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Seeking Sabbath in Annie Dillard's *Holy the Firm*

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SEEKING SABBATH IN ANNIE DILLARD'S *HOLY THE FIRM*

by

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ABSTRACT

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Annie Dillard's third-ever publication, *Holy the Firm,* asks why an omniscient God allows natural evil to occur. In this deeply poetic and mystical series of essays, Dillard explores the relationship between time, artistry, and God in the face of devastating chaos. This thesis argues that Dillard's emphasis on the importance of time reflects a Jewish notion of Sabbath as defined by Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel. Dillard offers time and creation as medium through which to commune with God just as Heschel does in his book, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. Heschel defines Sabbath as the coming together of humanity and God through the sanctification and elevation of time; one way this sanctification and elevation is accomplished is through the divine ability to create, a trait humanity and God share. Up until this point, critics have primarily, and justifiable so, considered Dillard's work through a through the perspective of Christian mysticism, but Dillard's elevation of time makes her work compatible with Jewish mysticism as well. Using the critical scaffolding of Heschel's Sabbath, Dillard's mystical experiences in Holy the Firm can be understood as an intense spiritual journey to find compassion in the midst of suffering as Dillard considers what it means to create and be created within her three narrative essays.

Key Terms: Annie Dillard, Sabbath, Jewish Theology, Abraham Heschel

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The official Annie Dillard website currently lists her religion as "none," yet in an interview with the *New York Times* in 1992, Annie Dillard described herself as having been a Christian since she was twenty. Looking beyond her spiritual life, Dillard's husband and biographer, Richard Robertson, says that Dillard, as young person, was a keen observer of the natural world. She was "an avid collector of both rocks and insects—which she subjected to study using "…a chemistry set and a microscope with which she found a single-celled world full of wonders" (Robertson). Unusually accomplished, by twenty Dillard, had "finished her BA and an MA…and taught herself to read topographical maps. She hiked and camped on the Appalachian trail and along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Mostly, however, she read, and lesserly wrote poetry" (Robertson). From these earlier years onward, Dillard would process her fascination with nature through her writing. Indeed, she intentionally roots her interest in nature in the mystical Christian tradition. Yet her theological interests extend beyond Christianity to incorporate a variety of belief systems which influence her work including Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam. Critic Eleanor Wymard quotes Dillard as communicating her passion in terms of the close relationship between art and belief: "Art is my interest, mysticism my message, Christian mysticism" (49). In *Holy the Firm*, perhaps Dillard's most concentrated work on the subject, she integrates what it means to be created by God and how humanity can commune with God. She suggests that through time, not place, humanity has a direct line of communication. This thesis proposes that Dillard's treatment of time resembles a Jewish notion of Sabbath extrapolated by Jewish theologian and philosopher Abraham Heschel. Though Dillard is often read through a

Christian theological context, her notions of how humankind communes with God displays similarities to Heschel's Jewish concept of Sabbath, a practice he outlines in *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man.* According to Heschel, Sabbath not only provides a means of communion for the purpose of worship, but it also creates more humble, humane, and compassionate people. Using the critical scaffolding of Heschel's Sabbath, Dillard's mystical experiences in *Holy the Firm* can be understood as an intense spiritual journey to find compassion in the midst of suffering as Dillard considers what it means to create and be created within her three narrative essays.

In many ways, Annie Dillard's poetic and writerly project, as a whole, explores the existential reality of the human experience. For Dillard, the spiritual journey depicted in *Holy the Firm* is pedagogical. Her work indicates that humanity needs explore self-improvement and communal wellbeing even while contending with the pain that life brings. Dillard's ideas are both practical as well as profound. Though Annie Dillard has consistently avoided the public eye, her critically acclaimed career has earned her a place in the American canon. Her writing career began in 1974 with a well-received book of theological poetry entitled *Tickets for a Prayer Wheel.* Approximately two months after this initial publication, Dillard published a book of narrative prose entitled *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* which won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction despite critics bombing individually published chapters of the book. Shortly after this success, Dillard retreated to an island near Puget sound to escape publicity. From this relatively remote location she taught at Western Washington State University. While there, Dillard wrote the short story *The Living* which she would later expand into a novel. During this time she also "wrote the book she likes best, *Holy the Firm*" (Robertson). In 1979, Dillard and her husband moved to Connecticut where she taught as Writer in Residence at Wesleyan University. Several

years later she published "the comparatively minor *Living by Fiction*, and a crucial volume, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*" (Robertson). One essay, *Total Eclipse* from *Teaching a Stone to Talk* was selected as one of the twentieth century's 100 best essays by Joyce Carol Oates. In 1984 Dillard published a work of journalism entitled *Encounters with Chinese Writers* followed by her memoir about "coming to consciousness, "a*n American Childhood* in 1987 (Richardson). Her next publication came in 1989 and is titled *The Writing Life*, and in 1992 she published the novelization of *The Living* which some critics considered "the intellectual and stylistic culmination of Dillard's career" (Robertson). In 1998, Dillard left Wesleyan University instead choosing to spend time in Key West, Florida. Robertson notes that all of Dillard's books "have been in print without a break since they were first published," and that "almost thirty years after *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* her reputation has grown to the point where a permanent place in the front rank of American literature seems assured."

Throughout her bibliography, Dillard takes up issues of mortality, suffering, and artistry; however, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Holy the Firm,* and *For the Time Being* serve as an informal trilogy considering, in depth, the relationship between, people, God, and natural evil. As such, these texts lend themselves particularly well to the perspective of Sabbath when one considers that Sabbath, properly understood, is the communion between God and humanity. For those of the Jewish faith, the celebration of Sabbath means communion with God by spending a day of rest on the seventh day of the week—characterized infamously in a manner that associates rabbinic Sabbath with rigorous legalism. Pieter G.R. de Villiers and George Marchinkowski characterize it as "a detailed web of laws that gradually expanded to include various matters like resting, eating, playing, conversing, reading for pleasure, sexual intercourse." Christians moved Sabbath to the first day of the week, memorialized as the day that Jesus resurrected. With

contemporary, American evangelicalism, it is spent as a day of worship, but without much emphasis on stringently observing a time of rest. Within the multitudinous Jewish and Christian traditions, Sabbath-keeping is a "complex and multifaceted phenomenon" with a "dynamic nature and [an] ability to enrich the spiritual life in very different contexts" (de Villiers and George Marchinkowski). Dillard, then, is utilizing a predominantly Jewish concept of Sabbath and advocating its practice among a primarily Protestant Christian readership. Her use of this tradition would have struck her readers as peculiar both because of its Jewishness as well as its mysticism.

There is a general deficit of conversation around Sabbath in the Western literary tradition. Explicit literary depictions of Sabbath in English are fairly limited outside of sermonic texts. There is a literary sabbatical tradition that critic Lucas Nossaman traces from Edmund Spenser to Wendell Berry. Berry has written a series of Sabbath poems and Spenser's last canto of *The Faerie Queen* utilizes a pun that connects Sabbath and divine hosts. Judith Anderson, examines the wordplay Spenser employs with "Sabbath"/"Sabaoth"[1] that employs economic theology. Anderson explains that "Spenser's final lines with two b's for the God of rest who is to grant the Sabaoth's sight of the active hosts—one b—at the very end of the final stanza. That is, the God of sabbatical rest and peace would grant the 'site' of the sabbatical hosts or armies." Berry's discussion of Sabbath is far more metaphysical than Spenser's pun. Nossaman claims that for Berry, "Sabbath rest is absence from work, whether on a particular day or as a general practice according to the needs of the land, with the intention to remember and acknowledge that the most essential work of nature continues even while people rest" (2). For Berry, then Sabbath is a "sense of being in nature" (Nossaman, 3), such as meditative silence that is unlike meditative

[1] The OED notes that "Sabaoth" translated literally from Hebrew means "armies."

practices in other settings. Berry approaches Sabbath in terms of performing labor on the land—a pastoral approach. This contrasts with Dillard's approach, which is to contemplate the landscape in order to recognize and participate in the beauty of God's creation. Nossaman describes Berry's Sabbath poetry as an attempt "to integrate Sabbath theology into the demanding work of small-scale farming" (7).

Holy the Firm stands out among Dillard's trilogy on natural evil as particularly compatible to concepts of Sabbath. Though all three books are works of narrative meditation, *Holy the Firm* focuses far more on the role that time plays in the existence of natural evil— time being the central pillar of Heschel's Sabbath. Both *Pilgram at Tinker Creek* and *For the Time Being* could, and should, be juxtaposed with Sabbath, but neither text possesses the concentrated spiritual content of *Holy the Firm*.[2] Pamela Smith acknowledges that "if much of *Pilgrim* is, as Dillard admits, a feverish gathering of facts and statistics from observations and books, her next book, *Holy the Firm*, is a more studied reflection on these facts" (130). On the back end of the trilogy, *For the Time Being* "shows a wild mix of things" (Robertson) as opposed to the intensely focused seventy or so pages of dense prose focused in Puget Sound found in *Holy the Firm*. *Holy the Firm* is the heart of Dillard's spiritual journey—the pressure that propels Dillard into *For the Time Being*. Though Dillard does not explicitly use the term, at the center of *Holy the Firm* is a blazed path to Sabbath, if one only looks.

It is worthwhile to consider the relevance of Sabbath in contemporary American society. While the Sabbath is widely considered a strictly religious structure, it has fundamentally shaped secular American culture as well. The study of Sabbath in America extends beyond the academic

[2]Dillard includes in her description of *Holy the Firm* on her official site that "reviewers wondered if I took hallucinogenic drugs. No." which, amusingly, speaks to the highly metaphysical and spiritual nature of the book.

and religious spheres into popular culture. Journalist Casey Cep provides context for contemporary attitudes and historical influences of Sabbath in the United States. Broadly understood in the religious sense, Sabbath serves as a day of rest from labor to pursue spiritual life, but Cep illustrates Sabbath's broader relevance by recognizing the "hurried exhaustion and omnipresent stress of modern life–our digital addictions, our burnout culture, our depression" and how Sabbath, even a secular Sabbath, can alleviate this exhaustion. The practice of Sabbath is deeply entrenched in American history. Winton Solberg describes how early American Puritans came to America for many reasons; in part, however, they left Europe to practice Sabbath on their own terms, which "revitalized Sabbatarian impulse profoundly [and] molded American society in its most formative years." Cep describes the requirement of rest from labor that authority figures found "revolutionary," especially in secular spaces.

The presence of Sabbath within the legally regulated structure of contemporary American civic life were present in the twentieth century in the form of "Blue Laws"—secular, legal enforcement of the Judeo-Christian notion of a day of rest. Businesses were forced to shutter their business on Sundays, allowing Christians to go to church and have a day of rest. Even in the twenty-first century, it is not uncommon for liquor stores to remain closed until after noon on this day of worship for Christians.

Rooted Annie Dillard is within an American context, her work articulates this mixture of religion and labor advocacy as she claims the importance of a Sabbath as a time for rest. Regardless of one's views about religion, this is a primary human need that, rightfully, became established as a basic civil right. Cep notes that cultural revolutionaries like Engels and Marx "did not see themselves as advocates for a particular religion or as enemies of any other, only as protectors of workers from economic exploitation." Even if they did not see time as something

sacred in the way that Dillard does, the secular view of Engels and Marx emphasized the importance of time as something worth honoring and protecting from exploitative authority of factory owners.

Cep goes on to explain that the opposition to Blue Laws and the Sabbath is "often cloaked in secularism" with the claim that enforcing Sabbatical practices through Blue Laws violates the separation of church and state, but it is just as likely that, such assertions are not an attempt to separate religion from civil authority, but instead they are "motivated by greed." This drive for a higher profit margin, however, is ironic because science has shown that not only is taking the time to rest restorative for the human body, but it also increases work productivity. John Pencavel states that "long hours and days of work injure workers' health and impair individuals' productivity at their place of work" (545). He goes on to discuss the cumulative fatigue that is a result of long work days, one after another, without sufficient time to recover (Pencavel, 558). In another study, Vanda C. Marques and Gregory R. Berry find that both individuals and organizations experience improved productivity with a better work-life balance (268).

Martin Doblmeier also documents in his film *Sabbath* that Seventh-Day Adventist communities that observe Sabbath experience not just revitalization of the spirit, but also enjoy significant health benefits such as reduced risk of diabetes, cancer, and high blood pressure (Doblmeier). Granted, taking a day of rest each week is not unique to religious groups, but viewing this as a spiritual practice means that they are more adamant in maintaining it as a regular practice. Norman Wirzba elaborates in a film interview with Doblmeier that for those who engage in meaningful Sabbath, the practice "isn't simply a pious teaching. What's at issue is the very meaning of life." Cep succinctly ties together how Sabbath contributes to the "very

meaning of life" by observing that "if we regularly took an entire day off from the work and the worry of our lives, we might think about doing it much more often; moreover, we might think about how much more others need time to rest, too." The promotion of compassion is precisely the issue that Dillard promotes in *Holy the Firm.* Her decision to embrace compassion in the face of strife parallels a journey to understanding Sabbath. First, she details an experience of artistry and communion that reflects Heschel's concept of Sabbath. Then Dillard complicates her relationship with God and artistry by exploring the human experience of grief. She find resolution through a prescription of humility and compassion in the her final essay. Though Dillard does not explicitly refer to her experiences in *Holy the Firm* as Sabbath, she nevertheless demonstrates how Sabbath is worthwhile in the face of random disaster– as Sabbath enables rest and rejuvenate through communion with God as well as the capacity to assist others to do the same.

Contemporary scholarship has thoroughly covered Annie Dillard's status as an American mystic; however, critics diverge in considering how to interpret her mysticism. Kristen Drahos depicts Dillard as a Bonaventrian mystic as she heavily incorporates reality and reason into her mysticism. Rachel Mathesion labels Dillard's mysticism as a form of "sacramental visions," but does not connect her visions to a larger framework. Dana Wilde frames Dillard's mysticism in regard to American Transcendentalism and follows Dillard's elevation of Transcendentalism into modernity through her mysticism. Susan Felch focuses on Dillard's fascination with science in connection to her mysticism, illustrating how physics influences her prose. Scott Slovic considers the concept of "fringe" and separateness in *Holy the Firm.* The critical conversation, as a whole, surrounding Dillard leans toward a Christian framework while acknowledging her transcendental influences and interests with aesthetics and complex narrative structures.

In a survey of recent scholarship, there is a clear gap in research that considers Dillard's work through the perspective of Judaism. Much of Dillard's writing echoes the sentiments of Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel who explains time as a "dimension in which man aspires to approach the likeness of the divine...There is no quality that space has in common with the essence of God...Yet the likeness of God can be found in time which is eternity in disguise...The love of [time] is the love of man for what he and God have in common" (16).

Heschel writes about the complexities of Sabbath, but here is a simplistic summation of his concept: Sabbath is the coming together of humanity and God. When people intentionally participate in the sanctification of time as opposed to space/things, they practice Sabbath. Heschel argues that God exists in time, but not space, and what binds humanity and God together is the divine ability to create beauty:

> Time is the process of creation, and things of space are results of creation. When looking at space we see the products of creation; when intuiting time we hear the process of creation. Things of space exhibit a deceptive independence. They show off a veneer of limited permeance. Things created conceal the Creator. It is the dimension of time wherein man meets God, wherein man becomes aware that every instant is an act of creation, a Beginning, opening up new roads for ultimate realizations. Time is the presence of God in the world of space, and it is within time that we are able to sense the unity of all beings. (100)

Through time, God creates nature with each new sunrise, and humans create art, which also requires a sacrifice, in the form of time. In this context, Sabbath functions as a meditative meeting space for God and humanity to participate in creation— an opportunity to experience an ecstatic mystical vision accessed by placing significance and focus on a particular moment in

time. In his elegant and poetic style, Heschel describes Sabbath in this manner: "Creation is the language of God, Time is His song, and things of space the consonants in the song. To sanctify time is to sing the cowels in unison with Him. This is the task of men: to conquer space and sanctify time" (101). Humankind demonstrates the love of time through acts of sanctification to celebrate what it has in common with God—the ability to create. In *Holy the Firm* Dillard provides numerous examples of creative acts that not only produce beauty, but also contribute to healing and restoration in the world.

Dillard enters Sabbath by observing the creation of the natural world while elevating the importance of time. What she questions in *Holy the Firm* is the other half of that relationship, if God, is an active or passive participant who cares about human creations, and what it means to be an artist pursuing participation in Sabbath with a (perhaps) uncaring God. My thesis traces in Dillard's opening narrative a spiritual journey in which she understands that humanity primarily participates in creation through observing and celebrating the wonders each day brings. My thesis considers the interlocking relationship between each of the three essays in *Holy the Firm*. Through this comparative and progressive reading, I maintain that Dillard comes to believe that time serves as an agent of God, and without God, time loses its agency and corrodes into chaos. This view of the world is made coherent through reconciliation, which Dillard addresses in the final essay. Ultimately, I suggest that Dillard advocates for an ecological mysticism rooted in Heschel's theology, defined as Sabbath, which invites collaborative creation with a higher power and peace in the face of a chaotic world as a means to find peace and meaning.

Abraham Heschel's daughter, Susannah Heschel—someone who understood her father's work intimately— describes her father's concept of Sabbath as an attempt to "reintroduce the importance of the Sabbath" during a period of radical assimilation for American Jews in the

early 1950s as he advocated for a return to Jewish spirituality and mysticism— Hasidism (xii). Placing Dillard's work in conversation with a spiritually canonical text, like *The Sabbath*, serves as a reminder that Dillard is not iconoclastic; rather, she builds from a variety of mystical traditions even as it departs from a strictly mainstream theology, which, since the Lutheran Reformation in the early 16th century, abandoned mystical practices. Catholicism, Buddhism, and Islamic traditions all share in Dillard's ecstatic narratology. In her other works such as, *Teaching a Stone to Talk, Pilgrim and Tinker Creek,* and *For the Time Being,* etc. she explicitly engages with Buddhist, Islamic, and Inuit spirituality. Despite her diverse spiritual frameworks, critical scholarship primarily interprets her work to be rooted in Catholic mysticism. In fact, John C. Waldmeir describes Dillard's depiction of a moth aflame, and how it reflects the "manifestation of God's grace [which] comes to her as a sacrament, understood precisely according to the definition advanced by the Catholic tradition" (86). Waldmeir's framework of Dillard's writing is well founded and worthy of consideration. That being said, there are clear parallels between Heschel's Jewish mysticism and *Holy the Firm* that require exploration.

To study *Holy the Firm* requires grappling with questions of genre. The highly metaphysical ideas that propel Dillard exceed categorization as either theology or creative essay. In fact, she incorporates elements of autobiography, nature writing, novel, creative nonfiction, scientific treatise, and religious meditation. She is ecumenical both in terms of religious traditions as well as genres. This hybrid quality of *Holy the Firm* has led Dillard to resist the label of "essayist" (Robertson). Robertson describes much of her work as "imaginative non-fiction narratives." Sue Yore claims "she invents an imaginary voice enabling her to write a spiritual autobiography that is subjective but also one that is able to transcend her own experience" (61). Dillard's disciplined narrative voice, one that is part persona and part

autobiographical, reflects her position on creativity in *Holy the Firm*. Dillard believes the ability to create reflects the divine. In her book, *Living By Fiction*, she theorizes "imaginative acts — even purely mental combinations carry real weight in the universe. Thoughts count... [They] counteract the decaying of systems, the breakdown of stars and cultures and molecules, the fraying of forms" (174). She believes these creative works provide some order to the universe. Though later Dillard jokingly refers to the idea of imaginative acts literally impacting the world's physical processes as a whimsical "crackpot notion" demarcating the line between mysticism and the physical world.

It is counterproductive to give Dillard's "imaginative acts" a definitive label when considering to which literary tradition she belongs since her work subverts most relevant genres in some form or another. This approach of hers is in keeping with mysticism, which transcends human-imposed definition and boundaries, such as "denomination." Such consideration, however, helps contextualize Dillard's dense layers of prose. Her critically acclaimed *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* established her as one of America's foremost nature writers in addition to winning her the 1975 Pulitzer in General Nonfiction. In her only somewhat positive 1974 *New York Time's* review of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Eudora Welty highlights Dillard's ecological motifs but describes the work as "peculiar and astonishing". Welty refuses to label the book's genre beyond referring to it as "a form of meditation." Dillard goes beyond simply writing nonfiction about herself or nature; she intensely engages with her audience, drawing them into her metaphysical and existential world in addition to her physical world.

Lynn Bloom specifically tackles Dillard's place within the literary tradition with a genre she refers to as "creative non-fiction." Bloom defines creative non-fiction saying that it fails to be "objective" (because no nonfiction can ever be completely objective) while paradoxically still

being true with an “utterly reliable” author (96). She argues that the lack of objectivity should be considered as creativity and such writing represents a “coherent presentation of a ‘possible world’” (87). Dillard’s deeply emotional text certainly contains her subjective experiences while she shares what she believes to be truth as she describes a "possible world.” *Holy the Firm,* however, goes beyond simple subjectivity. Dillard’s poetic style intentionally conveys creativity and beauty beyond sharing her experience. Thus, Bloom’s creative nonfiction label, at least for *Holy the Firm,* only partially addresses Dillard’s writing. The spiritual nature of Dillard’s writing pushes the boundaries of Bloom’s description.

Dillard’s writing intersects and contrasts with other nature writers who similarly find the boundaries of genre to be inadequate. Dillard’s contemporary and fellow nature writer, Edward Abbey, takes up similar spiritual topics, but he staunchly resists the sort of theism found in Dillard’s work. In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey philosophizes, “God?...who the hell is *He?* There is nothing here, at the moment, but me and the desert. And that’s the truth. Why confuse the issue by dragging in a superfluous entity ? Occam’s razor. Beyond atheism, nontheism. I am not an atheist but an earthiest. Be true to the earth.” (184). Another contemporary nature writer, Wendell Berry, invokes Christian doctrine in his poetry but emphasizes human community and labor while Dillard’s work frequently removes the human as the subject of the landscape. Dillard focuses on deriving meaning through witnessing the landscape, itself as opposed to witnessing the interactions between community and landscape in the way Berry does. Berry considers both rest and labor within a landscape as a holy act as reflected in his acknowledging there is “a difference between knowing a place and living in it, between cherishing a place and living responsibly in it” (“The Making” 330). Rachel Carson’s writing reflects the observant nature like Dillard’s, but Carson’s purpose is based in an explicit environmental activism and lacks the

spiritual connections found in Dillard's prose. Each of these writers have transfigured the genre of nature writing in such a way as to suit their own ends, Dillard included. They are "more than" most classifications. Dillard's nature writing, in particular, has led to her being hailed as the great American mystic, and Kristen Drahos reflects in "Nailed and Aflame: Annie Dillard's Bonaventurian Mysticism" that "Dillard's mysticism finds itself pushed ever beyond Christian borders" (92). Drahos goes on to say that Dillard considers Protestant Christianity and Catholicism, as well as Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism–all as demanding answers for the flawed state of the world.

In addition to Dillard's global religious influences, she draws from Transcendentalism. Bruce Foltz quotes James McClintock pointing out that "Nature writing in America has always been religious or quasi-religious. All the important studies on the subgenre conclude that nature writing is 'in the end concerned not only with fact but with fundamental *spiritual* and *aesthetic* truth'" (115). As such, it is unsurprising that scholars frequently and reasonably label Dillard as a transcendentalist. In fact, many argue that transcendentalism plays a strong role in Dillard's writing. Donna Mendelson says Thoreau's influence "is so potent in her book [*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*] that Dillard can borrow from Thoreau both straightforwardly and also humorously" (51). Dillard, in the tradition of Thoreau, slowed down her pace of life, she was observant, and "wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach" (qtd. in Baym, 1028). Though Mendelson primarily discusses *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, much of her analysis of the similarities between Dillard and Thoreau directly apply to *Holy the Firm*. For example, Mendelson notes that both authors "perceive the bind, the problem with cyclic, earthly time, and imagine breaking out of it. Both understand the mixed blessings of nature, life, and consciousness"—time, of course, being a central theme of *Holy the*

Firm (54). This is not the only comparison that is applicable to *Holy the Firm*. Mendelson also notes "the presence of natural images and metaphors" and how each author utilizes "motifs of mapping and surveying, like the thematic importance of place and exploring place" (55 & 57). Consider the central image of the burning moth in *Holy the Firm* and how Dillard surveys the horizon at the end of "God's Tooth." Both of these examples demonstrate how Mendelson's claim of Thoreau's influence on Dillard goes beyond just *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

Dillard's work can be considered transcendental in a much broader sense. In his discussion of Dillard's transcendental roots, Frederick Brøgger remarks Dillard's "view of nature therefore tends to be quite paradoxical: nature is different yet closely related to man, is material and yet mystical, is physical and yet transcendental" (30). He goes on to say that the paradox of her writing is what makes it a "typical example of the American tradition of transcendentalist nature writing" (32). Dillard, however, also subverts the genre. Richard Hardack interrogates Dillard's gendered aspects of transcendentalism claiming, "inhabiting a nineteenth-century transcendental white male persona, while subjecting it to postmodern irony, Dillard produces a hybrid aesthetic that simultaneously critiques and manifests anew the limitations of its subjectivity" (101). Hardack rightly understands Dillard's work as a "hybrid" genre rather than pure transcendentalism.

Dillard's writing connects with a rich tradition of female memoirists and essayists from Julian of Norwich to Virginia Woolf to Rachel Carson even as she inhabits a "white male persona" as Hardack states. One of the earliest known female English authors, Julian of Norwich appears as an allusion in *Holy the Firm*. Though Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* is classified as more sermonic than as a memoir or essay, Julian influences Dillard's content and rhetoric. Therese Novotny says Julian's writing "reveals a landscape of language that allowed for a

mingling of complex material to move from traditional academic spaces to broad audiences" (573). The same can certainly be said of Dillard who guides her audience from the densely metaphysical to the tangible much in the same way as she transitions from describing her mystical experiences to mundane relatable experiences such as apple picking or going to church. Julian of Norwich teaches her audience how to summon compassion through suffering, using her own suffering and that of Christ as her primary examples. Dillard mirrors Julian's examples using the suffering of the fictional Julie Norwich and baptism of Christ in her discussion of compassion.

Jocelyn Bartkevicius emphasizes the similarities between the essay style of Dillard and Woolf. She explains that Woolf's "works have as a central concern the relationship between consciousness, the body, and the natural world, and they challenge the assumption that human life occurs apart from the natural world" just as the world Dillard inhabits does. (41). Vera Norwood also considers Dillard's tradition as female nature essayist. At the time that Dillard published *Holy the Firm*, "most studies of the American response to nature have focused on the problematic, ambivalent experience of men" (Norwood, 35). Norwood traces this feminine tradition and specifically notes the "echo [Rachel] Carson voiced in *The Sea Around Us*" as a direct influence on Dillard as well as Mary Austin's intimate sense of place (48). Dillard differs, however, in that she is "content with the quality of natural mystery itself – its ultimate unsolvability" (Norwood, 49). Dillard builds upon this tradition by considering both spirituality and nature in her essays as she participates in the subgenre of ecotheology. Dillard does not repudiate the white "male ethos of transcendentalism," but instead speaks through it, "critiques and reifies the male transcendental project all at once as if it were scaffolding to be discarded when necessary" (Hardack, 101). Dillard manipulates transcendentalism and its masculine

traditions to suit her work, creating entirely new genre.

Scholars such as Pamela Smith consider Dillard an Ecomystic or Ecotheologist. Neither term fully encapsulates Dillard's writing, but both still provide useful perspectives in understanding *Holy the Firm.* The term "Ecomysticism," coined by David Tagnani, "considers the role of the material world in inculcating mystical states in human subjects in an attempt to attribute even the most immaterial of phenomena—transcendence, spirituality—to material agency" (3). Ecomysticism embraces the physical, natural world, and the five senses as a means of transcendence rather than viewing the material world as an impediment. Tagnani notes that other forms of mysticism "involve turning inward and withdrawing from the world, usually in an attempt to transcend the material in order to approach the ideal" (7). Dillard, by contrast, leans into the external world in her search for mystical enlightenment (the state interpreted here as Sabbath) as opposed to transcending materiality as she engages her empirical senses to fully experience the world. Yet, Dillard's work still resists this label. Tagnani establishes that ecomysticism is "a realization of union with the material world rather than union with a deity. It is not union with any sort of supernatural entity, whether it be the ineffable One or the super-conscious essence of the universe" (8). The opposite is true of Dillard's work as she attempts to commune with God through Sabbath- a state she enters by participating in creation and in the natural world.

Smith describes Dillard as an ecotheologist as opposed to an ecomystic. This label is defined as the "integration of the new scientific perspective on the natural world with traditional theological concepts, producing a new theological paradigm" (Troster, 382). Though Dillard is certainly entrenched in ecotheology, Smith claims that she takes a far more ambivalent approach to the discipline, more an observer of "nature's own bizarre brand of happenstance and freedom"

than a participant as she struggles to reconcile her faith and her environment (Smith, 349). While Dillard is an ecotheologist, she carves out a unique space for herself within the genre by exploring both her own ambivalence and questioning God's ambivalence.

Consider, for example, this passage in which Dillard describes the human condition after little Julie's gruesome plane crash and devastating injuries, "We are precisely nowhere, sinking on an entirely imaginary ice floe, into entirely imaginary seas themselves adrift. Then we reel out love's long line alone toward a God less lovable than a grasshead, who treats us less well than we treat our lawns" (46). Dillard pushes against traditional Christian theological truths (in this case, that God cares about God's creation) in producing her ecotheological paradigm. She elevates ecological symbolism to describe her critical perception of God. For example, she expresses her understanding of God's presence, or lack thereof, in terms of landscape, which she perceives as God's earthen artwork. As she mourns for Julie she states, "Everything in the landscape points to the sea, and the sea is nothing; it is snipped from the real as a stuff without form, rising up the sides of islands and falling, mineral to mineral, salt" (49). Smith explains this phenomenon in Dillard's work saying there is "abundant evidence of estrangement, of an overwhelming sense of separateness" (351). Dillard's willingness to face misery deepens the critical conversation around the considerations of Sabbath and its value to humanity.

Holy the Firm does not lend itself to an obvious critical framework. This is evident in the many interpretations and labels given to Dillard's mystical reveries. Interpreting Dillard's mysticism as Sabbath overlaps with some readings but also brings a new focus on Jewish theology that is absent in scholarship on Annie Dillard. The celebratory Jewish interpretation of Sabbath epitomizes the joining of artistry and spirituality that she pursues in her work. Dillard struggles with cynicism in her spiritual ponderings but comes out on the other side of that

struggle. By acknowledging how tragedy impacts spirituality (and therefore art), Dillard offers both wisdom and solace in *Holy the Firm,* not unlike her predecessor, Julian of Norwich. Dillard's approach accommodates grief, anger, and pain. While she refrains from offering answers for suffering, she does offer hope and compassion to her audience.

In the following thesis, I make the claim that in *Holy the Firm,* Annie Dillard's work can be best understood through comparative study of Heschel's conception of Sabbath. By venerating time through artistry and creation as a means to establish a spiritual connection with God, Dillard exemplifies Heschel's definition of Sabbath. I extend conversations regarding Dillard's mystical spirituality by Sandra Johnson, Rachel Matheson, and Kristen Drahos. By interpreting Dillard's mystical experiences as Sabbath, I offer a new critical scaffolding to understand her position on the relationship between humankind, God, temporality, nature, and artistry informed through the overlooked context of Jewish mysticism. Chapter one establishes how Dillard employs ideas of Sabbath as a form of worship and artistic rejuvenation. Chapter two complicates this by investigating Dillard's grief and dissatisfaction with Sabbath in the face of tragedy. Chapter three tempers both of these views to conclude that in an unknowable world, Sabbath empowers humanity to make meaning of their circumstances and extend compassion to each other.

CHAPTER II

"THE GOD OF THE DAY": SABBATH AND CREATION IN DILLARD'S *HOLY THE FIRM*

In *Holy the Firm*, Dillard interrogates both the nontemporal and temporal aspects of Judaic Sabbath where the creative acts of humanity relate more to intrapersonal and spiritual realms. Dillard's work reflects an acknowledgement that entering a state of Judaic Sabbath requires atypical dedication as humanity has been separated from God since the expulsion from The Garden of Eden. The pursuit of this connection manifests itself in an Abrahamic mysticism. Dillard, herself is quoted saying, "'Art is my interest, mysticism my message, Christian mysticism'" (Wymard 49). As previously discussed, fitting Dillard's mysticism into a genre is tricky. Yore suggests her mystic writing spiritually renews a desacralized population by "adopt[ing] an almost surreal form of writing that often resorts to magical realism. The unsuspecting reader is forced into noticing unexpected incursions of the sacred through the continual blurring of the boundaries of the real and unreal" (62).

In the first of the three essays that comprise *Holy Firm* "Newborn and Salted," Dillard explicitly uses time to explore God's holiness as expressed by natural creation. She says, "Every day is a god, each day is a god, and holiness holds forth in time" (11). By using both determiners, "each" and "every," she emphasizes the continuing and enduring nature of time, God, and holiness, by extension. Deified time exhibits holiness and demands a response: "I worship each god, I praise each day splintered down, splintered down and wrapped in time like a husk, a husk of many colors spreading, at dawn fast over the mountains" (11). Dillard equates time and God's holiness with the first two independent clauses by elevating both equally. The word "splintered" connotes the horizon where the land splits from the heavens and where

humanity splits from God. Splintering, in this instance, creates like mitosis, generating new material. She describes this space as being "wrapped in time like a husk" with a god inside (11). This god enacts the will of God without being God but still possesses God's holiness. Dillard's henotheistic understanding in this description pushes the traditional boundary in discerning creation's agency. The liminal space opened by time affords a new glimpse of God's holiness. The description of a sunrise coming over the mountains that follows represents the progression of time so that the sunlight of each and every new day becomes a motif for understanding and interacting with God's creation. Dillard finds spiritual meaning in the holy act of creation, specifically in observing the creation of each day, and this creation is expressed through time; her depiction closely mirrors Heschel's conceptualization of Sabbath as she emphasizes the relationship between time, God, creation, and humanity.

Dillard focuses on the splintered horizon as liminal space for God and humankind. In this overlap, her writing reflects ideas of Sabbath. The horizon symbolizes "the fringe," as William Schiek refers to it, as the movement of the sun across the horizon creates a masterpiece of colors across the sky. Dillard proposes that time, as symbolized here by light, possesses creative and destructive power where God meets humanity; just as God possesses the power to create, so does humanity through artistry. This commonality allows communion, or Sabbath, between the Creator and the created. The natural world serves as a creative playground for the interaction between humanity and God- a canvas for Sabbath to leave its mark.

The description of the horizon wrapped in the husk of time mirrors the following image of humanity being born into time: "I wake in a god. I wake in arms holding my quilt, holding me as best they can inside my quilt. Someone is kissing me--already" (11). Here, God's qualities as creator and mother nurture her from the moment Dillard is born into time. In the image of a

mother's caring embrace, Dillard expands on the tone of her relationship with time and God to include intimacy and love, not just a one-sided sense of awe. Someone, presumably God, kissing her "already" further illustrates an intimate bond. The tone of surprise emanating from this statement reflects the relationship between God and creation; creation has done nothing to earn God's love, but God showers down affection regardless, like a mother with her newborn child. Dillard's predecessor, the anchorite Julian of Norwich, frequently speaks of God and Jesus as mother, claiming in her book *Revelations of Divine Love* that "Our Savior is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come." Dillard's observation clarifies that each day presents an opportunity to participate in the loving relationship of, what Heschel would describe as, Sabbath as each day begins with the creation of time and a new god.

Dillard fully wakens in the next passage and cries "'Oh,' I rise from the pillow. Why should I open my eyes?" (12). Dillard moves from simple existence within time to consciousness, rising to participate in time. Her question has plagued humanity for millennia: "Why should I open my eyes?" Dillard questions purpose, but the interaction with the god of time provides her answer:

> I open my eyes. The god lifts from the water. His head fills the bay. He is Puget Sound, the Pacific; his breast rises from pastures; his fingers are firs; islands slide wet down his shoulders. Islands slip blue from his shoulders and glide over the water, the empty lighted water like a stage / Today's god rises, his long eyes flecked in clouds. He flings his arms, spreading colors; he arches, cupping sky in his belly, he vaults, vaulting and spread, holding all and spread on me like skin. (12)

In this instance, Dillard uses "the god" as a metaphor for the creation of the morning, the light

revealing the natural world. This light, itself, equates here to time, and the divinely created world she inhabits. Time transitions from simply acting as a dormant fringe to an active agent between God and humanity as Dillard participation indicates the symbiotic relationship of Sabbath. Together with the god, Dillard witnesses the active creation of her surroundings. Yore suggests that for mystical writers, "seeing is the primary way of knowing and perceiving the sacred. What's more, seeing in this sense is clearly an interpretative act, as the information the eye receives must be filtered through cognitive and imaginative processes" (107). As the god rises, she also rises to bear witness.

Almost all of the verbs in this passage are either in the present tense or present progressive tense as time births a new and holy day each and every day. Composed of the physical, created environment, day serves as a symbol of divine power. Dillard indicates that each and every day and moment are made up of individual gods in the phrases "the god" and "Today's god." Time produces the day thus manifesting holiness on behalf of God. Abraham Heschel expresses "the higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments" (6). By personifying time as a being with its own agency, time takes on an independent and interactive role between God and humanity. Time serves God, and Dillard proposes that God invites humans to participate and revel in creation and thus serve as a vessel, like time, for God's holiness. She suggests that humanity accomplishes this through active witness and reflection of time's work in creation. Within time, God's power and the divine power granted to humanity meet to commune in harmony in the naturally created world.

Dillard transitions from metaphysical prose to a more literal, physical scene of awakening in her bed with her golden cat, Smalls. She draws her audience into her solid, "real" day. Susan Felch describes how "Dillard writes with a confidence in cause and effect and a firm belief in the

objective reality of nature" (4). She understands time as represented in a physical object that can be understood with empirical senses. Participation in creation through witness and vision is a well-studied attribute of Dillard's work. David Lavery has also taken note of the role of witness and vision in Dillard; however, Dillard's participation goes beyond just vision. She is wholly (holy) immersed in creation with all of her senses. "The day is real" to Dillard because she bears witness to the sun; she feels Smalls under her legs, and hears the cat bite its sutures (Dillard, 12). Dillard is alert, conscious. All these actions embody the god of the day encouraging her to participate intimately in creation as she makes her bed and eats breakfast before communing with a spider, of all things. Rather than a singular concrete image of what is holy, Dillard elevates a multitude of creatures and objects because the holiness of God cannot be a singular image, edifice, or object. Felch notes that Dillard's writing is not science fiction, "but fiction which incorporates recent scientific thinking about reality" (3). Dillard objectively analyzes the world and herself, and she takes her concrete observations of the natural world and elevates them to a mystical realm. The abrupt shift between this more palpable portion of the essay and the beginning metaphysical passage grounds the rumination in a tangible reality. Smalls, the yellow, sunlit cat, wakes along with Dillard and the dawn, and she represents one of several daily manifestations of holy creation as does the spider in Dillard's bathroom.

Though Dillard recognizes holiness in tangible objects, she understands that holiness is not confined to objects, but rather, to time. Spatial holiness, such as the spider's lair, acts only as a reflection for the passage of time. She says of the spider's victims:

> next week, if the other bodies are any indication, he will be shrunken and gray, webbed to the floor with dust. The sow bugs beside him are hollow and empty of color, fragile, a breath away from brittle fluff. The spider skins lie on their sides,

> translucent and ragged, their legs drying in knots. And the moths, the empty moths, the empty moths, stagger against each other, headless in a confusion of arcing strips of chitin like peeling varnish, like a jumble of buttresses for cathedral domes, like nothing resembling moths. (14)

It is not the physical bodies of these creatures that Dillard suggests as holy but rather the passage of time seen in their decaying bodies. She understands them as God's creation and does not shrink from the corpses. Instead, she "drop[s] to [her] knees" in a position of worship. She honors and separates the lives of each creature from the physical bodies that remain. Not made for external time, the physical bodies decay, suggesting God's corporeal otherness to humanity even as God expresses Godself in material objects. Time ravaged the bodies of the moths but gives Dillard an opportunity to gather insights concerning the nature of God's creation.

Dillard retains her empirical, objective observations while interpreting the "empty moths" as a remnant of holiness. By depicting the moths' bodies as a broken cathedral, Dillard draws parallels between a creature's living vessel and a church's structure. Just as a religious edifice, such as a cathedral, does not encapsulate holiness, neither does the physical body of the created. In comparing the dead moth to a contorted, empty cathedral, Dillard illustrates the changing, moving spirit that makes things holy. Time, not structure, imbues the world with holiness. Heschel remarks, "we must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is a moment that lends significance to things" (6). When a body or building ceases to participate in time, it no longer contains holiness. Cathedrals crumble away and bodies rot, but the remains still stand as a sign of what once was. The holiness of that "thing" lives on in memory. In this way, memory itself becomes a vehicle of temporal holiness. Memory collapses "then" and "now" to provide a liminal space within time where holiness can be appreciated and worshiped

without an animating creative, holy power.

Dillard expands on moths as the figure of the artist in the central motif of the text. Dillard enters into a more involved reflection on the connection between, artistry and time evidenced by her reflection on a camping trip in the Blue Ridge Mountains a few years earlier. Dillard is trying to rekindle her passion for writing by reading James Ramsey Ullman's *The Day on Fire*, the novel that originally inspired her to write. In trying to incite inspiration, Dillard's candlelight summons "pale moths" which "massed round my head in the clearing, where my light made a ring" (15). Dillard's imagery depicts an aureola composed of natural elements surrounding her indicating holiness. She layers consideration and symbolism around the moths in her search for artistic inspiration. Dillard lends this moment in time significance, sanctifying it. Heschel's descriptions of Sabbath reflect this exact method of elevating a moment in time to achieve Sabbath.

Just as God creates time, Dillard endeavors to create the written word. The act of creation joins humanity with God. God's medium is time while Dillard's is writing. Dillard's work suggests that God invites humanity into this creative space by the way of Sabbath. By intentionally making the pilgrimage into a creative mindset, Dillard is endowed with the type of divinity that Heschel considers Sabbath. Bruce Foltz describes this phenomenon saying, "the beauty, and holiness, of nature does not offer itself to the mere spectator, to the theoretical gaze, to the inspector of scenery, but to the pilgrim, to the seeker, to the ascetic who leaves behind, even temporarily, the conventions and convenience of the urban world and becomes immersed in nature" (137).

In this state of immersion, Dillard complicates the symbol of the moth as a "golden female moth, a biggish one with a two-inch wingspan" that enters the flame of her candle, and

"flaps into the fire, dropped her abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, frazzled and fried in a second" (16). This particular moth comes to symbolize a complex array of themes as it undergoes life, death, and resurrection mirroring each facet of the tri-part structure of the book. Rachel Matheson tidily sums up these themes by recounting: "flame and fire, light, the arcing flight of the moth (and later, the airplane), solitude, purity, and self-sacrifice. Immolating monk, flamefaced virgin, and artist [and thinker]" (66). The moth acts as a matriarchal Christ figure and artist as she enters the inferno of the candle. Dillard indicates that the moth intentionally enters the flame as it flaps into the flame and drops into the wax. Nothing about Dillard's language indicates the moth simply got too close by accident. Therefore the moth appears to move with intention. Its crossing over into the flame makes the moth's act a sacrifice for illumination and art as if it, too, pursues creation.

On the other hand, Dillard all but invites the cliche of "drawn like a moth to the flame" which indicates, conversely, the golden, majestic moth has no choice and is drawn to the flame by its very nature. Is this not also true of the Christ figure and the artist? In Matthew 26:39 in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion Christ, "fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'" Dillard's framework illustrates purpose and nature as inevitably intertwined. As a moth is drawn to flame so too was Christ destined for the cross, despite self-destruction. By this logic, Dillard presents the artist as compelled to create despite the consuming nature of creation. Deborah Bowen explores this relationship suggesting that "the artist is the wick of the candle, the burnt sacrifice" (324) illuminating God's creation. She goes on to describe the artist as a "Christ Figure who links heaven and earth, spiritual and material…it is not that he (or she) is particularly special, it is that he - or she - is there when God calls" in a meditative state of Sabbath attained

by “embracing emotional pain, [and] the all-or-nothing commitment of the writer” (Bowen, 324).

We see the moth take on the role of artist and Christ in a brilliant moment of transformation in the moment the flames consume her body. Dillard describes her wings as “ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the circle of light in the clearing creating out of the darkness the sudden blue sleeves of my sweater, the green leaves of jewelweed by my side, the ragged red trunk of pine” (17). The moth’s sacrifice and commitment brings a shock of color to the clearing and pushes away the darkness. Dillard makes a distinction between the moth simply illuminating the space and “creating out of darkness” mirroring Dillard’s holy pursuit of artistry.

Then the transformation takes a dark turn as “the light contracted again and the moth’s wings vanished in a fine, foul smoke. At the same time her six legs clawed, curled, blackened, and ceased, disappearing utterly. And her head jerked in spasms, making a spattering noise; her antennae crisped and burned away and her heaving mouth parts crackled like pistol fire.” (Dillard, 16) The flame utterly consumes the moth as she loses her appendages one by one in a “fine, foul smoke.” Dillard paints an especially gruesome and violent picture of the moth’s demise. Dillard does not claim definitively that the moth suffered, but the moth certainly did not have a peaceful death as she is utterly consumed by the power of flame. The moth’s death is complete, and the moth’s head is “gone, gone the long way of her wings and legs…All that was left was the glowing horn shell of her abdomen and thorax- a fraying, partially collapsed gold tube jammed upright in the candle’s round pool” mirroring the image of a collapsed cathedral. (Dillard, 16-17)

At this point, the golden moth is reborn into something else entirely, into something holy. The sacrificial moth takes on a new purpose. John Waldmeir suggests that “the movement is an intense Pentecost…The result, however, is not an outpouring of the spirit for its own sake; it is

the presence of the spirit, represented by the flame, through its ability to 'communicate' the spirit outward to the world" (86). Dillard depicts this communication as follows:

> And then this moth-essence, this spectacular skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burning. The wax rose in the moth's body from her soaking abdomen to her thorax to the jagged hole where her head should be, and widened into flame, a saffron-yellow flame that robed her to the ground like any immolating monk. That candle had two wicks, two flames of identical height, side by side. The moth's head was fire. She burned for two hours, until I blew her out. She burned for two hours without changing, without bending or leaning- only glowing within, like a building fire glimpsed through silhouetted walls, like a hollow saint, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God, while I read by her light, kindled, while Rimbaud in Paris burnt out his brains in a thousand poems, while night pooled wetly at my feet. 17

What remains of the moth is a result of the created, the testament to the passage of time, an empty cathedral declaring what once was. Dillard acknowledges the total transformation as she refers to the remains as "moth-essence" because the moth, herself is gone. In its place, a new wick burns alongside God's as they bring light together. The moth has given herself up to the spirit. Her reference to the "saffron-yellow flame" robes of the monk plays on a few different levels. Saffron or "red gold" reflects the original gold of the moth and indicates the power and status of saffron as one of the most valuable spices in the world. Furthermore, saffron is used both as a seasoning and as a dye representing the consuming nature of Sabbath as well as its artistry. (Mzabri, 11)

The more obvious allusion here is to the photo "Burning Monk" captured by Malcolm

Browne depicting the self-immolation of Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist monk Thích Quang Duc protesting religious discrimination in 1963 (Skow and Dionisopoulos, 398). Dillard's metaphor embodies Duc as he gave his life to flame in pursuit of martyrdom.[3] Duc literally embodies Dillard's metaphor by giving his life to flame in pursuit of martyrdom. Her choice to give agency to the flame rather than to the moth/monk plays with the tension of willingness vs. unwillingness as the flames "robed her to the ground." Just as the "god of the day" has agency to create so too does the flame. This image has a subtext of violence as the moth/monk figure is humbled with the weight of a holy robe. The figure is both elevated and relegated and can be interpreted as both martyr and victim. Matheson describes this duality in terms of kenotic concepts, claiming that Dillard's language "evokes a divine moment of filling and outpouring into everything that is" and compares the figure to Christ "as emptying himself of himself of his divinity and humbly taking the form of a servant" (65).

Matheson's Christ-centered approach to understanding Dillard only represents part of the equation because Dillard's description of the moth does not end with the moth's transformation to servant. With the addition of the moth's body, the "candle had two wicks, two flames of identical height, side by side" (17). The moth, itself, becomes another source of light, holiness, and creativity. It is after the moth has submitted to flame and sacrifice that it becomes something greater, creating in tandem with the creativity of God symbolized by the original flame – the moth becomes a source of illumination and wisdom. Heschel describes this state of Sabbath as

[3] Dillard's allusion attempts to include the diverse and widespread phenomenon of martyrdom through a Christian perspective in such a way that subtracts from the social and cultural context of Thích Quang Duc's death. The catalyst behind Christ's death and Duc's are radically different and comparing them dismisses the gross injustice of Duc's protest. *Holy the Firm* was published a mere fifteen years after Thích Quang Duc's death and lacks the sensitivity and perspective possible now, sixty years later.

"a dimension in which man aspires to approach the likeness of the divine" (16). He goes on to explain that "with all its grandeur, the Sabbath is not sufficient unto itself. Its spiritual reality calls for companionship of man…it is not good that the spirit should be alone" (52). It is not until the moth joins the candle that Dillard has a creative, holy epiphanic moment.

In the same way, this suggests that holiness does not persist without humanity's participation in Sabbath. Heschel elaborates saying, "to be sacred, a thing had to be consecrated by a conscious act of man. The quality of holiness is not in the grain of matter. It is a preciousness bestowed upon things by an act of consecration and persisting in relation to God" (80). The moth in Sabbath becomes holy, a "hollow saint, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God." Dillard consecrates the moth through her witness and by the moth's light, Dillard's artistic passion is kindled once more. Dillard takes the moth's sanctification as inspiration in stride with Rimbaud to fuel her own renewal.

In the intertwining of time and the noumenon world, Dillard finds an ongoing iteration of holiness. She says of her home in the Olympic Mountains: "they are the western rim of the real, if not considerably beyond it...[they are] the final westering, the last serrate margin of time. Since they are, incredibly, east, I must be no place at all" (20). The mountains represent the western rim of the created, of the visible, concrete evidence of God. In the mountains, Dillard experiences time's creation. She goes on to compare the finite nature of her environment to time while questioning what lies beyond human understanding--that is, the eternal God--and places herself beyond time and place into "no place at all." This realm is an incomprehensible eternity, and limited human understanding of God leaves her in an ambiguous liminal space.

Dillard backs away from this overwhelming notion and grounds herself again in the holiness of empirical time. She says "but the sun rose over the snowfields and woke me where I

lay, and I rose and cast a shadow over someplace, and thought, There is, God help us, more. So gathering my bowls and spoons, and turning my head as it were, I moved to face west, relinquishing all hope of sanity, for what is more" (20). Just as in the opening of "Newborn and Salted," the daylight serves as a comprehensible reflection of "the corner where eternity clips time" (24). Her shadow signifies her interaction in the sunlight and her interaction with God's holy time. Scheick describes how this passage "creates a liminal space between verbalizing the seen (revealed surfaces) and seeing beyond what can be verbalized" (52).

Once more she participates in time by witnessing the sunrise and casting a shadow and settling back into a tangible "someplace." Dillard "thought, There is, God help us, more." Dillard faces the eternal "There is" as she gazes past "the final westering" of human understanding into "more." The phrase "There is" could also be interpreted as a cry to God by her capital "There;" Dillard equates God with place. The deification of "There" connotes holiness of place. "There is" reflects the biblical term "I am" used by Christ to reference himself in passages such as John 8: 24 in which Jesus states "For unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins." As Dillard refers to God rather than herself, she uses the "to be" verb "is" as opposed to Christ's use of "am." Dillard's deification of "There" aligns with Heschel's conversation about Sabbath. Heschel notes "time and space [or place] are interrelated to overlook either of them is to be partially blind. What we plead against is man's unconditional surrender to space, his enslavement to things," (6) and so, Dillard looks beyond her mountains for "more" in God's eternity. Dillard demonstrates a healthy and revenant relationship with space in this passage that avoids the pitfall of "unconditional surrender to space."

As she gathers her "bowls and spoons" and faces west, that is, faces the vast Pacific Ocean, she acknowledges that "more" is beyond her comprehension and "relinquish[es] all hope

of sanity" in the pursuit of understanding. This westward direction serves as a meeting place between God and humanity where time and place cease to exist. In his description of this liminal space, which he refers to as "narrative fringe," Scheick says "this fringe demarcates where the terror (matter) and beauty (spirit) of life intersect" (53). He suggests that one can experience the holiness and beauty of God only in facing terror and accepting that humanity cannot ever fully grasp the concept of God. Instead, people live their lives pursuing a relationship with God hoping to expand their understanding of God incrementally through these encounters.

Dillard faces the sublime fringe and receives an answer to her call for "more" as she investigates the relationship between time and physical place. She says, "And what is more is islands: sea, and unimaginably solid islands, and sea, and a hundred rolling skies...Nothing holds; the whole show rolls...it's all a falling sheaf of edges, like a quick flapped deck of cards" (21). Time here serves as liminal space through which the eternal, or God, interacts with the world, and Dillard is a witness to this as time manipulates the land. The ever-changing landscape becomes a symbol of the passage of time. She likens the experience to a "dory or a day launched all unchristened, lost at sea" (21). The vast, unending sea juxtaposes the finite "dory or a day." The sea reflects the eternal while the dory/day represents time. Dillard indicates that time/day exists as a separate entity from God and humanity when she notes they are "all unchristened." According to Catholic doctrine, after christening, the Spirit of God dwells within the individual. Together, God and humanity create holiness. Without humanity, the dory/day remains unchristened.

Dillard continues witnessing "more," that is, witnessing God, at "the fringey edge where elements meet and realms mingle, where time and eternity spatter each other with foam" (21). Yore describes how Dillard's environment mirrors her theological standpoint claiming that this

passage “is a metaphor for the possibility of eternity breaking through into temporal time, or what she often refers to as the ‘fringe’” (96). Dillard continues questioning how to navigate this “fringe.” She reflects that “Time is eternity’s pale interlinear, as the islands are the sea’s. We have less time than we knew and that time buoyant, and cloven, lucent, and missile, and wild” (21). Dillard recognizes she cannot tie down and define the fringe. If time reflects holy power, she submits that humanity has less control/power than supposed, thus leaving humanity vulnerable to both time and God’s will. Dillard expands on the terror of vulnerability in the second portion of the book.

Within temporal time, humanity has the opportunity to create in tandem with God. Dillard remarks, “I see a new island, a new wrinkle, the deepening of wonder...I have no way of knowing its name. Call that: Unknown Island North; Water Statue; Sky-Ruck; Newborn and Salted; Waiting for Sailor” (26). Dillard beholds time’s creation of a new island, pencils it into her map, and bestows upon it a name, not unlike Adam and Eve naming the animals in the Garden of Eden. She further emphasizes the dynamic between the creator and created when she reflects,

> The hill creates itself, a powerful suggestion. It creates itself, thickening with apparently solid earth and waving plants, with houses and browsing cattle, unrolling wherever my eyes go, as though my focus were a brush painting in a world. I cannot escape the illusion. The colorful thought persists...I elaborate the illusion instead; I rough in a middle ground. I stitch the transparent curtain solid with bright phantom mountains, with thick clouds gliding just so over their shadows on green water, with blank, impenetrable sky. The dream fills in, like wind widening over a bay. (28-29)

Dillard simultaneously proposes that the hill is capable of creation and self-creation. The hill creates because Dillard grants it agency through her witness. In her "illusion" she acts as God who grants humanity agency. She solidifies the liminal space where "the land is complex and shifting" (22). Dillard eliminates the unknown and the sublime that serve as windows separating God and humanity; however, without the touch of eternity, her illusion appears distorted and cartoonish. A "blank" and "impenetrable" sky closes her off from the divine. She states she is "alone" and "already know[s] the names of things" (29). When Dillard attempts to create within the concept of place, her creation falls flat. Dillard implies that while imagination possesses its own creative power, it lacks deeper meaning unless expressed through time; she remains alone with her creation. Dillard transitions from conceptually creating outside of "real" time and God into acknowledging, "time is enough, more than enough, and matter multiply and given" (29).

Dillard concludes her first essay with a reassessment of the "god" of the day, her measure for time. She gives the day three progressive descriptions that all lead toward an understanding of time as chaotic. She does not present the "god" of the day as inherently chaotic, but she underlines the potential for chaos, a topic she further interrogates in the subsequent essay. She describes this particular "god" of the day as "a child, a baby new and filling the house...He is day. He thrives in a cup of wind, landlocked and thrashing. He unrolls, revealing his shape an edge at a time, a smatter of content," (29). Each new day "thrives" putting forth new creation in the "house," or world. Though "landlocked," the day "unrolls, revealing his shape an edge at a time" spreading toward the ocean and generating the liminal fringe Dillard describes earlier. Dillard describes how the day "thrashes," adding a violent connotation to creation. This reflects the violent manner in which the literal, physical structure of the Earth shifts where raging, erupting volcanoes often results in the formation of new islands. Again, Dillard has the

opportunity to participate in time's creation of new islands by naming them. She draws a parallel with the land creating itself by asserting that "the day discovers itself" (30). Her assertion gives autonomy to the day suggesting that exchange is an intelligent interaction, not human mastery.

The second description colors the "god of today [as] rampant and drenched. His arms spread, bearing moist pastures; his fingers spread, fingering the shore. He is time's live skin; he burgeons up from day like any tree" (30). Dillard's continued depiction of the day as unruly enforces the concept of time as a chaotic force. The god progresses and "spreads" unchecked and "rampant" into the water. Describing the god as "drenched" furthers the metaphor of God being represented by the ocean. His journey to meet God is complete as "his fingers spread, fingering the shore." While the god is "drenched," he is not submerged in the ocean's eternity. He only "finger[es] the shore" thus preserving his role as the liminal space between humanity and God. Dillard elaborates on the relationship between time and the god of the day claiming, "He is time's live skin." The god of the day serves as the outward and physical embodiment of time. The last sentence of the passage separates the god of the day from the day itself. Dillard says the god "burgeons up from day like any tree." This reinforces Dillard's earlier claim that the "day discovers itself."

Dillard's final description of "the god of today is a boy, pagan and fernfoot. His power is enthusiasm...He sockets into everything that is, and that right holy...his day spreads rising at home in the hundred senses. He rises, new and surrounding; he is everything that is, wholly here and emptied-flung, and flowing, sowing, unseen and flown" (30). Referring to the god of the day as "pagan" emphasizes the organized worship of nature as entirely separate from Christianity.

This demonstrates God's holiness does not need to be recognized by the Church to flourish on Earth. Though the god of the day brings forth the new day, he now worships it,

indicating respect for the created regardless of human appreciation. His “fernfoot” implies that nature makes up his body just a humanity makes up the body of Christ. Dillard notes that “his power is enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm here refers to “inspiration or possession by a god, demon, spirit, etc.; a state of frenzy attributed to divine inspiration or demonic possession” (Oxford). Dillard continues to indicate that the god of the day is a chaotic force, but he has now been influenced by “divine inspiration.” Melding God and day allows the god of the day to “socket into everything that is, and that right holy” rather than exploding across the landscape at random. Dillard refers to the day as “his day” implying that god and day are two separate entities where the god has ownership over day. The god/time wields divine creative power resulting in the day, the created.

Dillard revisits the motif of sunrise representing humanity’s interaction with creation. “His day spreads rising” refers to the sunrise while “home” refers to the horizon, a liminal space between the heavens and the Earth. Dillard expands on empirical senses and witness being instrumental to participating in creation to include a “hundred senses.” She effectively includes not only visual senses, but every conceivable and inconceivable sense that exists here on Earth and in God’s eternity. The god’s day rises, but he, himself also “rises, new and surrounding; he is everything that is, wholly here and emptied-flung, and flowing, sowing, unseen and flown.” Dillard depicts the god, both “wholly here” and “emptied-flung,” as the give-and-take relationship with the potential for harmonious unity.

One can see a clear progression from the first description of the god of the day to the third description of the god. The god begins as an untamed, surging, chaotic generator. He transitions into a tentative liminal space for God and humankind upon encountering the eternal influence of God. Dillard describes him as “rampant” before he gently “fingers the shore” and

"burgeons up from day like any tree." Finally, she refers to the god as a "boy" whose "power is enthusiasm" instead of chaos. Eternal God beckons the god of the day into his eternity so that time's creative potential can grow and flourish alongside humanity. In these final passages, Dillard prefigures the darker second essay, "God's Tooth," in which she contemplates a world seemingly abandoned by God to the forces of time as opposed to time serving as liminal space for God and humanity.

CHAPTER III

THE APATHETIC GOD: INTERROGATING SABBATH IN THE FACE OF POINTLESS SUFFERING

In this chapter I argue that Dillard utilizes her second essay to allow and even encourage her audience to interrogate time, interpreted here as Sabbath, in the face of pointless suffering as a means of spiritual growth. I focus on the pandemonium of time's creative potential unleashed without holy guidance, and Dillard's means and purpose in her interrogation of the subject. Dillard captures the chaos and pain of the human experience and thus challenges the rosy bliss of a naive faith. A mature religious worldview frequently involves the believer interrogating their beliefs and deity. Dillard accomplishes this cerebral work by discussing relatable human suffering. She questions if the bedlam of life suggests that God never genuinely intended to forge a relationship through interactive creation. Perhaps most impactfully, Dillard forces the reader to face this theological journey alongside her as opposed to providing a simplified answer.

In "God's Tooth," Dillard questions the commonality and intentionality between God and people. She poses the question, "why does God let bad things happen to good people?". This question lodges itself within field known as theodicy. Framing her essay in this fashion Dillard's essay serves as the antithesis of "Newborn and Salted," an essay which focuses on the positive application and structure of God. In that essay, she enumerated the ways in which time possesses creative potential that God can use to foster a relationship with humankind. In regard to Dillard's theological approach Pamela Smith comments, "There is a unity to all creation. The human is the participant who can enjoy the commonality of things and, better yet, comment on it." Everything that Dillard builds her first essay on depends upon God caring about creation and wanting to

elevate it to a creative holiness within time. However, the struggle Dillard describes in "God's Tooth" forces her to reexamine her propositions about God's benevolent role in his creation.

Dillard launches her essay with a shocking and terse description of tragedy: "into this world falls a plane" (35). Dillard's diction immediately indicates happenstance and lack of design by employing the word "falls" while simultaneously invoking the fall of humankind found in the book of Genesis and proposing that the crash might be divine punishment. She says shortly afterward, though, that "there was no reason: the plane's engine simply stilled after takeoff" (35). Whether the crash resulted from a divine decree or random chance, Dillard criticizes that "the meanest of people show more mercy than hounding and terrorist gods" (36).

The victim of this crash is a young girl named Julie Norwich, a direct reference to medieval anchorite Julian of Norwich who had mystical visions while gravely ill (Wilde, 31). Her *Revelations of Divine Love* depicts her visions of the Passion of the Christ and her spiritual teachings on finding compassion for those who suffer. Julian explains the relationship between suffering and divine love for her parishioners using her own physical suffering as a basis. Julian's theology claims that God "doth all thing, be it never so itle…nothing is done by lapp, ne by adventure, but all by the aforesaid wisdom of God," meaning that human suffering is part of God's design; however, she claims that God does not inflict suffering as a punishment. Rather, Julian frames suffering as an opportunity presented by God to develop compassion for one's neighbor and an understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as opposed to the concept of suffering as a result of punishment. She places God on the other side of suffering and death as compensation and reward.

Anna Minore notes that Julian does not equate divine reward with the display of human vices or virtues because, regardless, suffering is a universal part of human experience. This

leaves the question of "why?" Why do good people suffer? Minore explains that according to Julian, "to be human is to love and suffer…those who choose to grow in love of the good, the latter suffering is not necessarily destructive" (63). Julian teaches how to find peace, growth, and community in suffering, thus arguing there is both a point and an ending to suffering. She says, "for all this life and this longing that we have here is but a point. And when we be taken suddenly out of pain into bliss, then pain shall be nought" (150). Matheson notes, "What is remarkable about Julian's narrative is the complete absence of any blame or retribution in her depiction of the fall; there is no intentionality…the servant is not blameworthy because his departure was acted out in loving obedience. His suffering comes as a result of his fall into a place of separation, rather than being the cause of the fall itself" (68). Julian's work delivers guidance for peace and love in the face of intense suffering. By invoking Julian of Norwich, Dillard foreshadows her conclusions about little Julie's sufferings. Like Julian, Dillard will ultimately conclude that suffering is part of the human condition, and, in the face of suffering the best thing to do is to grow in compassion rather than drown in despair. Her insistence on going through and depicting her feelings of abandonment and helplessness offers a comparison of theology versus reality. It is not so easy as to simply take Julian of Norwich at her word. Rather, Dillard must fight through her own spiritual doubts to find existential understanding and peace.

Through this journey, Dillard complicates the beauty and eloquence she applies in her discussion of time and theology in the previous essay. Instead, she pulls no punches and bluntly lays the broken child at the feet of her audience. She recounts how "the fuel exploded; and Julie Norwich seven years old burnt off her face. Little Julie mute in some room at St. Joe's now, drugs dissolving into the sheets. Little Julie with her eyes naked and spherical, baffled. Can you scream without lips? Yes. But do children in long pain scream?" (36).

This gut-wrenching rhetorical question pulls the reader out of the metaphysical realm and into stark reality. Dillard invokes a deep pathos to exemplify the deep injustice she feels God allows to befall his people. She spends a considerable amount of time detailing how this impacts her tight-knit community on Puget Sound, describing how the members of the community "gossip, fight grass fires on the airstrip, and pray" (37). Before the plane crash, Dillard depicts the central farm in her community as a type of Eden. Humanity and nature exist together in tandem where "clay driveways and grass footpaths are a tangle of orange calendula blossoms, ropes, equipment, and seeding grass" (Dillard, 38). However, Dillard hints at one of the chapter's themes, The Fall, through the infamous symbol of the "forbidden apple" as Dillard and her community are in the process of harvesting the apple orchards. Despite this connotation, Dillard's community comes together, practicing creation together to make apple cider from scratch.

In this space, with "piles of apples everywhere," Dillard introduces the reader to Julie. She makes a point to humanize Julie rather than reducing her to a victim, telling anecdotes about a brief time spent together. Dillard efficiently presents Julie as three-dimensional by hinting at her underlying qualities. For example, she implies Julie is mysterious and powerful in her own right when she describes how Julie "sometimes started laughing as if you had surprised her at using some power she wasn't yet ready to show" (39). She also uncovers Julie's potential as an artist and creator. She recounts that Julie "was trying to learn to whistle, because sometimes she would squeak a little falsetto note through an imitation whistle hole in her lips" (Dillard, 39). Julie's simple but new creative outlet becomes depressingly morbid when one recalls Dillard's earlier rhetorical question, "can you scream without lips?" which is presumably the situation Julie finds herself in after the crash.

Despite Julie's youth, Dillard does not depict her as entirely innocent. Julian of Norwich theorizes that wrongdoing does not ultimately separate one from God but disconnection from God while on Earth results in unnecessary suffering. Gina Brandolino explains Julian's theology concerning the connection between Christ and pain: "suffering correctly felt results not in pain, but rather in comfort gained from Christ's protection, which nullifies at once the experience and significance of suffering" (106). Dillard illustrates the opposite of Julian's theology by presenting a paradox of Julie both as innocent and devious. It certainly seems as though Julie is being punished for her sins despite being a child, and Christ does not protect her in a way that prevents her very real and tangible suffering. Julie does not have the maturity to employ Julian of Norwich's teachings, and Dillard thus questions the validity Julian of Norwich's claim of comfort.

Furthermore, Dillard uses Julie's mischievous behavior to symbolize the condition of humanity's predilection to deviate from God's will. Dillard describes Julie tormenting Smalls the cat: "I watched Julie dash after it without hesitation, seize it, hit its face, and drag it back to the tree, carrying it caught fast by either forepaw, so its body hung straight from its arms" (41). The image of poor, innocent Smalls hanging, slumped, dangling by his arms under the tree parallels Christ's crucifixion with Julie representing his executioners. Matheson claims that in this scene, Dillard "recognizes her own fallen condition" (69) as Dillard goes on to reflect "You wake up with fruit on your hands. You wake up in a clearing and see yourself, ashamed" (42). Ultimately, despite Julie's chaos, Dillard recalls, "she knew I'd been watching her, and how fondly, all along. We were laughing" (41). Dillard provides this exposition as an act of vulnerability, an embrace of her and Julie's imperfections.

Dillard transitions into existential uncertainty as she reflects, "We looked a bit alike. Her

face is slaughtered now, and I don't remember mine" (41). Dillard sees herself and humanity in Julie's suffering and questions if humanity's imperfection warrants such tragedy. In contrast to God's creation in the first essay, here Dillard offers the day's destruction, negating earlier hope as she communed in the creation. Memory, which previously served as a temporal sanctuary for holiness, proves corruptible as she struggles to remember the uncorrupted face. Flech observes "The sure knowledge of the scientist/thinker is replaced by a sickening sense of randomness and chaos and illusion" (4). At this point, Dillard begins to fall into despair – not unlike the plane falling from the sky– into a philosophy that John Becker categorizes as "dysteleological" as she "arrives, over and over, at chaos" (408, 411). She flips through the lens as a scientist, artist, and nun only to conclude that God has abandoned his creation to the whims of time. This contrasts sharply with the awe and optimism Dillard expresses in "Newborn and Salted." For Dillard, Time's potential vacillates from a beautiful act of creation to a disturbing act of a destruction steeped in unpredictability that deeply impacts her psyche.

Dillard's tone turns cynical: "It is the best joke there is, that we are here, and fools--that we are sown into time like so much corn, that we are souls sprinkled at random like salt into time and dissolved here, spread into matter, connected by cells right down to our feet, and those feet" (41). Furthermore, she suggests that humanity is like "corn," something without agency and intended to be consumed. In "Newborn and Salted," Dillard notes the ancient tradition of sprinkling salt on a newborn child in dedication to God briefly mentioned in Ezekiel 16:4-5. Here, she instead suggests that the dedication has no meaning, and we simply "dissolved here." Time is no longer a medium for creation, but rather, an opportunity for chaos. Humanity does not wield time but is, instead, wielded *by* time.

Dillard demonstrates the ways in which she feels betrayed by time. She says, "You see

your own face and it's seven years old and there's no knowing why, or where you have been since. We're tossed broadcast into time like so much grass, some ravening god's sweet hay. You wake up and a plane falls out of the sky." Dillard expresses loss and betrayal on several different levels. She struggles with identity as she does not recognize herself beyond childhood. Time seemingly has taken her memory from her in this way; she's unattached to her own life, to her own history. Instead, she's left with a sort of gap in her personage. She has lost control over her life until she is able to understand where she is and why. Dillard uses the second-person "you" here with striking effect. She indicates that this is not her personal experience but a universal human experience. No one can stop external forces from robbing innocence and youth. Innocence and youth carelessly turn into fodder for "some ravening god's sweet hay."

Time, God's creation, consumes humanity like a monster as well as provides a space for Sabbath and a communal creation; however, without God's presences, only the former is possible. Dillard no longer finds comfort in nature, not when the sky drops airplanes–airplanes being a monument to human achievement–for no discernible reason. Pam Smith says that for Dillard nature "is more a matter of the survival of those who circumstantially survive. Accident, luck, unpredictability, nonsense, murder, and default all come into play. These all go on with senseless abandon, with nature's own bizarre brand of happenstance and freedom" (349). Hope for circumstantial survival after forging a relationship with a supposedly loving and omnipotent God seems a cheap reward, a betrayal of Sabbath's promise.

Dillard emphasizes the inconsistency of time when she remembers, "That day was a god, too, the day we made cider and Julie played under the hawthorn tree... He was spread under gardens, sleeping in time, an innocent old man scratching his head thinking of pruning the orchard, in love with families" (43). Dillard struggles with God's instability as one day is kind

and loving and the next violent and traumatic with no observable pattern. How does one find meaning and trust in the face of chaos? Dillard questions if anything is knowable. Flech offers, "Dillard, in fact, wrestles with the possibility…that randomness and uncertainty are the essence of physical reality" (5). Likewise, Dillard shifts from celebrating the unity of the physical world to resenting it. She observes that the world is "connected by cells right down to our feet, and those feet likely to fell us over a tree root or jam us on a stone" (42). Nature ceases to bring God and humanity together in holy creation, and instead acts as a stumbling block.

Dillard searches for someone or something responsible for Julie's tragedy. Her search reflects an Emersonian thought of theistic evolution and a religious self-reliance. Randy Friedman describes the Emersonian perspective saying, "the democratic nature of this shift in theology reflects its core the understanding that the approach to God is internal—or that God's will is not something externally imposed… A God who sits apart—a transcendent God—no longer has any force" (34,36). Dillard no longer feels connected to an internal *or* external presence of God; She does not deny the existence of God but rather implies a refusal to intervene. Concluding that God will not intervene, she appeals to the power of nature and the god of the Day.

Concerning the loving god of the day when the community made cider, she asks, "Has he no power? Can the other gods carry time and its loves upside down like a doll in their blundering arms?" (43). She questions both if the gods are capable of wielding the creative power of time and if they have been granted legitimate creative power. Time expresses God's creation and holiness which are supposed to be inherently good. Humanity has the ability to meet God in time and create together, but Dillard expresses a clear concern that God is unreliable – and that humanity's relation to him is some type of unintelligible game. She spends the first

essay eager to create alongside God as the day reveals itself, but God seemingly disappears in the second essay. She laments God's seeming absence or lack of intervention:

> Has he no power? Can the other gods carry time and its loves upside down like a doll in their blundering arms? As though we the people were playing house–when we are serious and do love–and not the gods? No, that day's god has no power. No gods have power to save. There are only days. The one great god abandoned us to days, to time's tumult of occasions, abandoned us to the gods of days each brute and amok in his hugeness and idiocy. (43)

She suggests a severe power imbalance as "the one great god" can leave humanity but humanity must remain. The power imbalance is evidence of the separation between humanity and God, and in "God's Tooth." Dillard clearly views the distance as an obstacle to having a relationship, (therefore an obstacle to participating in Sabbath) with God.

Time, or "the gods of days," is not capable of love or expressing love without the power and holiness of God. Without divine influence, the gods explode across the world. The gods are not as malicious as they are inept, making it God's responsibility to maintain them. Smith claims that Dillard can be most accurately classified as henotheistic in this text as she deifies her natural surroundings as well as each and every day. She explains "Godliness, it seems, appears from within things and also somehow comes down upon them from an emanating godhead. When godliness becomes, for better or worse, altogether overwhelming, God gets the capital 'G' (346). In this case, however, Dillard finds these lesser gods overwhelming and does not attribute the sensations to the capital "G" god. In fact, Dillard takes the opportunity to demote the eternal God referring to God with a lowercase "g." This slight seems to express Dillard's outrage more than expressing doubt about God's power.

Dana Wilde claims Dillard's sense of horror prevents her from being categorized as transcendentalist among the likes of Thoreau and Emerson "despite other similarities" (30). At this point in the text, the audience sees Dillard resign herself to a morbid fate of pain and horror as she recounts "So this is where we are. Ashes, Ashes, all fall down" (43). She resigns not just herself, but all of humanity to God's abandonment. For Dillard, Julie's crash does not represent a single interpersonal betrayal by God, but wholesale abandonment of all humankind. Previously, Dillard acknowledges humanity's fallen condition but recalls the children's innocence with the nursery rhyme "Ring Around the Rosie." Children do not deserve the plague and do not deserve to be abandoned by God and do not deserve to fall out of airplanes and have their faces melted off.

God's abandonment causes Dillard to reconsider her worldview the way one does only after a senseless tragedy. Her resignation exemplifies two significant switches in Dillard's rhetoric for the duration of the essay, "God's Tooth." First, she emphasizes space over time. Neither Dillard nor God participate in creation. This leaves humanity grounded in space, seemingly unable to transcend to a sense of Sabbath. Heschel notes that "the meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space" (10). Dillard finds no reason to celebrate time and creation as she struggles to comprehend God thus leaving her to contemplate the space "where we are." Her second shift is to transition from flame to ashes. The artist/nun has been consumed by passion and is left with nothing to show for it. Neither a broken cathedral, carcass, nor an empty moth is left to signify the majesty of what once was, but rather, there is only meaningless sacrifice, leaving nothing of substance behind.

The corruption of memory or time's temple is on display when Dillard asks, "How could I have forgotten? Didn't I see the heavens wiped shut just yesterday, on the road walking? Didn't

I fall from the dark of the stars to these senselit and noisome days?" (43). The audience is left to wonder who wiped the heavens shut or if it should be considered an act of self-destruction and what effect this has on humanity's participation in time. Alternatively, it is Dillard's senses, her ability to see, that fail her. Once again, Dillard invokes a space of fringe as she falls "from the dark of the stars" implying the darkness of outer space which is not space, but rather both the absence between celestial beings and the surrounding eternity. She contrasts this fringe with the conscious world of "senselit and noisome days." In the fringe of "the dark between stars," Dillard places herself in space consisting of nothing but abstract time, unsanctified time. It is space in which she is aware of time's paradise but finds herself disconnected from the God who dwells there. Upon her "fall" she exists in a physical world where time ceases to be holy and has both the potential for chaos and creation. The language surrounding this passage demonstrates Dillard's overarching disillusionment with time, and therefore, with Sabbath. Her description of time frames it not as a malicious force but an ambivalent, uncaring one.

In the reality Dillard depicts, physical space is "senselit" by limited human understanding and confined by "noisome days." Susan Felch observes, "it is particularly the space/time continuum which snags and baffles Dillard's imagination. If she begins talking about time, she often ends by contemplating space; or vice versa" (2). In this passage, Dillard seemingly applies a sense of importance to the space/time continuum and privileges time over space. She demonstrates the inability to transcend space strips time of its true meaning; it ceases to act as vehicle to God's creation. Furthermore, not only does time suddenly lack meaning, but becomes destructive.

Dillard begins in earnest a philosophical journey to find meaning withing time again. Dillard's prose becomes more convoluted and abstract, reflecting her turbulent state of mind. She

embarks with the metaphor, “the great ridged granite millstone of time is illusion, for only the good is real; the great granite millstone of space is illusion, for God is spirit and worlds his flimsiest dreams” (44). Dillard dismantles the idea that time is consistent and cyclical- calling the notion an “illusion”- and backs away from physical reality, which drops planes from skies, and retreats to a metaphysical outlook in search of answers. By dismissing the notion of time as a reliable millstone, she questions time’s potential to enable communion, here understood to be Sabbath, and access to God analogous to providing access to food for survival. In addition to this, she does away with the idea that time can be harnessed by human creativity as it is *not* a human invention unlike the millstone.

Just as important, she repudiates the reliability of our conceptions of Cartesian space in the next step of her journey despite her earlier appeal to the god of the day and its creation. Humanity has the same lack of control over space as evidenced when airplanes fall out of the sky. Furthermore, Dillard points out that physical space holds little importance to an omnipotent spirit who does not rely on space and instead exists in time “which belongs exclusively to God” (Heschel, 99). Regardless, Dillard tries to hold on to the illusion of control over space. She goes on to say, “but the illusions are almost perfect, are apparently perfect for generations on end, and the pain is also, and undeniably, real” (43). Dillard’s “perception is reality” sentimentality allows the acknowledgment of the illusion of certainty while validating the pain that results from life’s unpredictability.

Both Felch and Wilde express sentiments detailing Dillard’s nontraditional perspective as a modern mystic that provide insight on this stage of Dillard’s theodicean journey. Wilde states that “Dillard's version of the experience arises from a temperament and cultural disposition grounded in modern world,” (39) and Felch complements this view by stating, “Dillard is

convinced that if there is one thing twentieth-century science has taught us, it is that we cannot believe our eyes" (2). These perspectives, taken together, help explain Dillard's mistrust of the world, both physical and spiritual, but she concludes that a lack of understanding does not invalidate the pain that results from living in the world. She does not doubt that past generations suffered, rather, she notes that they had faith in the illusion that both time and space, or anything at all, were knowable. She emphasizes that "pain is also, and undeniably real. The pain within the millstones' pitiless turning is real," and connects herself back into the larger picture of human history. By framing the millstones' turning as the cause of pain, Dillard suggests time, itself, causes pain in addition to coincidental suffering.

Dillard identifies an ironic bright spot in the midst of human suffering. Although Dillard subscribes to "perception is reality" rhetoric and people perceive that they suffer, however, she posits that love alleviates suffering. She says, "for our love for each other- for the world and all the products of extension- is real, vaulting, insofar as it is love, beyond the plane of the stones' sickening churn and arcing to the realm of spirit bare" (44). Regardless of the realness of time and space, humanity experiences love and expresses that love as sacred. Dillard suggests that love, like time, serves as a vehicle to a metaphysical realm beyond physical spaces as it arcs "to the realm of spirit bare." Just as time is a fundamental part of God's identity and connection to humanity, so too is love. Love in this context differs in that Dillard suggests love as an alternative to time as a way to ground oneself in reality— as something knowable in a way time is not.

Just as love exists independently of time, so too does it exist independently of space. Dillard revisits the image of the cathedral, but she expresses the magnitude of love as unconfined to physical space as love extends "beyond the plane of the stone's sickening churn." Felch details

just how undependable physical space is when she reports, “particle’s velocity and position cannot both be known, wither in practice or in principle, then the essence of the world at its subatomic heart is not simply uncertain but certainty.” How could Dillard do anything but scorn a literally “churning” edifice seeking to represent the perfection of holiness? Dillard continually questions the validity of physical space as capable of genuine expression; the cathedral is a poor substitute for the vessel of love. Not only is the cathedral unreliable, but it is “sickening” compared to Dillard’s previous perception of space as an artistic monument to time’s holiness and creation. Thankfully, love extends beyond the edifice of the cathedral as it arcs “to the realm of the spirit bare.”

Dillard then pivots to demonstrate the irony of love as a saving grace to the cruel existence humanity endures. She laments “And you can get caught holding one end of a love, when your father drops, and your mother; when a land is lost, or a time, and your friend blotted out, gone, your brother’s body spoiled, and cold, your infant dead, and you dying” (44). She describes love “arcing,” and once that arc reaches its apex, it comes crashing back down. Dillard reimagines the arc of love as a fishing line upon which humanity is “caught,” a trap. Smith reflects that “the story of nature for Dillard is not a blithe passage from winter to spring to summer to fall and to another winter; it is a story of eating” (349). This rhetoric permeates Dillard’s perception from her natural environment to her spiritual relationships, and so too, does it apply to love. Dillard is caught up in the grieving, consuming nature of love when she reflects, “you reel out love’s long line alone, stripped like a live wire losing its sparks to a cloud, like a live wire loosed in space to long and grief everlasting” (44). Dillard juxtaposes the natural world with the human-made world with a fishing rod, intended to subdue nature, and the cycle of time with a thundercloud that conquers humanity unrelentingly. This suggests that love, the power on

which hope for redemption was placed, only attracts more suffering like a lightning rod.

Dillard's digression mourns the unimpeachable power love has over humanity. She presents love as an obstacle to finding the type of peace the Heschel describes as Sabbath and even implies that love leads to a path of increased suffering. Dillard pulls out of her melancholic revery rather suddenly and places the narrative back in concrete space as she sits at the window and reflects, "It is a fool's lot, this sitting always at windows spoiling little blowy slips of paper and myself in the process" (44). Dillard recognizes the futility of her theorizing and even goes as far as suggesting that such time spent is harmful and wasteful. She comes to a place of resignation in her journey. It is only after going through her period of mourning and breaking down that she begins to piece together her conclusions.

Dillard holds in her hands love, time, artistry, and suffering, —piecing together how they can possibly coexist in a way that enables her to keep her faith. Unsurprisingly, she does not find peace easily. Instead, she shares her doubt and vulnerability with her audience- giving them the space to question God's presence and ethics alongside her beginning with a discussion of Seraphs, the highest orders of angels. Seraphs "are aflame with love for God," and "the intensity of their love ignites them again and dissolves them again, perpetually, into flames" (45). Dillard draws a parallel between humanity's passion for artistry (artistry being a means of Sabbath) and the angel's passion for God with the image of being engulfed in flame. Dillard blatantly questions the value of a relationship with God for both humanity and angels. Seraphs supposedly hold the highest honor among heavenly hosts, but Dillard describes their fate as horrific rather than something to aspire to.

Dillard begins to unabashedly scrutinize any possibility that God cares for his creation. She laments,

> God despises everything, apparently. If he abandoned us, slashing creation loose at its base from any roots in the real; and if we in turn abandon everything- all these illusions of time and space and lives- in order to love only the real: then where are we? Thought itself is impossible, for subject can have no guaranteed connection with object, nor any object with God. Knowledge is impossible. We are precisely nowhere, sinking on an entirely imaginary ice floe, into entirely imaginary seas themselves adrift. (45-46)

She does not outright claim that God has abandoned humanity. Instead, she attempts to devise a scenario to account for the tragedy her community endured that includes the presence of a loving God. Reality, as she understood it, no longer stands, and Dillard throws everything out the window and lands at the conclusion that "the only thing we can posit about the real world is that it is indeterminate" (Felch 8). She eliminates the liminal space previously described in the first essay and here, instead, claims "we are precisely nowhere, sinking on an entirely imaginary ice floe, into entirely imaginary seas themselves adrift" (46). In this particular moment, the ocean ceases to be a symbol for the eternal and endless possibility and instead becomes meaningless.

Dillard's accusations become more direct as she protests the inequality of power between humankind and God. After witnessing Julie's suffering, her trust in God shatters. She specifically accuses God of being "a brute and traitor, abandoning us to time, to necessity and the engines of matter unhinged." She emphasizes the strain this inequality puts on a relationship when one party can seemingly disappear. She states her conditions for rectification as follows: "Faith would be that God is self-limited utterly by his creation--a contraction of the scope of his will; that he bound himself to time and its hazards...Faith would be that God moved and moves once and for all and 'down'...Faith would be, in short, that God has any willful connection with time

whatsoever, and with us" (47). Dillard objects to God's exemption from the same kind of chaos and suffering he allows his creation to endure. Though Christ unquestionably suffered on Earth, he returned to Heaven to suffer no more.

Dillard acknowledges that everything God touches is made good. But, Dillard also wonders whether God has abandoned humanity. This would mean that what has been made good, is good, but nothing more can be made good. She asks

> Has God a hand in this? Then it is a good hand. But has he a hand at all? Or is he a holy fire burning self-contained for power's sake alone? Then he knows himself blissfully as flame unconsuming, as all brilliance and beauty and power, and the rest of us can go hang. Then the accidental universe spins mute, obedient only to its own gross terms, meaningless, out of mind, and alone. The universe is neither contingent upon nor participant in the holy, in being itself, the real, the power play of fire. The universe is illusion merely, not one speck of it real, and we are not only its victims, falling always into or smashed by a planet slung by its sun-but also its captives bound by the mineral-made ropes of our senses. 48

Dillard thus indicates that all new matter and all new life (i.e. the generations of humanity) are untouched by God. She speculates further, saying, "if days are gods, then gods are dead, and artists pyrotechnic fools. Time is a hurdy-gurdy, a lampoon, and death's a bawd. We're beheaded by the nick of time. We're logrolling on a falling world, on time released from meaning and rolling loose...and the gods on the lam" (50). It is as if Dillard sees the world full of reigning pagan/plural gods now that the monotheistic God has retreated. Dillard frames "gods" as agents capable of bringing about creation. She essentially forsakes the prospect of God and humanity both participating in creation and time, calling artists "pyrotechnic fools" who create explosions

with no substance. Dillard dismisses time as anything other than a detriment as it wrecks chaos in God's proposed absence. Doing so, she also rejects Sabbath as Heschel depicts it.

Despite all of this, time continues onward creating just as it destroys, an unstoppable force. Dillard warily notes, "and now outside the window, deep on the horizon, a new thing appears, as if we needed a new thing…and as dumb as the rest…Yes, this land is new, this spread blue spark beyond yesterday's new wrinkled line" (50). Dillard does not finish her journey but, instead, accepts that the journey never ends. The day continues creating and so too does Dillard. She perseveres in her art and in her participation through observation. And yet, she still expresses her uncertainty and her need for exploration as she asks, "how long can this go on? But let us by all means extend the scope of our charts" (50). However, she asserts agency and control through the act of naming, in making something knowable. She expression hurt and the pain of creation and thus achieves a sort of catharsis as she calls "Thule, O Julialand, Time's Bad New; I name it Terror, the Farthest Limb of the Day, God's Tooth" (52). By finding a way to persist as an artist despite her grief, Dillard preserves the means to meet God in Sabbath.

CHAPTER IV

SABBATH AS COMPASSION, HUMILITY, AND ACCEPTANCE

Scholars of Dillard have proposed several theories as to what each of the three essays that make up the entirety of *Holy the Firm* represents when considered as a trilogy. Some argue the essays represent artist, thinker, and nun. Others claim her trajectory reflects the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Both of these lines of thought start at a place of creation and joy, move to consider the darkness of the world, before finding meaningful peace. In the first portion, "Newborn and Salted," Dillard expresses the exaltation of creation as humanity finds rest and restoration in a practice that mirrors Heschel's concept of Sabbath. Part two, "God's Tooth," confronts the pain of human existence and the incomprehensibility of our chaotic world–an expression of catharsis. At the end of her theological and mystical explorations–the titular and final essay, "Holy the Firm"–Dillard settles on a wearied acceptance of God's inscrutable nature. In her concluding essay, Dillard discovers how participating in time (defined here as Sabbath) can be a means of developing meaning, humility, and compassion in such a way that encompasses both positive and negative experiences of sustaining a relationship with God seen in the previous two essays.

If "God's Tooth" serves as catharsis, the third essay, "Holy the Firm," serves as a wearied acceptance of God's ineffable nature. Dillard reexamines the relationships between humanity and God as well as between creation and time and rejects the firm conclusion expressed in "Newborn and Salted" which proposes that her sabbatical reveries serve as a beautiful connection between humanity, God, time, and the natural world, while "God's Tooth" accuses God of abandoning humanity to time's instability. Instead, she opts to embrace the uncertainty between the two

essays, what she calls the fringe, by acknowledging her understanding of an infinite universe. Limited human understanding, however, does not prevent Dillard from seeking an artistic connection with God in the material world. Drahos notes that for Dillard the world is "as bountiful as it is terrible. She does not simply observe the world's monstrosities, but rather is herself drawn into them" (93). By facing these "monstrosities," Dillard finds humanity's place within Sabbath–a place of humility, compassion, and acceptance. She weaves together a vindication for participating in time (and thus participating in Sabbath), not just in spite of tragedy, but as a means of healing from tragedy by bouncing back and forth in her discussion of humility and compassion.

Dillard practices humility from the first sentence of "Holy the Firm." Unlike the opening of the previous two essays which begin with certitudes, Dillard's first sentence in "Holy the Firm" admits a lack of understanding. She says, "I know only enough of God to want to worship him, by any means ready to hand" (55). This is a shocking opening sentence. Dillard does an abrupt about-face from the confusion and suffering and misery that she struggled through in the middle section. "God's Tooth" is a confounded questioning of the chaos and absurdity of all life within creation. So, to transition to "I know only enough of God to want to worship him" is an unexpected development. Matheson elaborates on this opening sentence saying that, for Dillard, "Julie's senseless suffering is clarified insofar as she concedes that understanding pain in terms of individual merit or punitive justice is a misconstrual of the human relationship to God and a blindness to love, and, like Julian of Norwich, she surrenders to the divine's unknowability" (70).

Dillard's uncertainty seems paradoxical to such devotion, but Dillard acknowledges at the end of "God's Tooth" that life continues beyond tragedy, and she holds fast to life–

incomprehensible though it might be–and to the creation and Sabbath that give it purpose. She comes to accept that life includes pains, and she carries on serving others in her life as a creative act.

Dillard establishes a baseline, the fundamental nature of both humanity and God, to build her new understanding of time– an understanding that reflects Heschel's definition of Sabbath. Just as humanity is fundamentally flawed and cannot be anything other than human, God cannot be anything other than God's self. Dillard believes that the "particularity" of each individual human life gives God the opportunity to present God's self. And this is something that she can do with her life: to be an expression of God's action in the world. Her choice to describe God's appearance in environmental terminology, saying that God "burgeons up or showers into the shabbiest of occasions," emphasizes God as Creator before she undercuts humankind's capacity as stewards. For instance, Dillard cavalierly describes a relationship with God as leaving "his creation's dealings with him in the hands of purblind and clumsy amateurs" (55). Although God acts through a flawed and broken humanity, Dillard seems to accept that this is the best opportunity that life has to offer, to participate in the positive act of creation to the best of one's ability.

The first section of "Holy the Firm" promotes the humility needed to find peace in an intentionality that resembles Heschel's Sabbath. Dillard elaborates on the fundamental power difference between God and humanity by conflating Martin Luther's famous quote "Hier Stehe ich. Ich kann nicht anders" – Here I stand. I can do no other – with the word of God. The phrase reflects the position of both God and humankind. She places the second half of the phrase as God's own words demonstrating the unchanging nature of God compared to humans who constantly change and evolve. There will always be a gap between the nature of God and that of

humanity, but within time– within Sabbath– they meet and create together even if humanity's contributions are "clumsy." The phrase "I can do no other" similarly reflects human nature as humankind, despite evolution, cannot gain perfect, universal knowledge. We are eternally stuck in a state of limited understanding.

This realization leaves room for an acceptance of humankind's imperfection and lack of understanding when collaborating with an omnipotent God. She concludes the introductory passage by describing the collaboration, also known as Sabbath, as a "process in time is history; in space, at such shocking random, it is mystery" (56). In truth, the depths of time and Sabbath are only a mystery to people– not to God. Herein lies the nature of Dillard's conundrum: God is timeless, silent, and unchanging while humanity viscerally participates in the constantly evolving nature of creation without explicit guidance. Dillard's acceptance of this leads her on a path of humility.

Dillard's humility, however, does not preclude her striving for a nuanced understanding of humanities relationship with God. In "Holy the Firm" she reconsiders the fringe of this relationship by reviewing her previous two essays and tempering the passions behind them in such a way as to allow both suffering and joy to coexist within the concept Sabbath. She tempers the space of creation, holiness, and time of the "Newborn and Salted" by calling for the humble recognition that every person is undeniably flawed, and, thus, so are our creations, despite the beauty humanity contributes to the connection that leads to Sabbath. Nonetheless, we are the only sentient beings available for God to reveal Godself. Each and every day is an act of creative collaboration in Sabbath and though even "the stones will cry out" (Luke 19: 40 NIV) there can be no Sabbath without a sentient human component.

In "Newborn and Salted," Dillard emphasizes the divine aspects of time, creation, and,

therefore, Sabbath; in “Holy the Firm,” she emphasizes the humanity of Sabbath, the mortal component, as equally important by pointing out the foolishness of an artificial spiritual hierarchy people assign themselves. Her criticism of those who consider themselves more dedicated, pious, and holy demonstrates that it is innate humanness that lends importance to Sabbath, not spiritual superiority. She notes how individuals tend to think of other people as more capable of pursuing a complex spirituality because they are “single in themselves, while we now are various, complex, and full at heart. We are busy. So, I see now, were they…there is no one but us” (56). Dillard advocates for humanity’s intentional participation in time through creation despite their flaws. Though she does not explicitly say it, she’s advocating for Sabbath. She goes on to suggest that art provides this exact opportunity to commune with God through, what is essentially, Sabbath.

Dillard inadvertently gives a prescription of how art enables humankind to participate in the Sabbath. In “Newborn and Salted,” Dillard shows her audience the mystic’s experience of Heschel’s Sabbath as she participates in the creation of the day through witness. Now, she lays out the experience of Sabbath in more conventional language in a way that makes Sabbath more accessible. Dillard describes how meeting God though creative participation in time is possible for the average person when she says, “there has never been a generation of whole men and women who lived well for even one day. Yet some have imagined well, with honesty and art, the detail of such a life, and have described it with such grace, that we mistake vision for history, dream for description, and fancy that life has devolved" (57). This description puts Sabbath within reach of the average person who has “imagined well” and illuminates an alternate reality of a better life. So powerful is this sabbatical vision that ordinary life seems to have “devolved.” This more accessible description of Sabbath reflects Dillard’s advocacy for a humble approach to

divinity, one of humility.

Dillard lays the power of what is defined here as Sabbath at the feet of her audience as recommendation. Humanity can glimpse that paradise, that vision, through their creations; however, it is also in time, not just art, that Sabbath becomes apparent. Dillard goes on to say, "you learn this studying any history at all, especially the lives of artists and visionaries; you learn it from Emerson, who noticed that the meanness of our days is itself worth our thought" (57). Dillard highlights how when we look back into time, we see it is "the lives of artists and visionaries" who have realized art can be something greater than aesthetics because they "notice." Sandra Johnson describes Dillard's writing as Emersonian, a "probing and questioning philosophical approach to her environment" (55). Dillard takes the time to notice and consider the expanse and complexity of her experience and its relationship with the environment. Art, taken in with that Emersonian mindfulness of time, leads to something greater. Again, the reader can see Dillard advocating humility over arrogance as she demonstrates an attitude of curiosity and consideration towards spiritual journey.

Dillard analyzes how the institution of the Church provides the physical space for communal mindfulness and art, even failed art, and the wisdom in recognizing the unknowability of God. Dillard brings the reader back down to her immediate, physical world to illustrate what this looks like in her church. The physical structure of the church does not invoke Sabbath in and of itself, but rather provides opportunity for communal Sabbath within. To emphasize her earlier point, Dillard shows that every person is capable of entering Sabbath with God through the act of creation even if that creation is flawed. For example, she demonstrates the beauty of flawed creation through the churchwomen of her congregation who bring in massive flower arrangements to decorate. Yet, Dillard reports that "the altar still looks empty, irredeemably

linoleum, and beige," but their efforts were sincerely made and constitutes as Sabbath. She also describes a "wretched singer" who sang "an entirely secular song about mountains" (58). Despite their flaws, Dillard rejoices in both forms of artistry because they are acts of creation, of bringing something new into the world, experienced together, that invokes holiness, and by doing so, she encourages her audience to do the same.

Compared to "Newborn and Salted," this characterization of creation within time allows for the participation of every person as opposed to the dedicated mystic devoted to observing each god of the day. She stays rooted in humility by rejecting the "higher Christian church– where, if anywhere, [she] belong[s]" (59). Dillard presents an interesting dichotomy of acknowledging her own theological tendencies while simultaneously rejecting them for something simpler. She characterizes the "higher Christian church" as having "an unwarranted air of professionalism, with authority and pomp" (59).

Dillard uses this final essay to resist authority and pomp in a way she failed to in her previous work in favor of the humility needed to achieve a matured understanding of her spirituality. Consider the opening lines of the first two essays. "Newborn and Salted" begins definitively saying, "Every day is a god, each day is a god, and holiness holds forth in time" (11). Despite this opening leaning towards the metaphysical, it makes a clear declaration of fact. "God's Tooth" also makes a similar declaration of fact: "into this world falls a plane" (35). In contrast, the opening line of "Holy the Firm" comes across as humble saying, "I know only enough of God to want to worship him, by any means ready to hand" (55). Dillard further promotes this humility as she criticizes the "higher Christian church" for acting "as though people in themselves were an appropriate set of creatures to have dealings with God" as they "saunter through the liturgy…[having] long since forgotten their danger" (59). Dillard suggests

these churches are not seeking an intentional connection with God but are confidently relying on their "set pieces of liturgy" that offer no originality or sincerity; they find comfort and a false sense of safety in their repetitive rituals.

By contrast, the "low churches" do not delude themselves into thinking they have discovered the formula for pleasing God; as such, they possess the humility needed to better access an experience of Sabbath. Dillard suggests that neither the "High churches" nor the "low churches" are immune to the power of God, but the congregations that interact with a more organic, humble form of Sabbath are aware of that. Dillard introduces the element of uncertainty as something that kindles creation and connection with God. According to Heschel, these elements are what elevate a moment in time to Sabbath. Ultimately, Dillard condemns the assumption that one can know God fully and praises reverential fear of God; she states that this reverence is "the beginning of wisdom" (59). In this way, Dillard qualifies the exuberance of creation with God, also known as Sabbath, in the first essay with humility in such a way that leads to her eventual acceptance unknowability of God.

Dillard tempers and reviews ideas such as suffering and grief from the second essay by emphasizing compassion. Dillard grieves and reveres little Julie's wounds, but she is less accusatory of God. She is frustrated, though, as she questions why God needs to demonstrate power through the suffering of God's people. Dillard addresses these questions somewhat paradoxically. Matheson claims that Dillard "neither seeks to deny the offence of such love nor to transform it into something comforting or sentimental. Rather, she depicts the tormented struggle to understand how the darkest occasions, such as Julie's plane crash, might, in fact, be contained within God's loving reach" (72). When viewed through an attitude of compassion, Dillard's understanding of God's distance reminds humankind that they are tangible creations

existing in the physical realm and must rely on each other for tangible comfort. This reminder encourages humanity to serve one another as we function as conduits for God's love. By remaining absent, God cultivates an environment in which humanity treats one another with compassion. In this way, Dillard extends Heschel's concept of Sabbath to a communal relationship between humanity and God as opposed to an individual and God.

Unsurprisingly, Dillard uses narrative to facilitate the understanding of this humble, communal Sabbath. Matheson emphasize a geometric metaphor as a motif throughout Dillard's writing. (76) Her structure and language of her text resemble an arc as she grounds the narrative in a specific scene, climaxes up in the realm of the metaphysical, before spiraling back down into reality, much like the plane in the opening of the second essay. The reality into which she crashes is Julie's suffering, and then begins climbing the arc again by examining the relationship between, God, suffering, and Sabbath. Her arc reaches its climax in what is the paradox of Sabbath as humanity exists as both the created and creator. The prose begins falling down again back into the physical perspective as first Dillard considers her own existence and then rapidly declines as Dillard reaches for holiness in the practicality of buying communion wine for her church.

She begins this trajectory to compassion and humility by invoking the pathos of Julie's condition to epitomize needless human suffering. To support her claim she cites the biblical Christ. She recalls the story of Jesus healing a blind man and explaining the cause of the man's blindness as an opportunity for "the works of God should be made manifest in him" (60). Dillard then makes a bold move, challenging this teaching of Jesus asking, "Do we really need more victims to remind us that we're all victims?" (60). Her challenge underscores the unequal power dynamics between humanity and God. In "God's Tooth," Dillard emphasizes the complete and

utter helplessness of people, but here, Dillard stands up for humanity and her community. Her outrage demonstrates that even if humanity cannot change circumstances, they can demand answers; they can be angry, demand justice, and be outspoken. Dillard does not at any point demonize grief or anger. In fact, her essays serve as an example of the need to express these emotions; she normalizes having a complex relationship with one's religion. "Do we need blind men stumbling about, and little flamefaced children, to remind us what God can – and will – do?" Dillard asks, and the question has merit (61). In asking, she vocalizes her own lack of understanding as well as a deep-seated sense of injustice for her beloved community.

Dillard makes a jolting transition to focus solely on the importance humility as she describes the scene outside her window overlooking Puget Sound before answering her own rhetorical question. This mirrors her conclusion of "God's Tooth" when she names the island appearing over the horizon. In both essays, she illustrates that, despite tragedy, life goes on, time continues, and the world continues creating right outside of her window. It is in this moment, after reflecting on the creation of time, that Dillard answers her own question. As she witnesses the creation of a new day, she is launched into a more metaphysical contemplation that should be considered Sabbath. She says,

> Yes, in fact, we do. We do need reminding not of what God can do, but of what he cannot do, or will not, which is to catch time in its free fall and stick a nickel's worth of sense into our days. And we need reminding of what time can do, must only do; churn out enormity at random and beat it, with God's blessing, into our heads; that we are created, *created*, sojourners in a land we did not make, a land with no meaning of itself and no meaning we can make for it alone. Who are we to demand explanations of God?" (61-62).

Dillard's claim that God will not interfere with time and the flow of creation emphasizes time as its own, independent entity. Time is a medium that reminds us that we, too, are created, and God will not stop it from providing a wide range of moments and opportunities for that pursuit. Dillard's use of second-person pronouns in this passage emphasizes the communal experience of humanity within time. Matheson explains that Dillard "shifts from demanding answers of God to accepting that a profound division exists between herself and the divine…Insisting on the meaning of which human creatures alone are the source reveals a profound misunderstanding of human limits" (72). Humankind gives meaning to tragedy together, as community, through Sabbath and art. Meaning is not something that can be extracted from God, alone.

Unlike in "God's Tooth," in "Holy the Firm," Dillard offers guidance in the face of tragedy; she prescribes a humble mindfulness and participation in creation. Every single moment of time is ripe for artistry and the search for meaning, even the horrific moments. Even the corpse of a burning moth can be understood as sacred. Scott Slovic states that "it is not continued calm, but rather calamity, that is the appropriate stimulus of consciousness during periods of relative harmony" (85). Only through viewing horrors, like the moth or Julie's burns, through thoughtfulness and compassion does something meaningful and positive emerge.

Dillard's choice to portray humanity as spiritual aliens, displaced during their mortal lives in the physical world, is a way in which she underscores humanity's limited understanding of tragic events as the chaos of time. The seemingly chaotic nature of time reminds humanity that they are mortal and not meant for this world, but it is up to them to make the most of this world while they are here- through observation, art, and Sabbath. Dillard's God created humanity with the capacity for intense emotion for this exact pursuit. Humankind does not possess the omnipotence of God, but Dillard asks if God's creation has meaning without humanity to

experience it. Would God derive pleasure from his creation without humanity? The symbiotic nature of the relationship means humanity also cannot find meaning outside of Sabbath and God.

Dillard suggests that this sort of emotional journey, one that invokes humility and compassion, facilitates questions that lead to the pursuit of meaning. The measurement of the journey is in creation, whether that creation is as simple as singing poorly or as intense as being consumed in flame with the call to devote your life to artistry. Entering into Sabbath does not allow control but offers an opportunity to make meaning from experience. As both creators and the created, humanity lacks the authority to demand answers of God, but we are divinely gifted with the cognitive awareness to have the desire and ability to do so anyway. Kristen Drahos expounds on this duality saying, "Dillard becomes the priest whose witness of creation's suffering turns it into offering—both of thanksgiving and as accusation" (97). Acceptance of these limitations leads her to highlight human agency when she suggests that "it's time to toss things, like our reason, and our will" (62). Accepting God's silence provides the opportunity to surrender the need for control and embrace the creation of Sabbath and the compassion it leads to.

Dillard demonstrates this humility as she leaves her conscious self behind. She tosses aside cold, hard reason, and her prose becomes more abstract. Slovic notes that "consciousness of the present self interferes with both mystical vision and artistic creation" (64). Dillard abandons her embodied self when she claims, "there are no events but thoughts and the heart's hard turning, the heart's slow learning where to love and whom. The rest is merely gossip, and tales for other times" (62). She does not deny the existence of events and time, but rather, emphasizes the emotions– specifically love– that drive them. The thoughts and feelings of humanity give them the ability to access Sabbath. She pulls herself out of this sabbatical fringe

by grounding her observations of the tangible world in purpose– purchasing communion wine for her congregation.

With this, she begins to prime her audience for the nuanced and intertwined relationship between humility, compassion, and acceptance. This entwinning reflects Sabbath as Heschel describes it. As a means to reach her audience, Dillard repeats her Socratic pattern of answering her own rhetorical questions while simultaneously undercutting her authority as a spiritual teacher. She asks, "Who am I to buy the communion wine?...Shouldn't I *make* the communion wine? Are there holy grapes, is there holy ground, is anything here holy?" (63). The answer is simple, "there are no holy grapes, there is no holy ground, nor is there anyone but us" (63). With this concern and consequent answer, Dillard makes an important clarification: though creation leads to what is defined here as Sabbath, it is the people who create, not the physical creation nor the action, that hold the potential for holiness and can imbue space/time with holiness.

Dillard balances the idea of humanity as powerful and holy creators with the simplicity and humility of humankind; she juggles the paradox of acknowledging the need for humility while demonstrating the power of elevating creation and time. To illustrate, she hedges her authority by emphasizing her own normalcy with the phrase, "All I know is…" as she returns to her immediate surroundings. The shopping list that follows, comprised of "eggs, or sandpaper, broccoli, wood screws, milk," reflects the mundane necessities purchased alongside the communion wine, which is both a sacrament as well as a normal, physical object. The comparison between the wine intended for Eucharist and other items acts as an example of Dillard's claim that it is the creators and not the created that bring holiness, but people are made of both the holy and mundane. It takes effort and thoughtfulness, though, to create holiness, unlike the mundane. The wine, for example, is not fit for Eucharist until it undergoes

transubstantiation performed by a priest.

Another example of Dillard's depiction of Sabbath's paradox of power comes when Dillard places herself in a mindset of humility by "forgetting [her]self, thank God" (64) as she starts walking home again and enters a vision of what should be considered Sabbath. Dillard once more presents both her literal and mystical journey in an arc. This climb of the arc depicts nature's ongoing creation and power and Dillard's place in it. At the apex of the arc, she witnesses Jesus's baptism, and then descends back into reality and down the hill. As she begins her journey and walking back up the hill she reflects, "here is a bottle of wine with a label, Christ with a cork. I bear holiness splintered into a vessel, very God of God, the sempiternal silence personal and brooding, bright on the back of my ribs" (64). The key to Dillard's entrance into a state of Sabbath in the rest of the passage is vision/witness as participation and a willingness to let go of herself.

Though Dillard demonstrates artistry as a means of communion throughout her essays, here she reminds us once more that standing witness to God's creation is a means of participating in that creation and time —thus entering Heschel's Sabbath. She describes the natural world as sentient, as "living petals of mind, each sharp and invisible" (64) as it pulses and changes around her. Dillard undergoes a sort of transformation and "rather than manifesting an impersonal deity, her vision is transformed through union with Christ, so that the world is revealed for what it is: a created whole, alive in motion with the divine, made entire in Christ's personal and sacrificial love" (Matheson, 74). Only after humbling herself is she prepared for a union with Christ. Through this experience, she transcends her human body as the wine "sheds light in slats through my rib cage, and fills the buttressed vaults of my ribs with light pooled and buoyant. I am moth; I am light. I am prayer and I can hardly see" (65). Her transformation creates her body as a

cathedral, a symbol of creation and holiness that is ultimately meaningless without inhabitants. Her body becomes a metaphor for the spatial symbol of Sabbath. Dillard no longer needs mortal vision to experience Sabbath because she, herself, has become holiness incarnate and "becomes less and less substantial as she undergoes the experience of awareness" (Slovic, 68).

In her mystical vision, Dillard uses the metaphor of Christ's baptism as catalyst for demonstrating the role of compassion in Heschel's Sabbath. The vision of his baptism conveys compassion by illustrating hope and the interconnectedness among all living things. In her mystical reverie, Dillard crests the hill (as well as her narrative arc), and as she takes in her world and community, she understands that "everything, everything, is whole, and a parcel of everything else" (66). Her humility allows her to integrate herself with the rest of the world. It is here that she makes an assertion for hope as she discusses Christ's baptism and crucifixion in such a way that reverses the image of Julian of Norwich's depiction of Christ's crucifixion. Julian's vision portrays Christ's suffering, desiccated body. She describes his body as "discoloured, so dry, so clongen, so dealy, and so piteous, as he had been sevenight dead, continualy dying" (49). Julian desires to understand the suffering of Christ as a means of deepening her own compassion and understanding. She emphasizes throughout the rest of the passage just how dry Christ's body is as it hangs upon the cross. Dillard focuses on a reversal of this image to balance Julian's portrayal. She finds inspiration and hope in the beads of water on Christ during his baptism. She says,

> I can look into any sphere and see people stream past me, and cool my eyes with colors and the sight of the world in spectacle perishing ever, and ever renewed. I do; I deepen into a drop and see all that time contains, all the faces and deeps of the worlds and all the earth's contents, every landscape and room, everything

> living or made or fashioned, all past and future stars, and especially faces, faces like the cells of everything, faces pouring past me talking, and going, and gone. And I am gone…There is no speech nor language; there is nothing, no one thing, nor motion, nor time. There is only this everything. (Dillard 67)

In the renewal of Christ, Dillard is fully immersed in time and Sabbath granting her holy enlightenment. Though Dillard, herself does not describe the experience as Sabbath, she demonstrates how Sabbath does not just provide a space to find meaning, but it also rejuvenates the spirit. Her Sabbatical vision depicts internal creation and growth. Dillard uses a fantastical vision to convey enlightenment, suggesting that she has an answer to the problems raised by theodicy, although is unable to adequately convey it to the reader beyond her previous efforts. Fletch emphasizes that for Dilliard, "language itself becomes only a human invention, a cognitive structure, a not entirely accurate grid through which we see the world" (5). However, that does not stop Dillard in her conviction to serve little Julie. Dillard emerges from Sabbatical enlightenment into her physical reality at the top of the hill but with a new purpose: to touch those around her with the same compassion and love she experienced. She begins this journey metaphorically and literally by traveling down the hill toward home. Like Christ, she comes to dwell among humanity rather than remain in a state of Sabbath.

Her mission of compassion begins with Julie, giving her the command to "rest now." In this command, Dillard's emphasis on time reflects a more conventional understanding of Sabbath as a day of rest. Dillard explains that "for me there is, I am trying to tell you, no time" (68). Her meaning here is twofold. The more obvious interpretation is that Dillard is encouraging rest because she, herself no longer has the time to do so and wants Julie to take advantage of her time. The other interpretation is that Dillard's enlightenment causes her to see beyond time.

Heschel describes this experience by saying “there is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord” (3). By encouraging Julie to rest, Dillard echos Heschel’s rhetoric surrounding Sabbath. Dillard demonstrates how Julie too can reach a point of harmony within time. She has an understanding of Christ as everything and nothing and existing outside of everything, including time. In this understanding, she has peace.

She demonstrates that this more mindful version of faith interacts with both the intrinsic, physical earth– which she grounds in observation of the natural world– and something entirely beyond the physical realm via a “created substance” which represents holy, creative potential. At the same time, she describes the substance as the core of the plane, “in touch with the Absolute, at base” of the world, emphasizing the depth of consideration need to interact with it. (Dillard, 69) Dillard claims that, from this substance, the created world comes forth, the paint from which God colors the world. She names it “Holy the Firm.” She lays out how Holy the Firm interacts with the world saying, “time and space are in touch with the Absolute at base. Eternity sockets twice into time and space curves, bound by an idea” (71). If Holy the Firm is God’s paint, then time and space are the paintbrush and canvas. Felch speculates that Dillard finds God “as Holy the Firm, the unseen ground beneath the dullest level of material. Although God is hidden, the fact that [God] is there means there is also reality and design and meaningful language” (12).

Dillard backs up and compares different Western theological theories of the nearness of God, the participation and caring of God, in regards to Holy the Firm, only to conclude that multiple theories are fundamentally true. To continue the paint analogy, she asks if God painted the world on a canvas, animated it, and stood back and observing his work, or whether God is the animating principle, Godself adding to the everchanging canvas. Dillard suggests that one aspect

of God tempers the other. She says God's "right hand is clenching, calm, round the exploding left hand of Holy the Firm" (71).

Dillard utilizes the paradox of trying to describe the fundamentally intangible nature of Holy the Firm to illustrate the relationship between compassion and artistic expression in her own experience of writing. Her description of the artistry of God and the integration of the artistry of humanity and Holy the Firm sheds light on a call to action. She claims that artists are responsible for bringing light to the world, and the world "without light is wasteland and chaos, and a life without sacrifice is abomination." She asks, "what can any artist set on fire but his world?" (72). In this way, the artist is an imitation of Christ, willing to devote oneself to creation on behalf of humanity. At the end of this chapter, Dillard explains the suffering that she endures as an artist–how she has had to endure being set aflame, like the moth in the first essay, to bring illumination to others. This act of creativity brings the firm foundation of God, Holy the Firm, into the lives of her readers. She goes on to describe the creation of the land as a beautiful act of creation and the call to rise up and participate, to greet the world as something holy and to participate in that holiness by the act of creating oneself, even if it brings suffering. By virtue of this self-inflicted trial, Dillard has become someone with a greater capacity for compassion.

Dillard brings the conversation back to an observation of Julie Norwich to further emphasize the strength of compassion one gains through suffering. She says Julie was "baptized at birth into time and now into eternity, into the bladelike arms of God" (73). By writing her story, Dillard submits Julie's story into the eternal tapestry of creation; it is, however, still Julie's story and her experience, and Dillard suggests there is something to be gained from Julie's suffering. Julie must face some of life's most brutal questions and find answers for herself. Paradoxically, Dillard tells Julie "You got there early, the easy way" (74). Matthew Eggemeier

reconciles some of the bitterness in this sentiment saying, “Dillard observes that while she lives for this transcendent moment of vision, she recognizes that it is gratuitous and there is little that one can do to produce it beyond the patient, contemplative work of waiting in silence” (63). Dillard’s language, however, does not negate Julie’s suffering. Dillard purports that Julie is launched into this particular brand of theodicy when the god of the day “bore [her] like a torch, a firebrand, recklessly over the heavens” leaving her disfigured. Drahos observes, “Dillard finds herself on the altar with Julie Norwich and countless others. She cannot escape the form of any who suffer. It pulls her into the horror of being broken, cast aside, and left in the silence of a living death” (102).

Dillard takes this opportunity to suffer alongside Julie, to be filled with compassion and empathy. She laments,

> You might as well be a nun. You might as well be God’s chaste bride, chased by plunderers to the high caves of solitude, to the hearthless rooms empty of voices, and warm limbs hooking your heart to the world. Look how he loves you! Are you bandaged now, or loose in a sterilized room? Wait till they hand you a mirror, if you can hold one, and know what it means. That skinlessness, that black shroud of flesh in strips on your skull, is your veil. (74)

Dillard does not deny Julie’s pain just as Julian of Norwich does not deny pain but uses it as a gateway to compassion. Minore writes that for Julian of Norwich “the imitation of Christ involves empathy for his pain and compassion for all those in pain, whether Christ or otherwise,” (55) and Julian “joins him in that suffering out of love” (54). Dillard’s lament in this passage, though pessimistic, expresses her deep love for little Julie. Furthermore, Dillard does not end her address to Julie here. She conveys the hope ahead that Julie, too, can find strength and peace in a

connection with God that Heschel describes as Sabbath.

Dillard commands that Julie "learn power, however sweet they call you, learn power, the smash of the holy once more, and signed by its name. Be victim to abruptness and seizures, events intercalated, swellings of heart" and claims Julie "won't be able to sleep, or need to, for the joy of it" (75). Dillard lays bare the liberation Heschel's Sabbath brings, the opportunity to be part of something beyond oneself. Her recommendation to submerse oneself into time, and thus into Sabbath, illustrates her faith in the phenomenon–that she would dare suggest it as the answer to a melting child. Matheson reflects that the more Dillard, " joins with brokenness, it seems, the more she finds a seal that feels like divine fire rather than divine love. God holds her hand and focuses his eye on her palm, letting her feel heat and burn, and although it is not an act of direct immolation, the sear that Dillard feels seals a moment of solidarity that verges on absurdity" (60). Dillard indicates that this is a means of moving forward for Julie. She ends the essay by remarking to Julie, "Mornings you'll whistle, full of pleasure of days, and afternoons this or that, and nights cry love. So live. I'll be the nun for you. I am now" (76).

Dillard leads her audience by example: she has humbled herself to a position of compassionate servant to care for Julie. With this promise, Dillard frees Julie from the double-edged sword of artistry. Dillard will allow herself to be consumed by Julie's tragedy so that Julie can move on with her life. Drahos expands on this passage

> With this exclamation Dillard embraces the conjunction of moth and nun, and the two join together in a flame that does not lift one from suffering, but rather binds one all the more firmly to it… The flaming moth is no mere burnt offering—she is, rather, a moment of channeling and transfiguration… the moth represents a point of connection between Heaven and Earth that is as alive as it is unbreakable.

> If transfiguration is possible for Dillard, it is made so through the blazing nun, whose channeling of the world wicks earth to heaven and finds the presence of a God beyond the "Firm." (105-106)

Julie's experience allows her a level of connection and compassion because of the tragic accident she experienced. Rather than undergoing a rigorous spiritual journey, Julie's artistic expression, whistling, is all she is compelled to do. In this simple act of creation, Julie may begin her journey to understanding the importance of Sabbath. Dillard takes up the burden of intense artistry on Julie's behalf. Felch notes that "Art, particularly literature, renders the world intelligible, visible, discussible because the art object [is] an orderly coherent whole which can be analyzed and explored" (11). In this way, Dillard conflates Julie's story of tragedy with her own spiritual journey–one that she shares with the world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Annie Dillard portrays an intense experience of Sabbath despite never naming her reveries as such. Other attempts to categorize her ecomystical experiences are not wrong, but they do not account for the didactic and interactive nature of *Holy the Firm* the way that the concept of Sabbath does. The complexity of Dillard's prose slows the reader down and forces them to consider and meditate on her words. The reader becomes an observer of creation much the same way Dillard observes the creation of the day in "Newborn and Salted." This form pushes the reader to engage in the very type of Sabbath that Dillard describes. Just as she pursues Sabbath in her writing, the reader participates in Sabbath by reading Dillard's creation thus modeling the collaborative nature of Sabbath Dillard depicts throughout the text.

Dillard takes an immersive approach to sharing Sabbath with her audience as opposed to writing a straightforward theological treatise. Although Dillard's text does so indirectly, it still outlines the qualities of the Sabbath as the communion between God and humanity through the sanctification of time. What enables this communion is the shared ability to create- God's presence in the natural world as each new day is born, and humankind's observance, consideration, and subsequent art. Sabbath serves as a liminal space for creators, both divine and mortal, to meet in a particular moment. Heschel argues that moment of connection is what is worth sanctifying, worth enshrining in art.

Dillard spends the first of her three essays, "Newborn and Salted," illustrating the sanctification of time as she immortalizes each new day in writing. She personifies and defies time as God's agent which calls her to reciprocate with her own participation. Over and over

again, Dillard privileges meditative observation as a means of participating in Sabbath while differentiating that it is the ongoing process, not the finished created product, that is holy. The finished product, in this case, the landscape, bears the mark and serves as a reminder of what is holy.

Dillard complicates the understanding of Sabbath with the symbol of the burning moth. She plots the course from observer to artist and the sacrifice that metamorphosis entails. Just as the moth is consumed by flame, Dillard is consumed by the need to create- both of which are bringing illumination in their own ways and both sacrificing themselves to this end. When the figure of the moth has burnt itself out, it is reborn into something new. The hollow carcass of the moth serves as testimony to what was, a creation unto itself. Just so, Dillard works to give herself to creation, the original flame of the candle, here representing God's creative power, sparking her imagination just as it alights the moth. The two flames burning simultaneously, the original wick and that of the candle, representing Sabbath.

Dillard considers how this relationship plays out in the natural world. She accomplishes this in terms of "fringe." She pulls from the work of William Scheick to investigate the fringe of the natural world, the horizon where the ocean meets the sky, and the fringe of the spiritual world, the Sabbath where the physical world meets the spiritual world. For Dillard, both are very real but very intangible. She suggests that in this liminal space humanity gets a glimpse of divinity while being stuck on Earth. Dillard goes on to illustrate what this looks like in the ecological world and emphasizes the wildness of holiness that is not addressed by organized religion. She concludes "Newborn and Salted" by marking how humanity interacts with creation through every conceivable sense–God's hand shaping the creation of each day. Ultimately, her first essay celebrates Sabbath, her role as an artist, and God's presence in both.

The next essay, “God’s Tooth,” is the theodical antithesis of “Newborn and Salted” as it focuses on destruction as opposed to creation. Dillard lays bare the reality of trying to maintain faith in God in the face of horrific suffering. She tells the story of little Julie’s violent plane crash, but she foreshadows hope for peace through her allusion to Julian of Norwich who advocates for compassion through suffering. Both Dillard and Julian acknowledge suffering as part of the human condition; however, Julian’s teachings do not magically alleviate suffering in the moment. Dillard takes her audience with her on a journey to interrogate and challenge Julian’s proposition for love and compassion within suffering, which can be seen through the framework of Sabbath.

Dillard does not delude herself with platitudes when faced with Julie’s suffering, but she instead grieves deeply and expresses her outrage. She emphasizes the potential chaos that a single moment of time can bring and how this instability causes one’s psyche to spiral into despair. Dillard reconsiders the relationship between people and time as a subject/object pairing instead of a mutual relationship which in turn affects her own understanding of herself and her autonomy. As she questions God’s presence, she proposes that communing with God through the medium of time is worthless if God does not care what happens to humanity. By condemning time, Dillard, therefore, condemns Sabbath. Without God’s participation, creation on Earth because a rat race of survival. This becomes evident in the way she talks about the ecological world as stumbling block as opposed to something to be celebrated.

Eventually, she appeals to time as if it is a separate entity from God, in hopes that it can show mercy, but to no avail. This results in her resentful resignation from sanctifying time, and she privileges her focus on space over time. Her dense philosophical and theological tangent evaluating the usefulness of Sabbath results in a disintegration of her understanding of time as

represented by the decay of memory. Instead, Dillard abandons Sabbath and adopts a "perception is reality" as a means of establishing what she knows to be real and reliable. This leads her to acknowledge that the love people have for one another is real and could serve as a route back to Sabbath but ultimately decides that love leads to secondhand suffering. The dead end causes her to spiral further as she expresses her rage at God and the inequality between humanity and God. She burns herself out and wearily accepts that her journey to understanding, what is interpreted here as Sabbath, and God is not yet over, and the world continues to spin, perpetuating creation. Dillard, too, concludes that she must persevere in her art, regardless, and finds power in agency through doing such as she bestows names on the islands as they appear over the horizon.

In her final essay, Dillard builds on her acceptance of her lack of control and focuses on what she can control- the agency provided by Sabbath. She observes that, despite humankind's flaws, we are the only sentient beings available to meet God in Sabbath. Her layman's prescription for Sabbath is to "imagine well" as beauty exists in the simplest and clumsiest of creation when it comes from a place on sincerity. Dillard tempers the rage of "God's Tooth" elaborating on how God's absence causes us to foster love and support among ourselves, and yet, she does not concede her frustration with God and her grief at injustice.

By calling for a communal participation in time, Dillard calls for a participation in Sabbath which she discusses using a narrative arc to depict the visceral experience of Sabbath. At the end of her trajectory, she concludes that humans have the opportunity to find meaning in tragedy through time and art, (which taking in tandem create Sabbath) neither of which can be extracted from God. Instead, she advocates for thoughtfulness and compassion. She supplements this notion with the suggestion that suffering, and chaos reminds humanity that the physical world is not intended to be our home. Human suffering triggers an emotional and spiritual

journey to facilitate the pursuit of meaning of our limited time on Earth; it is not, however, a means of pursuing control. Dillard's mystical reveries indicate that control is an illusion.

This is evident as Dillard stands witness to the baptism of Christ. The agency Dillard does find is that of extending compassion, specifically for little Julie. She expresses a compulsion to immerse others in the same type of mystic experience that has led her to this conclusion of compassion and hope. Dillard launches into a description of a substance that is paradoxically a metaphorical physical substance that represents creative potential that she labels "Holy the Firm" and considers how God uses this substance to create each new day. Dillard creates alongside God, spinning Julie's story into a work of Sabbath. Dillard does not negate Julie's suffering in a vain attempt to make it beautiful. Instead, she suffers alongside Julie, loving her through her pain. She offers Sabbath to Julie as a means to participate in something beyond your physical body. Dillard determines she will take on the burden of Julie's story so that Julie can focus on her own childlike acts of creation, like whistling a melody.

Dillard never directly calls her audience to action in the physical or spiritual world. So, what does she ask of her audience? McClintock notes that for a writer so steeped in ecology, Dillard remains "silent on environmental issues" nor does she seem intent on religious conversion (xviii). Other critics, such as Jack Shindler, suggest that she invokes environmental activism in the "Thoreauvian tradition of encouraging readers to become more aware of the natural world around them," and the act and practice of observance is the first step in addressing environmental concerns (169). Shindler rightly identifies the importance of observance in activism, and just as Shindler suggest, Dillard's practice *begins* with observation, but observation is not the sole objective of *Holy the Firm*. What Dillard asks of her audience is to engage with her work, it, in itself, being an act of Sabbath. Once finished with the essays, the reader is left

with the choice to continue pursuing Sabbath. Dillard engages in Sabbath not as means to bring environmental justice or exert influence/control, but as a means to find a little peace, a person, as an artist, and as a mystic.

Dillard pursues sanctification of time through her writing and a deeper understanding of sanctification in time. She acknowledges the complexity of spirituality- the incredulity of believing a God that allows indiscriminate suffering is worth pursuing Sabbath for. Dillard advocates ultimately, not for blind devotion to Sabbath, but for compassion and humility. She suggests Sabbath as a coping mechanism to find beauty and connection not just in God, but among ourselves. She places God as unknowable and accepts that will never change. Humanity will never have a comprehensive picture of the world. She makes a choice between staying in a place of bitterness at her own lack of understanding or pursuing compassion for her fellow woman. What she does know of God is that God provides the means for relationship through artistry and time. She is consumed by it and is brought into Sabbath as Heschel describes it.

Dillard takes the reader into the intricacies of maintaining faith in the Abrahamic God. Too often audiences are content with messages handed down in churches or best-selling books on faith. Dillard does not set out to make simple things complex; rather, she is revealing the challenge of trying to abide by the simplistic messages one frequently receives in sermons. “God loves us” is fine until someone experiences an emotionally devastating tragedy. It is not uncommon to hear an anecdote of someone who had a “rock solid” faith until something traumatic happened, and then she abandons the faith that she previously found unquestionable. Dillard is preparing us for the tragedies that will inevitably occur. She is drawing attention to the paradox of professing faith in a loving God when everything we understood about life suddenly changes. Dillard attempts to deepen the reader’s understanding that faith is not as straightforward

as it seems to be from those who pedal such messages in sermons.

I focus on Abraham Heschel's teachings on Sabbath, but there is room for further exploration in the relationship between Dillard's work and Judaism not only in *Holy the Firm* but in the rest of Dillard's bibliography. For a first-time reader, *Holy the Firm* may come across as dense and impenetrable. This is due to the complexity of Dillard's thoughts and theology; but by reading Heschel and Dillard in relationship to one another, the reader has greater clarity in understanding her outlook on the physical and spiritual worlds. By bringing in the theological views of Judaism, one can clarify and better understand Dillard's wisdom and worldview.

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Summary

I obtained a Master's of English at Old Dominion University in 2023 and graduated from Milligan University in 2019 with a degree in English and minors in Women and Gender Studies and Humanities. I utilized my writing skills in my position as Head Writer at NATO's Innovation Hub while pursuing a Master's of English Literature at Old Dominion University. This role required that I be adaptive and proficient across a multitude of genres while employing modern conferencing and publishing technology. In the summer of 2022, I received training and worked as a reading instructor with the Institute of Reading Development where I taught students from pre-school up into high school. All of these roles demonstrate an ability to quickly master relevant technology/skills and use it to communicate efficiently.

Experience

Instructor

Institute of Reading Development

May 2022- July 2022

During my time as an instructor, I received training in classroom management skills, classroom leadership, and curriculum. With younger students, I emphasized a strong fluency and comprehension when reading. I worked with the older students to further develop comprehension and translate that comprehension into strong writing.

Head of Writing

NATO ACT Innovation Hub

Sep. 2021 – May 2022

This role required that I be adaptive and proficient across a multitude of genres including: video scripts, PR, speech writing, general communications, blogs, and technical writing. In this effort, I coordinated a team of writers and serve as a writing coach to improve the overall quality of the written mediums.