A large number of Dickinson's poems deal with the theme of earthly love. They express powerful feelings and reverberate though in a sombre tone the passions of "a flaming lover." Devoted mainly to the theme of separated lovers, most of these poems seem records of stress and strain experienced during separation. However, the poems do not only express a state of mind and a process of thought and feeling but also probe an emotion. Their insight into the nuances of feeling, ever changing but always intense, gives them a special poignancy. They externalize with sensitivity the intensity of the inner experiences. All these qualities point to an artistic control which, matched with their special poignancy, makes them the finest lyrics in the English language. Some critics justifiably rate Emily Dickinson "as one of the greatest lyric poets of all time."¹

Love, perpetually unsatisfied, has been Dickinson's major concern as a poet. In her love poems she limits herself to the emotional tangle that love implies to her; and in the process she brings out the tension which such an experience involves. Unlike Shakespeare's sonnets and conventional love poems, Dickinson's poems do not anticipate or describe the lover's response as an event, but portrayal a situation in metaphors which "speak for themselves."

Every stanza functions as a charged metaphor bringing out the tension of the drama portrayed. Though the moods of these poems are myriad, there is a single theme that recurs in most of these poems: the necessity of sacrifice and the acceptance of pain. For Dickinson love was accompanied by anguish and strife, and hence she was reluctant to accept joy in love. Her poem "I got so I could take his name," for instance, is about the endless sufferings of a beloved. Every stanza externalizes the strain of the experience:

I got so I could take his name -
Without - Tremendous gain -
That stop-sensation-on my soul-
And Thunder - in the Room -

I got so I could walk across
That Angle in the floor,
Where he turned so, and I turned - how -
And all our Sinew tore -

I got so I could stir the Box -
In which his letters grew
Without that forcing, in my Breath -
As Staples - driven through -
Could dimly recollect a Grace -  
I think, they call it "God" -  
Renowned to ease Extremity -  
When Formula, had failed -  

And shape my Hands -  
Petition's Way,  
Tho' ignorant of a Word  
That Ordination - utters -  

My Business, with the Cloud,  
If any Power behind it, be,  
Not subject to Despair -  
It care, in some remoter way,  
For so minute affair  
As Misery -  
Itself, too vast, for interrupting - more -  

(J. 136-7)

The separated beloved, while thinking of the lover, gets emotionally disturbed. The intense pain numbs her soul, "Stop-sensations-on my soul." The introvert experience of emotional turbulence is externalised as "The Thunder in the Room."

In the second stanza the experience becomes intense, when the beloved recapitulates the moment of departure of her lover. The intimate relationship of the lovers and the intensity of pain caused by separation are simultaneously rendered in the epithet "Sinew-tore." The beloved feels attached to her lover like muscle to bone, but during her separation from him, she experiences both physical pain and deep mental anguish.

Both physical and spiritual pain are at their extreme
in the third stanza where the beloved, paralyzed, cannot even "stir" the "box" while trying to touch the objects associated with the lover's memory. In her anguish she craves for release from her emotional turmoil. She turns towards God but soon rejects the idea of pleading with Him. She thinks that for God such misery is of a trivial kind, and hence He will be remotely concerned with her affair. So she suffers an endless misery inflicted on her by love, looking upon this misery as crucial to the ecstasies of higher love. The poem recalls Donne and Marvel inasmuch as every stanza of the poem elaborates through metaphors the internal experience involving acute mental anguish.

This poem could also be read as an illustration of Dickinson's conviction that earthly love is a prelude to heavenly love. In one of her letters to Justice Lord she wrote, "Eden ebbs away to Diviner Edens." Eden denoted the paradise of earthly love, suggesting the culmination of human love into divine love. The Metaphysical poets of the 17th century held a similar view. In "Sanctified Passions,"

for instance, John Donne describes conjugal love as a prelude to divine love:

> And according to this rule too, Solomon, Whose disposition was amorous, ... he departed not utterly from his old phrase and language, but having put a new and a spiritual tincture, ... he conveys all his loving approaches and applications to God, and all God's gracious answers to his amorous soul into songs and Epithalamions, and meditations upon contracts, and marriages between God and his Church, and between God and his Soul. 3

Similarly Crashaw also writes about the transcendence of conjugal love into divine love, when he says:

> I would be married, but I'd have no wife I would be married to a single Life. 4

He speaks of the reconciliation of "Heat" of conjugal love with the "Light" of divine love in his poem "Out of the Italian" =

> O! that poore Love be not for ever spoild Let my Heat to your Light be reconciled. 5

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George Herbert also describes Love (God of love) as "Immortal Heat," conjugal love as "lesser" flame and divine love as "greater flame."

Immortal Heat, O let thy greater flame
Attract the lesser to it. 6

Like them Dickinson also describes earthly love as a "filament" of higher love.

The Love a Life can show Below
is but a filament, I know,
Of that diviner thing
That faints upon the face of the Noon
And Smites the Tinder in the Sun
And hinders Gabriel's Wing

(J. 334)

The poem here is largely concerned with the vastly superior glory of divine love; earthly love has been described as a filament, a thread on which the web of heavenly love can be woven. Dickinson was fully acquainted with the Metaphysicals and also owed to the Bible her consistent belief that earthly denials hold the promise of heavenly fulfilment.

Believing that earthly love foreshadows higher love, Dickinson often equates the sufferings of an earthly lover with those of Jesus Christ, thereby associating sanctity with

6 William Oscar, p. 361.

earthly love. But this did not change her view that earthly love is circumscribed by time and space. That is why in several of her poems she dwelt on the theme of transience of earthly love. The poem "There came a Summer's full" will serve to illustrate the point.

There came a Day at Summer's full,  
Entirely for me—  
I thought that such were for the Saints,  
Where Resurrections—be—

The Sun, as common, went abroad,  
The flowers, accustomed, blew;  
As if no soul the solstice passed  
That maketh all things new—

The time was scarce profaned, by speech—  
The symbols of a word  
Was needless, as at Sacrament,  
The Wardrobe—of Our Lord—

Each was to each The sealed Church,  
Permitted to commune this-time—  
Lest we too awkward show  
At Super of the Lamb.

The Hours slid fast—as Hours will,  
Clutched tight, by greedy hands—  
So faces on two Decks, look back,  
Bound to opposing lands—

And so when all the time had leaked,  
Without external sound  
Each bound the Other's Crucifix—  
We gave no other Bond—

Sufficient truth, that we shall rise—  
Deposed—at length, the Grave—  
To that new Marriage,  
Justified—through Calvaries of Love—

(J. 152-3)

Two separated lovers looking forward to their happy union on earth realise that their human relationship and joys
are limited by speeding time. They are aware that this union can't be anything but temporary. Since they are entrapped in time they are bound to separate. This situation is vividly portrayed through the appropriate images of two ships destined for opposing lands:

So faces on two Deck, Look back Bound to opposing land.

According to Suzzane⁸ the most common vocabulary employed by Dickinson to describe the distance between lovers is the present tense of pain and a possible or future union with the beloved in bliss is that of Sea and Ships. As the time of meeting draws near the two lovers vow to seek the bliss of communion in Christian Resurrection rather than in earthly union "justified through calvaries of love." For Dickinson pain suffering was like long illness which left a patient "transparent, spiritual and pure";⁹ the pain of love made the bond of union all the stronger. Like every Puritan, she knew that suffering on earth held the promise of blissful union in heaven.


The pleasant nature imagery of the opening stanzas of "There came a Summer's full" is replaced by religious imagery as the poem progresses, according well with the shift of thought revealed in the persona's expression of preference for divine love. The nature imagery is gainfully employed to analogise the happiness of the earthly beloved. The religious terms used in relation to the lovers serve to exalt them and sanctify their secular love. It is pertinent to mention here that in several of her letters Dickinson spoke of love as synonymous with God/Religion. For instance in an early letter to Samuel Bowles she wrote: "The church within our hearts, where the bells are always ringing and the preachers whose name is Love—shall intercede there for us. In another letter to Judge Otis Lord, she writes: "while Others go to Church, I go to mine, for are not you my church, and have we not a Hymn that no one knows but us? In another letter to Judge Lord she writes, "The Trespass of my rustic Love upon your Realms of Ermine, only a Sovereign could forgive - I never knelt


11 Ibid., L. 790.
Yet in one of her poems she equates the love of earthly beloved with the love of Jesus for mankind.

So well that I can live without -
I love thee - then How well is that?
As well as Jesus?
Prove it me
That He - loved Men -
As I - love thee -

(J. 219)

Though Dickinson attributed essential Divinity to human love, this did not restrain her from exploring the physical aspect of desire. She was writing at a time when staunch Puritanic culture governed the Amherst valley. As was usual with the Puritans, repression of desire, self-discipline and moral sensitivity were virtues revered, and love in its physical aspect was considered undesirable. The puritan climate of her times qualified her treatment of love. She thus explores the theme of love with charged metaphors and not through the uninhibited sexual vocabulary of the Elizabethans although she was fully conversant with Shakespeare among them. For instance, in her poem "He fumbles at your Soul" Dickinson brings out intricate

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13 Jack L. Capps, p. 145.
intellectual and emotional convulsions that a beloved undergoes because of the absence of her lover and portrays the expected meeting of the two lovers without using terms like love, lover or Cupid.

He fumbles at your Soul
As Players at the Keys
Before they drop full Music on-
He stuns you by degrees-
Prepares your brittle Nature
For the Ethereal Blow
By fainter Hammers - further heard-
Then nearer - then so slow
Your Breath has time to straighten -
Your Brain - to bubble Cool-
Deals-One-imperial-Thunderbolt-
That scalps your naked soul-
When Winds take Forests in their Paws -
The Universe - is still -

(J. 148)

The final emotional embrace of the lovers is described as "Winds take forests in their paws; and their "Universe" becomes "Still" after the "naked soul" is touched by the "thunder bolt." This is however, not to say that Dickinson's poems are devoid of "Prophane and Sensuality Darts" in her poems. They are presented "New Englandly." She Camouflages "Night's possibility" that lovers anticipate on physical plane in a dialogue between "Sun" and "Daisy" in her poem "The Daisy Follows soft the Sun."

The Daisy follows soft the Sun-
And when his golden walk is done-
Sits shyly at his feet-

He-waking-finds the flower there-
Wherefore-Marauder-art thou here?
Because, Sir, love is sweet!
We are the Flower-Thou the Sun!
Forgive us, if as days decline-
We nearer steal to Thine!
Enamored of the parting West-
The Peace - the flight-the Amethyst
Night's Possibility!

(J. 51-52)

One can gather from the contextual clues that the images of Daisy and Sun here signify the beloved and the male lover. The beloved tracing her lover's course steals near him for the fulfilment of her love. Since she attributes preciousness to love in its ecstatic gratification, she longs for her wish-fulfilment to be realized in "Night's Possibility." The preciousness of the consummated love is vividly conveyed through the metaphor of precious stone "Amethyst." "The Peace" and "The Flight" signify the repose and ecstasy that characterise fulfilled love.

Another poem in which physical consummation is hinted at is "Come Slowly-Eden." Here the ultimate union of lovers is suggested through the union of Jessamines and Bee:

Come Slowly - Eden!
Lips unused to Thee-
Bashful-sip thy Jessamines-
As the fainting Bee-

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums-
Counts his nectars-
Enters-and is lost in Balms.

(J. 98)

The poem is full of erotic imagery that lends specificity to the action suggested. "Eden" is the paradise of earthly
love marking the bliss of the lovers' final union. The line "Lips unused to Thee" presents an image suggestively sexual. The image of the fainting Bee hints at the ecstatic experience of the lover. Similarly the last line "Enters and is lost in Balm" is highly erotic. Balm applied to some part of the body has a soothing influence on it. Its usage in the poem conveys the sense of repose and fulfilment experienced in the gratification of physical love. What is noteworthy here is the usage of "Lost."

Dickinson here refers to the total surrender a lover makes for the ultimate communion through loss of self. It is in fact the loss of self, the need of self sacrifice in love around which several of Dickinson's poems revolve.

In her poem "Doubt Me! My Dim companion" she writes about how a beloved dedicates herself to her lover, sacrificing her delights for him.

The whole of me - forever -
What more the woman can,
Say quick, that I may dower thee
With last Delight I own!

(J. 125)

Her complete devotion to her lover is evident in the following lines:

It cannot be my Spirit -
For that was thine, before -
I ceded all of Dust I knew -
What Opulence the more
Had I - a freckled Maiden,

.........................
Sift her, from Brow to Barefoot! 
Strain till your last Surmise - 
Drop, like a Tapestry, away, 
Before the Fire's Eyes - 
Winnow her finest fondness - 

But hallow just the snow 
Intact, in Everlasting flake - 
Oh, Caviler, for you! 

(J. 126)

In yet another poem she denies separate identity to a 
beloved, who has totally dedicated her life to her lover:

Forever at His Side to Walk- 
The smaller of the two! 
Brain of His Brain- 
Blood of His Blood- 
Two lives-One Being-now- 

(J. 112)

It is Dickinson's belief in self sacrifice in love that 
makes her question whether the beloved really gets the 
kind of fulfilment she longs for in love. In the poem 
"Did the Harebell lose her girdle" she questions whether 
the much desired experience of love really exalts the 
lovers:

Did the Harebell loose her girdle 
To the lover Bee 
Would the Bee the Harebell hallow 
Much as formerly? 

Did the "Paradise" - persuaded - 
Yield her moat of Pearl - 
Would the Eden be an Eden, 
Or the Earl-an Earl? 

(J. 98)

The poem is in the form of a series of questions. It 
asks whether the desired experience of physical love 
ends in the degradation of lovers. The use of the word
"hallow" in the context of the experience is significant. The word 'girdle' used also suggests chastity, which is through sexual gratification. Further, it questions whether such an experience really gives something that can be regarded precious, pure, rare and hence divine, which is particularly suggested by the epithet "moat of Pearl." And lastly, it asks whether the anticipated "Eden," paradise of earthly love, is worth calling a paradise at all.

According to Psycho-analytic critics Dickinson's poetry provides enough evidence to prove that she had apprehensions about sexual love. 14 This is explicitly conveyed in "In winter in my Room." Through its symbolism, it dwells on the attraction of sex and surmises the fear and repulsion it can arouse. In view of this symbolism, the poem has been described as the classic example of repressed desire. 15 The opening line refers to "winter," symbolically suggesting emotional barreness and isolation of the female persona involved in the experience. She


15 Ferlazzo, p. 20.
finds a worm in her room. In order to counteract her isolation she keeps it tied to her with a string.

In Winter in my Room
I came upon a Worm -
Pink, lank and warm -
But as he was a worm
And worms presume
Not quite with him at home -
Secured him by a string
To something neighboring
And went along.

(J. 682)

Suddenly, to the utter surprise of the persona, the worm is turned into a snake that threatens to dominate her as it is "ringed with power." The phallic imagery suggested by the words "pink," "lank" and "warm" in the first stanza is reinforced in the following section:

A Trifle afterward
A thing occurred
I'd not believe it if I heard
But state with creeping blood -
A snake with mottles rare
Surveyed my chamber floor
In feature as the worm before
But ringed with power -

(J. 682)

The persona tries to contain the male power by appeasing it, but it explodes despite her naive attempts to restrain it. The coiling rhythms of the snake correspond to the sexual advances of the male and its rising desire.

16 See Paul J. Ferlazzo, p. 64.
I shrank - "How fair you are!"
Propitiation's claw -
"Afraid," he hissed
"Of me?"
"No cordiality"
He fathomed me-
Then to a Rhythm Slim
Secreted in his Form
As Patterns swim
Projected him.

(J. 682)

Fascinated and terrified at the same time, the persona
flies to a distant town where the snake cannot follow her.
The snake has Biblical association with evil; Dickinson
sees sexual desire as analogous to it.

That time I flew
Both eyes his way
Lest he pursue
Nor ever ceased to run
Till in a distant Town
Towns on from mine
I set me down
This was a dream

For Dickinson love was a sacred vocation that demanded
complete devotion/surrender to the lover. In one of her
poems she writes "What would I give to see his face?" She
answers without hesitation, "I'd give my life - of course."
She will use all her wealth to buy one smile, she will
banquet sumptuously if her table "is laden with a single
Crumb/The consciousness of Thee." In as many as thirty
poems (based on a personal count) Dickinson attempts to
measure the worth of love and in one of her poems she
writes "Unable are the Loved to die" because love is a god
that immortalizes the beloved. Love is never fulfilled
in the profane realm, since spiritual union is its ultimate aim. Physical union leads only to the degradation of the lovers, instead of elevating them. It is understandable why Dickinson restricts the theme of most of her profane love poems to unfulfilled love.

In her treatment of profane love Dickinson shares certain thematic concerns with her urban British contemporary Christina Rossetti, who too wrote about earthly love. The bulk of Rossetti's poetry is devoted to sacred love, and this is consistent with the ideology of a true woman that she professed and followed. There are a few poems, however, wherein she writes about profane love. Like Dickinson, she too does not associate fulfilment with earthly love. In the poem "Monna Innominata," actually a series of sonnets, she sings like the loving lady of the Middle Ages\textsuperscript{16}, whose love though perfectly pure does not find its fulfilment in matrimony or physical union:

\begin{quote}
For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
For one is both and both are one in love:
Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';
Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
Both of us, of the love which makes us one.  \textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 21.
Battiscombe has rightly observed that "it seems that Christina's conscious mind was concerned not with sex but with chivalry. She looked for a knight in shining armour." One is reminded of Dante here who had greatly influenced the Rossettis; they virtually had elevated him to the position of a "family item." The Dante-Beatrice relationship, if relationship it can properly be called, became Rossetti's ideal of love between man and woman. Thus for Christine Rossetti physical love was undesirable; while dwelling on its evil nature, she often conveyed her longing for higher love. "My Dream" serves to illustrate this. At the surface the poem is about an attractive crocodile which in its gastro-metabolic act destroys the whole race of feeble crocodiles to satiate its hunger. But, in effect, the crocodile signifies on earthly lover; its act of satiating hunger signifies physical desire for sexual fulfilment.


20 Battiscombe, p. 42.
The earthly lover's attraction for the beloved is suggested in the physical charm of the crocodile.

Each crocodile was girt with massive gold
And polished stones that with their wearers grew:
But one there was who waxed beyond the rest,
Wore kinglier girdle and a kingly crown,
Whilst crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast.
All gleamed compact and green with scale on scale,
But special burnishment adorned his mail
And special terror weighed upon his frown;
His punier brethren quaked before his tail
Broad as a rafter, potent as a flail.
So he grew lord and master of his kin.*21

The earthly lover is described in terms of his grandeur, strength, and power. This description is analogous to the description of the Knights of the Middle Ages, who fulfilled the expectations of their beloveds. Rossetti had read folk and fairy tales,22 and their influence is evident here. The cruel drama of eating, denoting the sexual hostility of an earthly lover, is given visual dramatic representation in the following lines:

21 William M. Rossetti, p. 151. Subsequent references to Rossetti's poems are to the same edition. Page numbers are indicated at the end of every quote.

An execrable appetite arose,
He batten'd on them, crunch'd, and suck'd them in.
He knew no law, he fear'd no binding law,
But ground them with inexorable jaw.
The luscious fat distill'd upon his chin,
Exud'd from his nostrils and his eyes,
While still like hungry death he feed'd his maw;
Till, every minor crocodile being dead
And buried too, himself gorg'd to the full,
He slept with breath oppress'd and unstrung claw.

(R. 152)

The above lines are very suggestively sexual. The expression "execrable appetite" suggests the abominable hunger of lust. The words "batten'd," "crunch'd" and "suck'd" reinforce the analogy. The line "He knew no law, he fear'd no binding law" points to the lawlessness of sexual passion. "Luscious" is associated with something sickly sweet and hence detestable. The attractive physicality of the earthly lover fades as he finishes with the act.

O marvel passing strange which next I saw!
In sleep he dwindled to the common size,
And all the empire faded from his coat.

(R. 152)

The powerful appeal of the earthly lover, who at first is loved but later hated, is finally counteracted by the attraction of the Divine lover, who proves stronger of the two as he humbles and diminishes the earthly lover.
The prudent crocodile rose on his feet,  
And shed appropriate tears and wrung his hands.  

The supernatural powers of the heavenly lover are imaged forth in taming water without force. His divinity is revealed in his being "Supreme yet weightless as an idle mote," an ethereal quality. Further the evasiveness and mysteriousness of the divine is conveyed through the similes "Swift as a swallow" and "subtle as a flame." The arrival of the divine lover and his supremacy over the earthly lover are dramatized in the following lines:

Then from far off a winged vessel came,  
Swift as a swallow, subtle as a flame;  
I know not what it bore of freight or host,  
But white it was as an avenging ghost  
It levelled strong Euphrates in its course;  
Supreme yet weightless as an idlemote  
It seemed to tame the waters without force  
Till not a murmur swelled or billow beat.  
Lo, as the purple shadow swept the sands,  
The prudent crocodile rose on his feet  
And shed appropriate tears and wrung his hands.  

(R.152)

Projected in the form of a dream, the poem symbolically expresses Rossetti's rejection of earthly love and her yearning for love of a higher kind. It reminds us of Dickinson's "In winter in my Room" wherein she expresses her disapproval of profane love. In Freudian terms then either poem can be interpreted as embodying a repressed sexual desire.
Rossetti rejects earthly love in another poem "The World." Its evil nature is symbolized by a wicked woman, who exercised her spell on her victims by the artificiality of her physical beauty.

By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair:
But all night as the moon so changeth she;
Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy,
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.
By day she woos me to the outer air,
Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety:
But thro' the night a beast she grins at me,
A very monster void of love and prayer.
By day she stands a lie; by night she stands
In all the naked horror of the truth,
With pushing horns and clawed & clutching hands.
Is this a friend indeed, that I should sell
My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?

(R.50)

The deceptive beauty of the woman is presented through the images of "Ripe fruits" and "Sweet flowers." In "Goblin Market" too temptation is symbolized through fruit. Rossetti had read the Bible well enough to know that fruit is a traditional symbol of sin and temptation. The woman's evil nature is imaged forth through "subtle serpents gliding in her hair." Her vulgarity is shown in terms of her monstrosity, "Pushing horns" and "clawed and clutching hands." She represents all that is evil about earthly sensuous love. The utter scorn against such love is expressed through the words "loathsome"
"foul" and "hideous leprosy." The woman tries to entrap the persona, but is soon rejected because of her loathsome form, which she cannot conceal at "night" - the evil that she essentially personifies. The persona denies to her the contract of her "life" and "youth" affirming the poet's conviction that physical love is evil and leads to hell:

Is this a friend indeed, that I should sell
My soul to her, give her my life and youth
Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?

Rossetti was Christian to the core and marrow of her being.23 Her faith had taught her that love on earth can be renounced, preferably for the recompense of union in heaven. She believed that lovers, denying themself the joy of fulfillment on earth, can win each other through Christian love in a "newer, complete, more rapturous and intense life in which this one is but a prelude."24 Many of her poems celebrate the beloved's farewell to her earthly lover only to win him in heaven. "Convent Threshold" is one of them: in this poem the beloved bids farewell to her earthly lover in the hope


24 L.M. Packer, p. 129.
that they meet in the world above.

There we shall meet as once we met,
And love with old familiar love.

(R.167)

The beloved thinks that their love on physical plane
is transitory and implores her lover to repent to get
purged so that they can share paradisal glory together
in Heaven:

Repent, repent, and be forgiven.
This life is long, but yet it ends;
Repent and purge your soul and save:

(R.165)

The beloved does not want to attain salvation all alone;
she wishes her lover to be in her company in paradise.

How should I rest in paradise,
Or sit on steps of heaven alone?
If Saints and Angels spoke of love,
Should I not answer from my throne,

Several vivid descriptive passages contrast the joy of
redeemed martyrs in heaven and lustful excesses of earthly
life, rendered in the following passage:

Milk-white, wine-flushed among the vines,
Up and down leaping, to and fro,
Most glad, most full, made strong with wines,
Blooming as peaches pearled with dew,
Their golden windy hair afloat,
Love-music warbling in their throat,
Young men and women come and go.

Against the pompous life of earth, Heaven is described
as:

Beyond the hills a watered land,
Beyond the gulf a gleaming strand
Of mansions where the righteous sup;
Who sleep at ease among their trees;
Or wake to sing a cadenced hymn
With Cherubim and Seraphim.

(R. 165)

After giving a typical Christian version of paradise, the beloved assures her lover of their union there, since she thinks that their denial of love in this realm holds the prospect of union in the other one:

When once the morning star shall rise,
When earth with shadow flees away
And we stand safe within the door,
Then you shall lift the veil thereof.
Look up, rise up: for far above
Our palms are grown, our place is set;
There we shall meet as once we met,
And love with old familiar love.

(R. 167)

The poem comes very near to the conception of Dickinson's poem "There came a day at Summer's full," which too celebrates the supremacy of heavenly love - the lovers renounce earthly union for the bliss of reunion in heaven, earned through 'Calavaries' of love, i.e. extreme mortification unlike Rossetti's mere repentance. Yet in another poem "By way of Remembrance" Rossetti dwells on the theme of heavenly reunion of lovers in Resurrection.

In Resurrection may we meet again:
No more with stricken hearts to part in twain;
As once in sorrow one, now one in mirth,
One in our resurrection-songs of praise.

(R. 229)
The beloved asks her lover not to look for fulfilment in earthly love because "Life as a rolling moon doth wax and wane"; she suggests that they wait for the other world where love is reborn and annuls loss, decay and death:

Let us go fall asleep, dear Friend, in peace;-
A little while, and age and sorrow cease;
A little while, and love reborn annuls
Loss and decay and death—and all is love.

(R. 229)

Rossetti wrote at a time when young ladies professing Anglo-Catholic religion were trained right from their childhood to repress rather than to express their feelings. William Rossetti describes Christina as "An Anglo-Catholic and among Anglo-Catholics, a puritan" for whom any display of emotion was suspect. This is evident from the fact that in almost all her love poems she looks forward to love's fulfilment hereafter. For instance, her poems like "Echo," "Let Patience Have Her Perfect Work," centre round the belief that in paradise, "Souls brimfull of love abide and meet." In none of her poems do we find the meeting of earthly lovers celebrated. Love always remains unsatisfied. This is borne out in these poems for instance: "Meeting,"

25 Shove, p. 82.

Like Dickinson and Rossetti, Kamala Das has frequently written on the theme of profane love in her poems. In fact, "Love-desire, genuine love, love on various planes has been Kamala Das's obsession." Centering her poems round the theme of physical love she particularly dwells on undisguised sexual love giving minute details of sexual acrobatics. However, she thinks that "Love is beautiful whatever, four lettered name the Puritans call it by. It is the foretaste of paradise. It is the only pastime that involves the soul." Against this, it is interesting to notice that unfulfilled love has been her favourite theme. Her poems reveal that lack of fulfilment characterizes her vision of love on earth and this to an extent establishes her kinship with Dickinson and Rossetti.

"The Freaks", for instance, dwells on the theme of unfulfilled love. We are here given an uninhibited


account of all that the physical union of lovers involves:

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where the stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee... 28

Though the lovers are inclined to make love to each other, the whole act ends "trippling idly over puddles of desire." There is no meeting point for the two hearts, the mind of the persona goes astray and this is a situation which Kohli characterizes as "a rather helpless situation." 29

The woman persona is filled with utter disgust at the failing of her lover, who can touch her with nimble finger-tips to fondle and soothe her but can offer her nothing more than "Skin's lazy hungers." She cannot seek fulfilment of true love through "Sexual titillation" 30 and her despair is expressed in the painful question:

Who can
Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love? 31


31 Kamala Das, The Old Play House and Other Poems, p. 11.
The heart remains "an empty cistern" filled with silence instead of hopes and desires:

The heart
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence ... 32

Such love does not afford any satisfaction to the female persona and yet she is helplessly forced to compromise with it:

I am a freak, It's only
To save my face, I flaunt, at
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust. 33

"Convicts" describes physical love in the elemental terms of physical labour and heat; a physical experience only. In fact the lovers examine the kind of love one comes across in the profane realm:

There was a time when our lusts were
Like multicoloured flags of no
Particular country. We lay
On bed, glassy-eyed, fatigued, just
The toys dead children leave behind,
And we asked each other, what is
The use, what is the bloody use?
That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each other's parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking uldas

32 Kamala Das, The Old Play house and Other Poems, p. 11.
33 Ibid.,
At noon, we were earth under hot
Sun. There was a burning in our veins
and the cool mountain nights did
Nothing to lessen heat. 34

Going through the experience of love, the lovers experience
no bliss but only heat and exhaustion. There is no scope
for any spiritual gratification in it, which is suggested
in the line "The cool mountain nights did nothing to
lessen heat"; they remain part of the profane world only.
In spite of their wish to make the act pleasant, they get
only pain. This is suggested in the following lines:

There were no more
Words left, all words lay imprisoned
In the ageing arms of night. In
Darkness we grew as in silence
We sang, each note rising out of
Sea, out of wind, out of earth and
Out of each sad night like an ache ... 35

In the ironically titled "In Love" we find evidence of
the poet's disapproval of sexual love. She compares the
mouth of the lover to the Sun which only brings heat that
leads to loss of love; limbs are described as Carnivorous
plants.

Of what does the burning mouth
Of Sun, burning in today's

34
Kamala Das, The Old Play house and Other Poems, p. 25.

35
Ibid.
Sky remind me ..... Oh, yes, his
Mouth, and ... his limbs like pale and
Carnivorous plants reaching
Out for me, and the sad lie
Of my unending lust. 36

Even forced participation does not lead to the kind of
fulfilment the persona longs for. Except physical contact,
it offers no satiation to her:

Where
Is room, excuse or even
Need for love, for, isn't each
Embrace a complete thing a
Finished jigsaw, when mouth on mouth
I lie, ignoring my poor
Moody mind, while pleasure
With deliberate gaiety
Trumpets harshly into the
Silence of the room .... 37

Though inclined to make love to each other, they can't do
so and this exercise leads the persona's mind astray and
she most thinks of the Corpse - bearer's chant which is
appropriate to her aspiration: "Bol, Hari, Bol' reminding
her of the love of a higher kind, the love of Krishna. It
is the inadequacy of carnal love that gives her an awareness
of higher love.

and at
Night, from behind the Burdwan
Road, the corpse-bearers cry 'Bol
Hari Bol', a strange lacing

36
Kamala Das, The Old play house and Other poems, p. 15.
37
Ibid.
For moonless nights, while I walk
The verandah sleepless, a
Million questions awake in
Me, and all about him, and
This skin-communicated
Thing that I dare not yet in
His presence call our love. 38

Higher love demands spiritual penance - purgation by the
'fire' of love to come close to God in the world hereafter.
This awareness is pervasive in the poem. Recurrent
references to the purgative value of love are also available
in several other poems such as "The Sea Store" and "The
Descendants." In "Descendants" the beloved thinks that
she and her lover have finally to give themselves to "fire"
or "hungry earth"; otherwise:

None will step off his cross
Or show his wounds to us, no god lost in
Silence shall begin to speak, no lost love
Claim us, no we are not going to be
Ever redeemed, or made new. 39

In "Sea Shore" we are told it is the Fire which consumes
the human body, and then the soul gets the right abode in
the heavens, suggested by the word 'content':

On some evenings I drive past the cremation ground
And seem to hear the crunch of the bones in
these vulgar

38 Kamala Das, The Old Play house and Other Poems, p. 15.
39 Kamala Das, Collected Poems Vol. I (Trivandrum: The
Navakerala Printers, 1984), p. 44.
Mouths of fire, or at times I see the smoke,  
in strands
Slowly stretch and rise, like serpents,  
satiated slow, content .... 40

In her quest for external peace, Kamala Das sets a high value on the spirit of total surrender to the Divine. In contrast, the beloved's surrender to the lover on earth means her degradation: getting entrapped in carnal hungers and decay.

.... when he made love  
Grunting, groaning, sighing,  
With no soul to overpower me,  
Only his limbs and his robust lust  
I was just a high bred kitten  
Rolling for fun in the gutter .... 41

In "Ferns" the same melancholic strain pervades. Sexual love is arrested in an image of self devouring, and self-mocking act. Towards the end of the poem the women persona longs to escape from such love and reach the realms of the other love:

Escape now from such bonds  
And from the precious staleness that we drag  
From one country to another, waiting


41 *Collected Poems*, p. 99
patiently at counters, evading no
Law, and which to willing arms are thrust with
A sigh and "I've waited so long for you." 42

Kamala Das's poems like "Glass", "The Looking Glass,"
"Captive" repeatedly point to the futility of physical
love. In fact, there is hardly any poem on profane love
that ends on a note of fulfillment. Everywhere the note
of disapproval and disgust prevails pointing to the fact
that the post does not glorify physical love. Going into
the minutest details, she actually highlights its
inadequacy and shows her yearning for higher love, the
love of God.

An examination of the love poetry of the three
poets has revealed a fair degree of agreement in their
view of profane love. For instance, Emily Dickinson
considers love a sacred vocation, that demands complete
dedication of the beloved; self sacrifice is the core of
love and the beloved has to sacrifice her delights and
undergo pains and sorrows to achieve her love. In spite
of struggles, the goal is not attainable on the profane
realm due to several reasons. Earthly love is transitory
and hence perishable. It is circumscribed by time;
secondly the union of lovers on the physical level doesn't

42
Kamala Das, Collected Poems, p. 43.
mean fulfilment inasmuch as it doesn't satisfy the soul. On this plane such union is envisioned as sexual union alone. The ultimate communion which is the goal of love, is realised in the realms beyond this earth. This should not however be construed as Dickinson's belief in the shunning of love on earth. In fact she does regard earthly love a prelude to higher love in that earthly lovers, through their dedication and loyalty, prove their worth for the Heavens above. Christina Rossetti is no different from Dickinson. Like her, she does not seek fulfilment in profane carnal love. For her too, sexual love is essentially evil. That is why she looks forward to spiritual gratification, associated with true love, beyond the lower realms. Like Dickinson she thinks that lovers who renounce physical desires on earth are rewarded with their ultimate communion in Heaven. As their religious beliefs and their social milieu required of them, both the poets sought fulfilment in a love of higher kind: love of the divine that is purged of all gross taints of flesh. Like them, Kamala Das too does not associate spiritual gratification with profane love, which for her, is nothing but lust. However, unlike both Rossetti and Dickinson, she considers earthly love as rooted in carnality; therefore, she does not see it as a prelude to divine love. Nor does she believe that earthly love can be rewarded in heaven, if
the lovers renounce physical desires on earth. Kamala Das writes insistently on sexual love and examines it from all possible angles; she arrives at the same conclusion: that sexual love is evil and leads to the mutilation of the woman/beloved. The quest for eternal repose, that she voices in her definition of love makes her seek fulfilment in higher love, the love of God and reject physical love. Thus in partial agreement with Rossetti and Dickinson, she too aspires for heavenly love, but she does not attach any significance to earthly love. She sees it as harmful and undesirable.

As far as Dickinson and Rossetti are concerned both of them remained unmarried and explored/wrote about the possibilities of physical passion in their poetry alone. But for Kamala Das such exploration was based on her personal experience as a married woman. Arguing from the Freudian point of view, one could say that the desire for physical love in the other two poets gets sublimated and finds a substitute in their love for a divine lover God.

In sum, Dickinson and Rossetti seek fulfilment in their devotion towards Jesus Christ, and Kamala Das in her love turned towards Krishna. The next chapter accordingly focusses on the sacred love poems of the three poets.