired by the Egyptian revival that informed Queen Victoria's grand mourning and sprinkled obelisks and cenotaphs throughout Greenwood and Mount Auburn. Dickinson herself mentions in an 1850 letter to Jane Humphrey that the Brewster family had hopes of seeing a young relative who had died "away at a mission" because her body had been "preserved in spirit" (*L* 1:96), perhaps in an airtight "Fisk Metallic Burial Case," with a porthole-like cover, similar to the one in which Henry Clay's remains were preserved. One of Clay's mourner's noted the aesthetic beauties of this device, first patented in 1848, for "the sarcophagus, in which the remains were inurned, resembles the outlines of the human body."²⁴ Americans of the 1850s seemed so concerned with the material preser-

vation of their political idols that they neglected the irony implicit in the last name of this ponderously "inurned" statesman, or the fact that the original Latin and Greek meaning of the term "sarcophagus" was that of a flesh-eating stone coffin.

As Habenstein and Lamers point out, such innovations in the design of coffins recall, besides the Egyptian sarcophagus, both "the iron torpedo, and the strong box" (*American Funeral Directing*, 263). If, to the sentimentalists, death was a sleep, then the coffin naturally became a bed; if the corpse was a gem, a coffin could be a showcase (some actually were made of plate glass); and if the loved dead were precious stones, a casket was the appropriate castle keep in which to secrete them. Anna L. Angier writes, "Sacred treasures sleep within / Our pleasant hill of graves," and Mrs. C. W. Hunt says of the deceased "Georgiana":

She lay within her coffin-cell
Like a priceless pearl in costly shell,
Enshrined in light, so pure—so rare,
A breath would leave a shadow there.

This "costly shell" is even more graphically described by the anonymous author of "The Little Coffin":

'Twas a tiny, rose-wood thing,
Ebon bound, and glittering
With its stars of silver-white
Silver tablet, blank and bright
Downy pillowed, satin lined,
That I loitering, chanced to find
'Mid the dust and scent and gloom
Of the undertaker's room,
Waiting, empty—oh! for whom?²⁵

Dickinson's "Ebon Box" of keepsakes was really no different from this kind of fancy burial case, upholstered in rich materials, where, as the author of *Agnes and the Key of Her Little Coffin* (1857) explained, an actual "lock and key" had been substituted for the "remorseless screws and screwdrivers" of old-fashioned pine packing cases (Douglas, *Feminization*, 204):

Ample make this Bed—
Make this Bed with Awe—
In it wait till Judgment break
Excellent and Fair.

Be it's Mattress straight—
 Be it's Pillow round—
 Let no Sunrise' yellow noise
 Interrupt this Ground—

[J 829]

While the terrors of death could not be lessened, its emblems and accoutrements were at least made palatable to a new genteel popular culture. The strategies of consolation developed by the Sentimental Love Religion stressed peaceful rest, aesthetic pleasure, and pious preservation over stern judgment, harsh utilitarianism, and physical decay. As Washington Irving admitted in "Rural Funerals" in *The Sketch Book*: "There is a dismal process going on in the grave, ere dust can return to its kindred dust, which the imagination sinks from contemplating." Airtight caskets, marble mausoleums and garden cemeteries were surely one way to "soften the horrors of the tomb, to beguile the mind from brooding over the disgraces of perishing mortality, and to associate the memory of the deceased with the most delicate and beautiful objects in nature."²⁶

In late January of 1875, referring to the death of her father six months before, Dickinson wrote to Mrs. Holland, "Mother is asleep in the Library—Vinnie in the Dining Room—Father—in the Masked Bed—in the Marl House" (L 2:537), and enclosed a poem that underlined the equivocal pleasures of new, "comfortable" burials:²⁷

How soft this Prison is
 How sweet these sullen bars
 No Despot but the King of Down
 Invented this repose

[J 1334]

Much earlier she had abstracted the cold comforts of this new gentility into a brittle imagism and mocked its transformation of the grave into a well-furnished stronghold in one of her most famous stanzas:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—
 Untouched by Morning
 And untouched by Noon—
 Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection—
 Rafter of satin,
 And Roof of stone.

[J 216]

Perhaps the sentimentalists, like the Calvinist Saints, could so exaggerate the "last things" that they cut themselves off from an enjoyment of living reality, building too many alabaster chambers of doctrine and dogma. Time and nature would destroy them all, as they had the

mighty monuments of Egypt; what use, then, was such safety or sagacity? Yet as a constant mourner who carried a "coffin in [her] heart" (J 39), Dickinson also was guilty of that "possessive idolatry" so dear to the Mount Auburn school:

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—

[J 577]

Gradually the grave became for Dickinson not a permanent residence but a stopping-off place, a "small Domain" (J 943), a beacon whose "little Panels" were glowing with a welcoming light (J 611), a boardinghouse or wayside "Inn" that entertained "Peculiar Travelers" (J 115), or finally a "little cottage" where one could play at being husband and wife—literally, a subterranean honeymoon hotel (J 1743). The funeral in turn became a regal procession, a royal progress. Here Dickinson could draw both upon her own private mythology of death as a grand "Imperator" (J 455) who conferred a distinguished rank upon his followers and upon the typical panoply of Victorian funeral customs themselves. In his *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, John Morley quotes an illuminating passage from the *Supplementary Report—into the Practice of Interment in Towns* of 1843, which establishes the chivalric origins of nineteenth-century burial rituals. "Are you aware," the learned author, Edwin Chadwick writes,

that the array of funerals, commonly made by undertakers, is strictly the heraldic array of a baronial funeral, the two men who stand at the doors being supposed to be the two porters of the castle, with their staves, in black; the man who heads the procession, wearing a scarf, being a representative of a herald-at-arms; the man who carries a plume of feathers on his head being an esquire, who bears the shield and casque, with its plume of feathers; the pall-bearers, with batons, being representatives of knights-companions-at-arms; the men walking with wands being supposed to represent gentlemen-ushers with their wands:—are you aware that this is said to be the origin and type of the common array usually provided by those who undertake to perform funerals? [19]

If Dickinson was not entirely aware of the antiquarian origins of this "array," she surely was conscious of its aristocratic pomp and circumstance, even as carried on in a country town like Amherst rather than in a great metropolis like London. A dispossessed Calvinist, she hungered for what was the nearest thing to High Church ritual:

One dignity delays for all—
 One mitred Afternoon—
 None can avoid this purple—
 None evade this Crown!

Coach, it insures, and footmen—
 Chamber, and state, and throng—
 Bells, also, in the village
 As we ride grand along!

What dignified Attendants!
 What service when we pause!
 How loyally at parting
 Their hundred hats they raise!

How pomp surpassing ermine
 When simple You, and I,
 Present our meek escutcheon
 And claim the rank to die!

[J 98]

Before her family moved back to the brick Homestead originally built by her grandfather on Amherst's Main Street, from her upstairs bedroom window of their wooden house on Pleasant Street Dickinson could almost daily watch funeral processions winding into the village cemetery (L 1:31). She well knew that the "numb look" of houses in which a death had occurred was a "Sign" that "There'll be that Dark Parade— / Of Tassels—and of Coaches—soon—" (J 389). It was a wholly fitting spectacle to accompany the deposit of the loved dead in their treasure-house beneath the earth, yet if Dickinson had been interested only in depicting sentimental burial customs, she would have produced poems little more interesting than Lydia Sigourney's "Journey with the Dead":

Weary and sad, their course is bent
 To seek an ancient dome,
 Where hospitality hath made
 A long-remembered home;
 And one with mournful care they bring
 Whose footstep erst was gay
 Amid these halls; why comes she now
 In sorrow's dark array?

[Poems, 71]

While Dickinson abandons Sigourney's flowery style and deliberately "poetic" diction for the heft and weight and imagistic compression of Watts's hymns, the individual apocryphal books she adds to the main canon of the popular gospel of consolation turn its heterodoxy inside out. Death becomes not merely a porter or a herald or an esquire (J 608), but a sinister "Gentleman-usher" who is also a best man, a groom or proxy who stands in for the true lover delayed in a remote paradise. This knight errant might even try to exercise a macabre *droit de seigneur*:

Death is the supple Suitor
 That wins at last—
 It is a stealthy Wooing—
 Conducted first
 By pallid innuendoes
 And dim approach
 But brave at last with Bugles
 And a bisected Coach
 It bears away in triumph
 To Troth unknown
 And Kindred as responsive
 As Porcelain

[J 1445]

The gentle wooing of the "little-earth angel" in the anonymous "Our Idol" from Mary Warner's scrapbook has become dangerously insistent, even rapacious. What emerges is what we might call an "anticonsolation poem," turning the pieties of sentimentalism into a grim Victorian dance of death—though the dance may be more a new-fashioned Viennese waltz than an old-fashioned country jig. Just as Dickinson assumed the role of Moriens in "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died," taking an egocentric liberty that Sigourney would allow only for the ethereal stage of Christian spiritualism that followed actual deathbed scenes (as in her "Voice from the Grave of a Sunday-School Teacher" [Poems, 178]), so did Dickinson continue to take an insider's view of her own grand funeral procession:

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—

We passed the School, where Children strove
 At Recess—in the Ring—
 We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
 We passed the Setting Sun—

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

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

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

[J 712]

In this poem all the clichés of the sentimental gospel are emptied of their well-intended meanings and become props by which Dickinson constructs a surreal “tribute” to her own special brand of spiritual materialism. Death is a gentleman caller, part suitor and part “usher,” observing all the genteel conventions and customary civilities. Yet he is also like the sinister undertaker at the Wilks funeral in *Huckleberry Finn*, who

slid around in his black gloves with his softy soothing ways, putting on the last touches, and getting people and thing all shipshape and comfortable; and making no more sound than a cat. He never spoke; he moved people around, he squeezed in late ones, he opened up passage-ways, and done it all with nods and signs with his hands . . . He was the softiest, glidingest, stealthiest man I ever see. [232]

The hearse is euphemistically described as a carriage, and the “dews” that traditionally bead the forehead of the dead become an unhealthy draft of frosty air, like the wind from out of the cloud in Poe’s poem “Annabel Lee” that chills and kills his beloved.²⁸ Consciousness again turns to marble, as the tomb house with its classical cornice is finally reached and Dickinson begins her long wait for reunion with her lover, like the trusting but forsaken heiress of Henry James’s *Washington Square*. The poet leaves hanging the question whether her long discipline of a life of willful renunciation, “sumptuous Destitution” (J 1382),

and childlike anticipation will be rewarded by the beatific vision of her Master’s unveiled face.

The pause before the house in the ground begins to last for centuries, and we do not know if Dickinson is looking back on the road not taken, the road of earthly fulfillment and ordinary marriage, with a despairing sigh of eternal regret or a blissful sigh of heavenly satisfaction. Celestial marriage would be the ultimate validation of her justification through death, the reward of a totally successful *ars moriendi*, but the poem is itself only another dress rehearsal, where the poet is clothed in the scanty ceremonies of the grave. The light tulle and gossamer of poetry can provide little protection against the frigid assaults of the Spoiler.

“Because I could not stop for Death” ends appropriately enough with a dash, since, as Dickinson wrote in a late lyric (J 1454), death was a hyphen, a mark that could leave the syllables of a word broken and unfinished or connect them to a new meaningful “Compound Vision” (J 906). Materiality can go only so far, and though in many poems Dickinson expressed a confidence about the facts of celestial marriage and a certainty about the life of maturation and passionate domesticity that lay beyond the grave, her deliberate ambiguity here indicates the same shakiness of faith that surrounds the light seen at the end of “I heard a Fly buzz—when I died.” Both poems end with a cinemalike fade-out, but whether it is to be followed by a “Hollywood ending” remains moot. Ultimately, “Because I could not stop for Death” presents a devastating triumph of the marmoreal over the corporeal, where the lack of overt fleshly suffering ironically underlines the blunt prophecy of Mary Warner’s favorite Christian slogan, “No Cross, no Crown!”

V

Dickinson’s appropriation of the props of the Sentimental Love Religion and the popular gospel of consolation involve a process of personalization, internalization, exaggeration, and inversion that can be seen in her responses to other aspects of her contemporary culture. Quite literally, she could not stop with a sentimental punctuation that made the grave a period and the afterlife an apostrophe. Death became an ambiguous hyphen, and paradise, if it existed, could be depicted only by a passionate exclamation point. Yet to use another typographical metaphor current with Dickinson, she “italicizes” images that have been given to her by the roman orthodoxies of her time, taking what is common and ordinary and setting it off in a bold, startling, and structurally independent way. Even her actual funeral was an example of this

kind of Emersonian originality, one that selected, transformed, and inverted motifs rather than inventing new ones out of thin air. As Jay Leyda writes:

The instructions left by Emily Dickinson for her funeral sound like the directions for a pageant of her allegiances. Following her father she was also to avoid the hearse, with its mock solemnity; he had been borne to the graveyard by the professors and successes of Amherst; she asked to be carried by the six Irishmen she had known. Led by Thomas Kelley of the single strong arm, Dennis Scannel, Stephen Sullivan, Patrick Ward, Daniel Moynihan and Dennis Cashman carried Emily Dickinson to the place she still occupies. When Edward Dickinson was buried, the town had closed in his honor, but his daughter's plan was quieter: she asked to be carried out the back door, around through the garden, through the opened barn from front to back, and then through the grassy fields to the family plot, always in sight of the house.²⁹

Dickinson was not alone in planning her own obsequies, for the sentimental emphasis on the Victorian panoply of death encouraged such speculations in both high and low. Ann Douglas tells us that the Unitarian minister and novelist Sylvester Judd "left directions for his own laying out: he was arranged for viewing in apparent comfort on his couch, as if in quiet natural slumber" (*Feminization*, 200). Queen Victoria also closely instructed her heirs on the manner of her interment. Interestingly enough, this "Crape Deity," as John Morley calls her, insisted on an all white funeral.³⁰ Dickinson, who abjured the "Dark Parade" of ebony hearse, tasseled horses, and muffled undertaker—"the Man / Of the Apalling Trade" (J 389)—anticipated royalty by commanding her own dazzling "White Exploit" (J 922). It was certainly no accident that one of the two landscapes that hung in the bedroom of the Amherst recluse was a Currier and Ives engraving of a view of Windsor Castle and Deerpark.³¹ Dickinson's funeral was no vulgar spectacle but, as Leyda notes, a "pageant," the mourning procession of a Yankee princess done in early Pre-Raphaelite style. Every detail of the ritual had as many allegorical resonances as did the emblems in a Rossetti painting. In effect it was not only an innovative late Victorian "happening" but Dickinson's last poem, a living witness to her symbolic intent to go "White Unto the White Creator" (J 709), as well as to approach her heavenly lover in the spotless draperies of a spiritual virgin.

Her little white casket was unusually "dainty" (YH 2:474), a receptacle ordinarily reserved for young children. This was matched by the

pliant flannel robe especially designed for her by her sister-in-law, Susan, who commented, "When we come into the world we are wrapped in soft, white flannel, and I think it fitting that we leave it that way,"³² making explicit the Victorian resemblance between grave clothes and baby clothes (Morley, *Death*, 255). T. W. Higginson was permitted to view the remains and saw their sculptural perfection surmounted by the marmoreal smile that Sigourney had described in what became her most famous poem, "Death of an Infant":

But there beam'd a smile,
So fix'd, so holy from that Cherub brow,
Death gazed, and left it there. He dar'd not steal
The signet-ring of heaven.³³

Higginson noted in his diary that Dickinson's face showed "a wondrous restoration of youth—she is 54 [55] & looked 30, not a gray hair or wrinkle, & perfect peace on the beautiful brow. There was a little bunch of violets at the neck & one pink cypripedium; the sister Vinnie put in two heliotropes by her hand 'to take to Judge Lord'" (YH 2:475). In the language of flowers popular in the ritual of early Victorian courtship, where each flower had a specifically coded meaning, violets stood for "Faithfulness, Watchfulness, Modesty and Rural Happiness." The cypripedium, a native American wild orchid known more familiarly as the Lady's Slipper, connoted "Capricious Beauty" and bore the tantalizing motto, "Win me and wear me." Whereas these two floral emblems defined the opposite poles of Dickinson's outward personality, shy retirement and jocose playfulness, the two heliotropes were keys to her inner life. They symbolized Dickinson's "Devotion" unto death and beyond,³⁴ making material her private solar myth and the imagery of the phototropic sunflower turning constantly to follow the path of its "Lord," the sun, that dominates her poems about spiritual marriage.

The majority of the mourners, like Helen Jameson, found the funeral to be "poetical" and "unlike any other I ever attended and very beautiful," but a few noted the irregularity of the poet's being carried out of the rear hall and through the open barn. Eudocia Flynt, reporting on the gossip attendant on Dickinson's obsequies, two weeks later entered in her diary these startling facts: "Emily Dickinson's funeral observed, private, no flowers, taken to the Cemetery—by Irishmen, out of the back door, across the Fields!! her request—" (YH 2:475). Not only was Dickinson as elusive in death as she had been in life, but she slipped out the back way of the family homestead, an exit traditionally reserved only for murderers, reprobates, and outcasts.

In passing out the rear hall through the garden and open barn, Dickinson said a last, symbolic farewell to the flowers and animals she loved, while she simultaneously defied public opinion and renounced the patriarchal house in which she had immured herself for over twenty years, exchanging it for the heavenly house "not made with hands." In her own account of the funeral, Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, wrote with seeming extravagance: "On an improvised bier of pine boughs, entirely covered by a pall of blue sand-violets which fell so low they swept the grass on either side as they passed, she was borne in a soft white coffin by laborers, who had all worked upon her father's land and revered her almost as the Madonna."³⁵ Yet in many respects Dickinson's last rites were simply a refinement of the Protestant idol worship encouraged by the popular gospel of consolation, and in essence they were even more feudal than the baronial pomp of the typical Victorian funeral cortege.

Like "A Spider sewed at Night," Dickinson's funeral mixed elite, popular, and folk responses to her culture. Her procession was a "Walking Funeral," favored by the English ecclesiologists with their love of medieval ceremony (Morley, *Death*, 30), but it also had its roots in nonconformist American Puritan traditions (Stannard, *Puritan Way*, 104). Its theatricality was paralleled by the funeral arrangements of the wealthy English eccentric Charles Scarisbeck, who had commissioned the famous Gothic revival architect A. W. Pugin to reconstruct his country house in that style in 1837. As Mark Girouard comments, "In 1860 the corpse of Charles Scarisbeck was carried, as he had directed in his will, in a straight line from the house to the church, across three ditches, a meadow, a wheat field, and a field of cabbages, and through a gap in the presbytery wall which he had ordered to be left open, to the mystification of the workmen, when the wall was built twelve years earlier."³⁶ Although no walls were left open or knocked down to allow Dickinson to make her unconventional backdoor exit, her obsequies were just as symbolic, courtly, and "sentimental."

Appropriately enough they ended in a mixture of paganism and Christianity, with prayers and recitations of orthodox biblical passages by the clergy balanced against T. W. Higginson's reading of Emily Brontë's poem "Immortality." Beginning with the declaration "No coward soul is mine," this romantic manifesto brashly addresses the "God within the breast" and pantheistically concludes:

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath,
And what thou art may never be destroyed.³⁷

Little did Emily Dickinson's mourners know that in attending these unique services on May nineteenth, 1886, they were "witnessing" the fourth, final, and transfiguring act of a remarkable American *ars moriendi*.

- 35 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Hyatt H. Waggoner and George Monteiro (San Francisco: Chandler, 1968), 98.

2. DARK PARADE

- 1 Mary Warner Crowell to Susan Gilbert Dickinson, March 17, 1896, November 30, 1883, the Evergreens, Amherst, Mass.
- 2 *The Poems of Maria Lowell*, ed. Hope J. Vernon (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1963), 45-7.
- 3 Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 208.
- 4 For a full exploration of this motif, see William E. Bridges, "The Family Circle in American Verse: The Rise and Fall of an Image" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1963), 66.
- 5 William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest DeSelincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 66.
- 6 Lydia H. Sigourney, *Gleanings* (Hartford: Brown & Gross, 1860), 153. The figure of the praying Samuel was a favorite mortuary sculpture for children's graves and a prominent feature of most American nineteenth-century monument catalogs. For examples of the type, see Edmund V. Gillon, Jr., *Victorian Cemetery Art* (New York: Dover, 1972), 66, 76-7, 112.
- 7 Ann Douglas Wood, "Mrs. Sigourney and the Sensibility of the Inner Space," *New England Quarterly* 45 (June 1972):163-4.
- 8 My interpretation of mourning iconography is based largely on the work of Anita Schorsch. See her introduction ("The Story of Mourning Art") to *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation* (Philadelphia: William Penn Memorial Museum, 1976) and her articles entitled "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection in America," *American Art Journal* 8 (May 1976):4-15, and "A Key to the Kingdom: The Iconography of a Mourning Picture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 14 (Spring 1979):41-71. See also Laverne Muto, "A Feminist Art—The American Memorial Picture," *Art Journal* 37 (Summer 1976):352-8; Jane C. Nylander, "Some Print Sources of New England Schoolgirl Art," *Antiques* 110 (August 1976):292-301; and Linda DePauw and Conover Hunt, "Remember the Ladies": *Women in America, 1750-1815* (New York: Viking Press, 1976). For an excellent selection of mass-produced mourning prints, see Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 160-2.
- 9 See James Steven Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Detroit: Partridge Press, 1972); James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); and Ronald Slusarenko, "Necrotecture: The Underground Population Explosion and Its Impact on Cemetery Design," *Landscape Architecture* 60 (July 1970):297-300. On the popularity of rural cemeteries, see Douglas, *Feminization*, 208-13, 372 n.19; for studies of this important cultural movement, see espe-

- cially Stanley French, "The Cemetery as a Cultural Institution: The Establishment of the 'Rural' Cemetery Movement," *American Quarterly* 26 (March 1974):37-59, and Blanche Linden, "Death and the Garden: The Cult of the Melancholy and the 'Rural' Cemetery," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1981).
- 10 See David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- 11 Lydia H. Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers* (Hartford, Conn.: Hudson & Skinner, 1838), 207.
- 12 For a pictorial representation of the sinless child as guiding star, see S. P. Mount's "A Portrait of Camille" (1868), reproduced on p. 77 of Pike and Armstrong, *A Time to Mourn*. Included in the portrait of the recently deceased child are a watch pointing to the time of her birth, a disembodied face hovering in the clouds, and the morning star in the distance.
- 13 For the emblematic origins of Dickinson's imagery, see Monteiro and St. Armand, "The Experienced Emblem," 196-204.
- 14 Lydia H. Sigourney, *Poems* (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1856), 33.
- 15 William Cullen Bryant, *Poetical Works* (New York: Appleton, 1879), p. 21-3. This important poem blends romantic feeling with neoclassical stoicism; its title, which translates as "A View of Death," emphasizes the high survey of a landscape prospect that characterizes Dickinson's "The Sleeping" as originally published in the *Springfield Republican*. For a similar perspective, see "When we stand on the top of Things" (J 242).
- 16 See Thomas H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 206-7.
- 17 See Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: The Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970).
- 18 Sigourney's death occurred on June 10, 1865. See Lydia H. Sigourney, *Letters of Life* (New York: Appleton, 1866), 413. This autobiography was completed by her daughter, Mary, who in 1855 had married the Reverend Francis T. Russell, pastor of St. Mark's Church, New Britain, Conn.
- 19 *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*, ed. Walter Jerrold (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), 444. Jerrold notes that this poem was published in August 1831 and was supposed to have been based on the death of the poet's sister.
- 20 Lydia H. Sigourney, *The Weeping Willow* (Hartford, Conn.: H. S. Parsons, 1850), 8.
- 21 For a view of Victorian death rituals as a necessary process of socialization, see John Kucich, "Death Worship among the Victorians: The Old Curiosity Shop" *PMLA* 95 (January 1980):58-70.
- 22 John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 91.
- 23 See Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bulfin Printers, 1962), especially chap. 8, "Through the Ice-Age in Embalming," 311-52.
- 24 *Reports of the Committee of Arrangements of the Common Council of New York*

- of the *Obsequies in Memory of the Hon. Henry Clay* (New York: McSpedon & Baker, 1852), 23-4. Emily Dickinson's father, Edward Dickinson, owned a copy of a similar memorial volume, *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. Daniel Webster . . .* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), inscribed to him by the Honorable George T. Davis of Greenfield, Mass., who delivered the first obituary address before the U.S. Senate. The binding features a sarcophagus stamped in gold.
- 25 Hunt's "Georgiana" is from *The Amaranth; or, Token of Remembrance* (Boston: Phillips & Sampson, 1846), 310. The other two quotations are from W. C. Whitcomb, ed., *The Early Dead; or, Transplanted Flowers* (Worcester: Henry J. Howland, 1857), 55, 140-1.
- 26 Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819; New York: New American Library, 1961), 142. Irving's antiquarian study of English funeral customs had an important influence on the development of the popular gospel of consolation. For another Dickinson poem where the coffin is a "house" with its own special "key" see "I am alive—I guess" (J 470). Nehemiah Adams explicates the meaning of such a unique mortuary keepsake in his *Agnes and the Little Key* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1863), when he writes: "It is an emblem and pledge of reopening. We use keys not merely to lock up. You seem to have regarded this key as a seal upon the stone. This is true, but also think of it as an emblem and a pledge of re-admission . . . The little key is a token of possession" (64). This quotation is from the revised eighth edition of the work originally entitled *Agnes and the Key of Her Little Coffin* (1857).
- 27 As early as 1871, Amherst was well stocked with caskets of all tastes and types. In a small booklet entitled *The Attractions of Amherst* (Amherst: Henry M. McCloud, 1871), Addington D. Welch writes that on a visit to Marsh and Son's Furniture and Coffin Warehouse he examined "a casket of rare design" that was "just the nicest thing of the kind we have ever seen. It is a folding casket, which on being opened and laid out flat looks like a satin bed." Welch adds that "there is no look of the 'coffin' about it, and it robs death of much that is disagreeable. Few people like to remember a dear one in his coffin; on the one they showed us, the occupant looks more like a person lying asleep" (10-11).
- 28 Although Dickinson wrote Higginson in December 1879, "Of Poe, I know too little to think" (L 2:649), the little that she did know was undoubtedly "Annabel Lee." On June 13, 1858, Joseph Lyman quoted some "rare and delicate touches" he found in a letter recently received from Emily Dickinson. In one of them she wrote, "The 'Kingdom by the Sea' never alters, Joseph, but the children do," a clear reference to Poe's

I was a child, and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea

See Sewall, *Lyman Letters*, 52; and Poe's *Poems*, ed. T. O. Mabbott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 477.

In a section of George and Samuel Duffield's *The Burial of The Dead*:

- A Pastor's Complete Hand-Book for Funeral Services* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885) entitled "Indications of Actual Death," we read that the first signs of death are like those of approaching sleep after deep weariness, but far stronger. At the same time a cold sweat is often perceptible on the face and limbs . . . The senses one by one are enfeebled, perhaps extinguished. First the sight fails; spots and flakes appear before the eye . . . the countenances of friends are but imperfectly distinguished; the candle held closely shines as if through a thick mist; darkness comes on" (73).
- 29 Jay Leyda, "Miss Emily's Maggie," *New World Writing # 3* (New York: New American Library, 1953), 266-7.
- 30 Elizabeth Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 562. The body of Victoria was attired in a white dress, lace wedding veil, and white widow's cap (ibid., 563). For a deathbed portrait of the Queen in this attire, see Morley, *Death*, fig. 57. The "tulle" mentioned in "Because I could not stop for Death" (J 712) was another favorite material for wedding veils.
- 31 The other was an example of schoolgirl art painted by her mother (reproduced in *LED* 1: facing p. 77). Both items are mentioned in an inventory of the contents of the Evergreens made by Martha Dickinson Bianchi in 1923 as having hung in "Emily's room," and both are now at Harvard.
- 32 *FF*, 61. In Stowe's *Old-town Folks* (ed. Henry F. May [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966]), Sam Lawson, "The Village Do-Nothing," who helps with the laying out of the dead, remarks: "I was at Parson Rider's funeral, down to Wrentham. He was laid out in white flannel." (81). See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this work.
- 33 Lydia H. Sigourney, *Select Poems* (Philadelphia: Frederick W. Greenough, 1838), 24-5.
- 34 See L. Burke, *The Illustrated Language and Poetry of Flowers* (New York: Routledge, n.d.), 61, 35, 28. That Dickinson was familiar with the language of flowers but that Master was not can be inferred from a letter she sent about 1858: "You ask me what my flowers said—then they were disobedient—I gave them messages" (L 2:333). Lydia Sigourney edited a similar volume of these "floral emblems" entitled *The Voice of Flowers* (1846). The only major work of American fiction in which this flower code appears is Herman Melville's *Mardi* (1849).
- 35 Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 102.
- 36 Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), 116-7.
- 37 *The Complete Poems of Emily Brontë*, ed. Philip Henderson (London: Folio Society, 1951), 247. This was popularly known as "Emily Brontë's Last Poem," on the basis of information supplied by her sister Charlotte, but Henderson notes that it is dated "January 2, 1846" and that Emily worked on other projects before her death on December 19, 1848 (281).