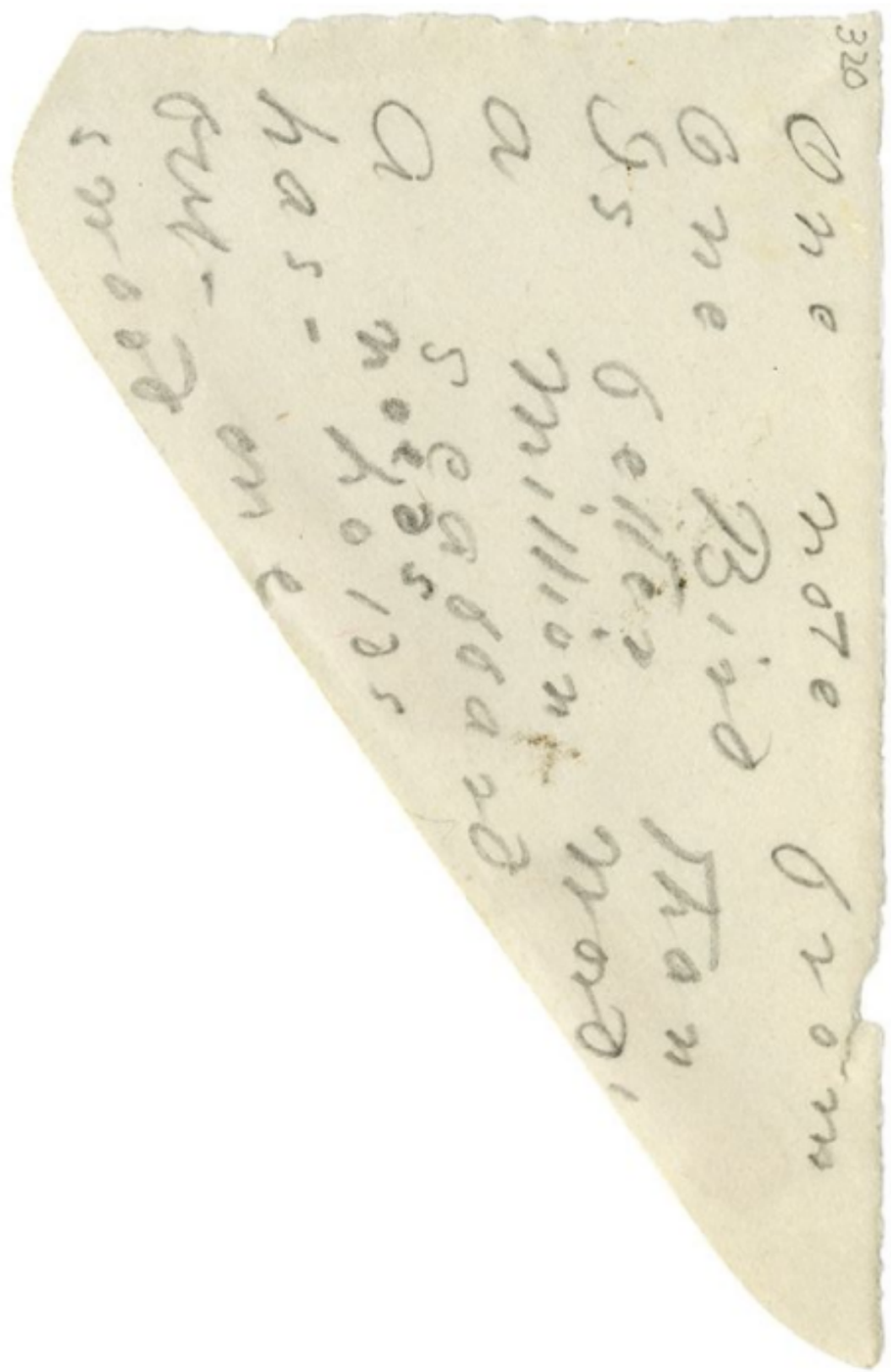


Preface

Although a very prolific poet—and arguably America's greatest—Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) published fewer than a dozen of her eighteen hundred poems. She preferred not to, and instead created her own gatherings of poems into packets later known as fascicles. When, in her later years, she stopped producing these, she was still writing a great deal, and at her death she left behind many poems, drafts, and letters. And it is among the makeshift and fragile manuscripts of Dickinson's later writings that we find the "envelope poems" gathered here. (Strictly speaking, some of the envelope writings collected here are messages or notes rather than poems.)

The earliest envelope poem may have been composed around 1864, but the majority were probably created from 1870 to 1885, when she was no longer creating her fascicle books and when she was testing, differently, and for a final time, the relationship between message and medium.

"What a | Hazard | a Letter | is —" Dickinson scrawled in a late fragment composed in a handwriting so disordered it seems to have been formed in the dark.

These manuscripts on envelopes (recycled by the poet with marked New England thrift) are sometimes still referred to as

Manuscript A842, "As there are | apartments in our | own minds"

"scraps" within Dickinson scholarship. But one might think of them as the sort of "small fabric" the poet writes of in one corner of a large envelope: "Excuse | Emily and | her Atoms | the North | Star is | of small | fabric but it | implies | much | presides | yet." When we say small, we often mean less. When Emily Dickinson says small, she means fabric, Atoms, the North Star.

In 1862, she wrote to her future editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, during a stretch when she was writing three hundred poems a year: "My little Force explodes —" This enigmatic poet, petite by physical standards, is vast by all others. These small envelope poems carry a poignant yet fierce art and, as the poet Susan Howe has remarked, "arrive as if by telepathic electricity and connect without connectives."

Written with the full powers of her late, most radical period, these envelope poems seem intensely alive and charged with a special poignancy—addressed to no one and everyone at once. They remind us of the contingency, transience, vulnerability, and *hope* embodied in all our messages.

The fragments in this book are selected from those reproduced in the complete collection of envelope writings, *The Gorgeous Nothings*, a collaboration between Marta L. Werner, the foremost scholar of Dickinson's late work, and the poet and visual artist Jen Bervin (Christine Burgin/New Directions 2013; Granary Books 2012). Their transcriptions allow us to read the texts, while the facsimiles let us see exactly how Dickinson wrote them (the variant words, crossings-out, dashes, directional fields,

spaces, columns, and overlapping planes)—and absorb the visual and acoustic aspects of the manuscripts: these singular objects balance between poetry and visual art.

When she was only sixteen Emily Dickinson wrote, in a letter to her friend Abiah Root, "Let us strive together to part with time more reluctantly, to watch the pinions of the fleeting moment until they are dim in the distance & the new coming moment claims our attention." *Envelope Poems* claims our attention with a new Emily Dickinson.

Emily Dickinson sent this miniscule two-inch-long pencil in a letter to the Bowles, "If it had no pencil, | Would it try mine –" (A695), wryly nudging them to write. It was enveloped in a letter folded into thirds horizontally, pinned closed at each side.

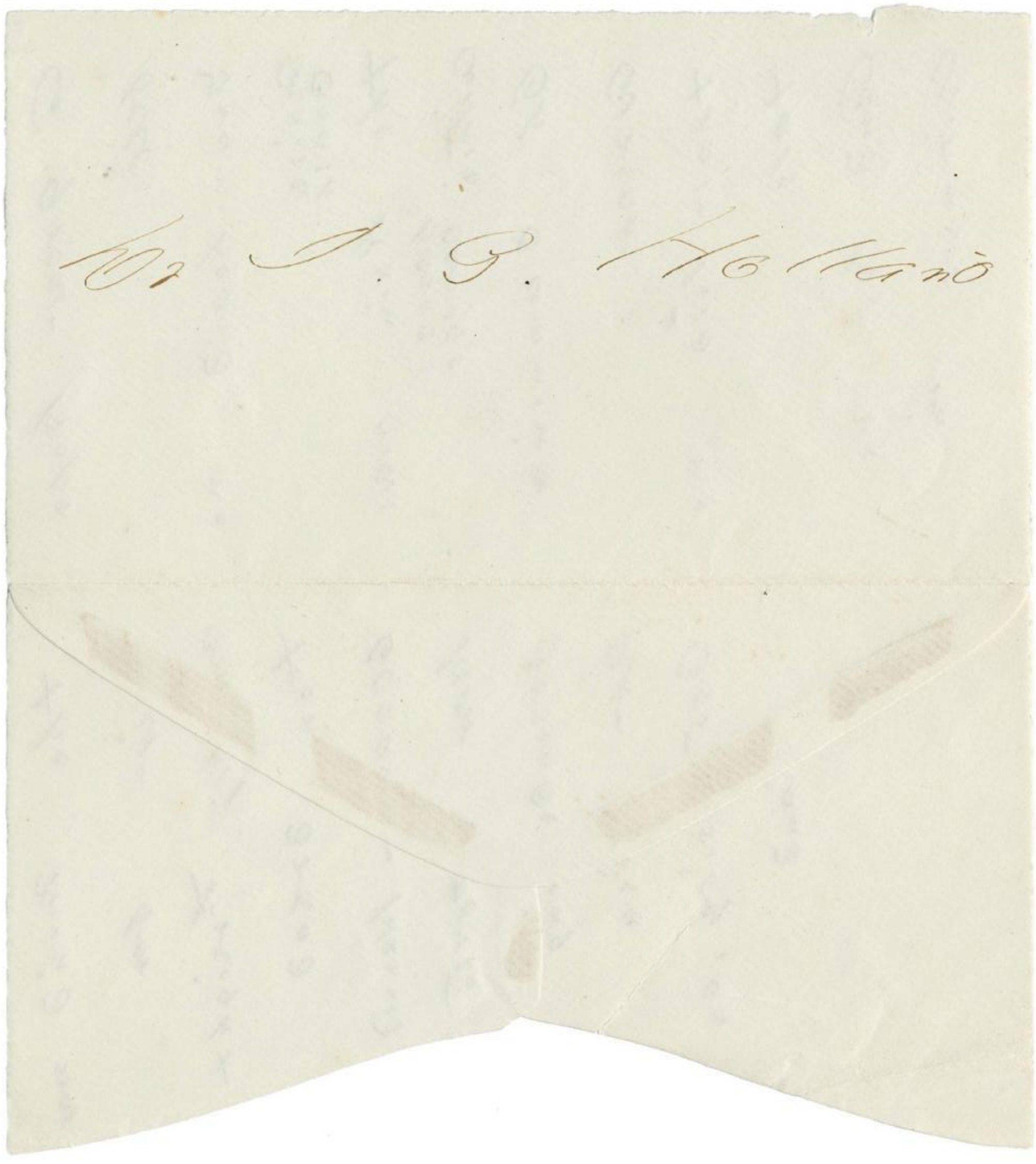
A 105

A great Hope fell
You heard no noise crash
The Ruin was havoc damage within
Oh cunning Wreck
That told no Tale
And let no Witness in

The mind was built for mighty Freight
For dread occasion planned
How often foundering at Sea
Ostensibly, on Land

A great hope
fell
You heard no
noise
crash
the Rain was
hard
within damage
Oh evening
attack
that I did no
tals
and let us
wit ness in

the mind was
quiet- for
might fright
for dread
occasion planned
him often
sorrow ing
ar- sea
est- mis. by. a
Land



Mrs Helen Hunt

105a

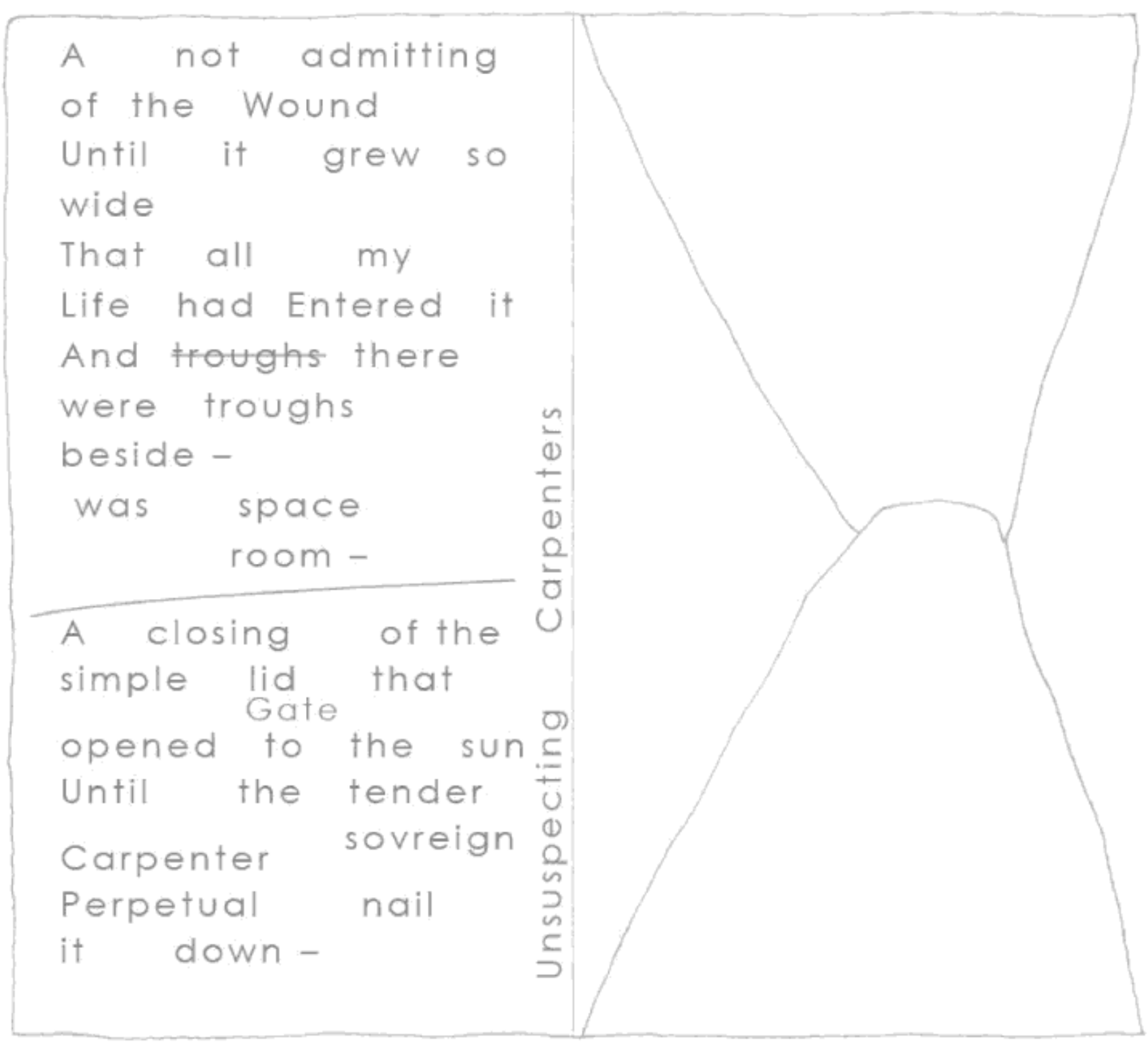
A not admitting
of the sound
until it grows so
wide
that all my
Life has entered it
And ~~Thoughts~~ these
men brought he
reside -
war space -
room -

A Closing of the Eye
simple God shut
Blaze
Opened to the Sunny
Until the Inner
Carpenter Sorrowing

Perpetual noise
in Dome -

Unsuspecting

A 105a



A 128

All men for Honor
hardest work
But are not known
to earn –
Paid after they have
ceased to work
In Infamy or Urn –

All men for honor
hardest work
But are not known
to earn
Paid after they have
earned (ceased)
based to work
In proportion or earn-

A 139

As old as Woe –
How old is that ?
Some Eighteen
thousand years –
As old as
Bliss
Joy –
How old is
that or
The age of that
They are of
Equal years –

Together
Chiefest they
Chiefly
are found

But ⌊tho seldom
side by side –
~~not~~ From
neither of
them tho'
he try
can
may
Human
Nature
hide

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