Dickinson knew the Bible well. She was profoundly aware of Christian theology and she was writing at a time when comparative religion was extremely popular. This book is the first to consider Dickinson's religious imagery outside the dynamic of her personal faith and doubt. It argues that religious myths and symbols, from the sun-god to the open tomb, are essential to understanding the similetic movement of Dickinson's poetry – the reach for a comparable, though not identical, experience in the struggles and wrongs of Abraham, Jacob and Moses, and the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Linda Freedman situates the poet within the context of American typology, interprets her alongside contemporary and modern theology and makes important connections to Shakespeare and the British Romantics. Dickinson emerges as a deeply troubled thinker who needs to be understood within both religious and Romantic traditions.

Linda Freedman is the Keasbey Research Fellow in American Studies, Selwyn College, Cambridge.
EMILY DICKINSON
AND THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

LINDA FREEDMAN
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To Sam
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A note on texts

It is a tribute to the recent work by scholars such as Virginia Jackson, Martha Nell Smith, Sharon Cameron and Marta Werner that what constitutes a ‘Dickinson poem’ remains an open question for students of her work. Together with the publication of Franklin’s *Manuscript Books*, Smith’s development of the online Dickinson archive has made available for view a number of Dickinson’s manuscripts, exposed the incongruities of her handwriting and punctuation and begun a discussion, in which there is surely still much work to be done, about the forms in which Dickinson’s ‘poems’ come. My use of quotation marks here is an acknowledgment of Jackson’s argument that theories of lyric reading have governed Dickinson’s edition and reception. She states a fundamental problem: versions of lyric reading took many of Dickinson’s lines out of their contingent relations in letters to family and friends and so made everything that was not a lyric disappear. Dickinson, too, was party to her own reception, copying lines from her letters onto bifolium sheets and either binding them into fascicles or leaving them unbound and dispatching poems in letters or letter-poems to chosen readers. It is certainly true that, reprinted in the editions of Johnson or Franklin, these lines appear to us as lyrics and in our eagerness to read them as such we have lost much of the historical contingency of the letter. But it may also be true that some of the qualities associated with lyric reading can be applied to Dickinson’s letters, many of which are thoroughly performative, governed by personae we find in the fascicles and sets, or signed with literary and biblical pseudonyms. In this area, Marietta Messmer’s *A Vice for Voices* is an invaluable resource.

In the wake of this scholarship, then, I continue to refer to poems and letters because these words still seem to me to be the best we have to express Dickinson’s writing, although letter-poem and epigrammatic verse become increasingly appropriate in her last years. I do not refer to them as lyrics because the lyric carries a narrower set of assumptions about form
A note on texts

and purpose. Unless otherwise stated, the poems are reproduced and dated according to Franklin’s Varorium edition, but the numbering of Johnson’s 1955 edition is also given. I adopt Johnson’s terms ‘variant’ and ‘dash’ in order to refer to Dickinson’s use of alternate (or perhaps consonant) words and the gestural marks that have been variously interpreted as punctuation by her editors. I do this for ease of communication but in the awareness that the graphic fixity suggested by ‘variant’ and ‘dash’ is somewhat at odds with the appearance of Dickinson’s manuscripts. I discuss the variants or the appearance of poems as in letters and fragments when it seems directly relevant to my argument about Dickinson’s religious imagination. But I would advise students to make full use of the archival scholarship and the Manuscript Books to take their interest in Dickinson further. I also refer to Dickinson’s ‘poetic purpose’ or ‘vocation’, by which I mean to express the drive, intensity, artistry and eagerness of her verbal expressions. I think it entirely possible, and indeed necessary, for letters and fragments to be considered as part of this vocation. Dickinson was sometimes slight or silly, but she was rarely thoughtless when putting pen or pencil to paper.