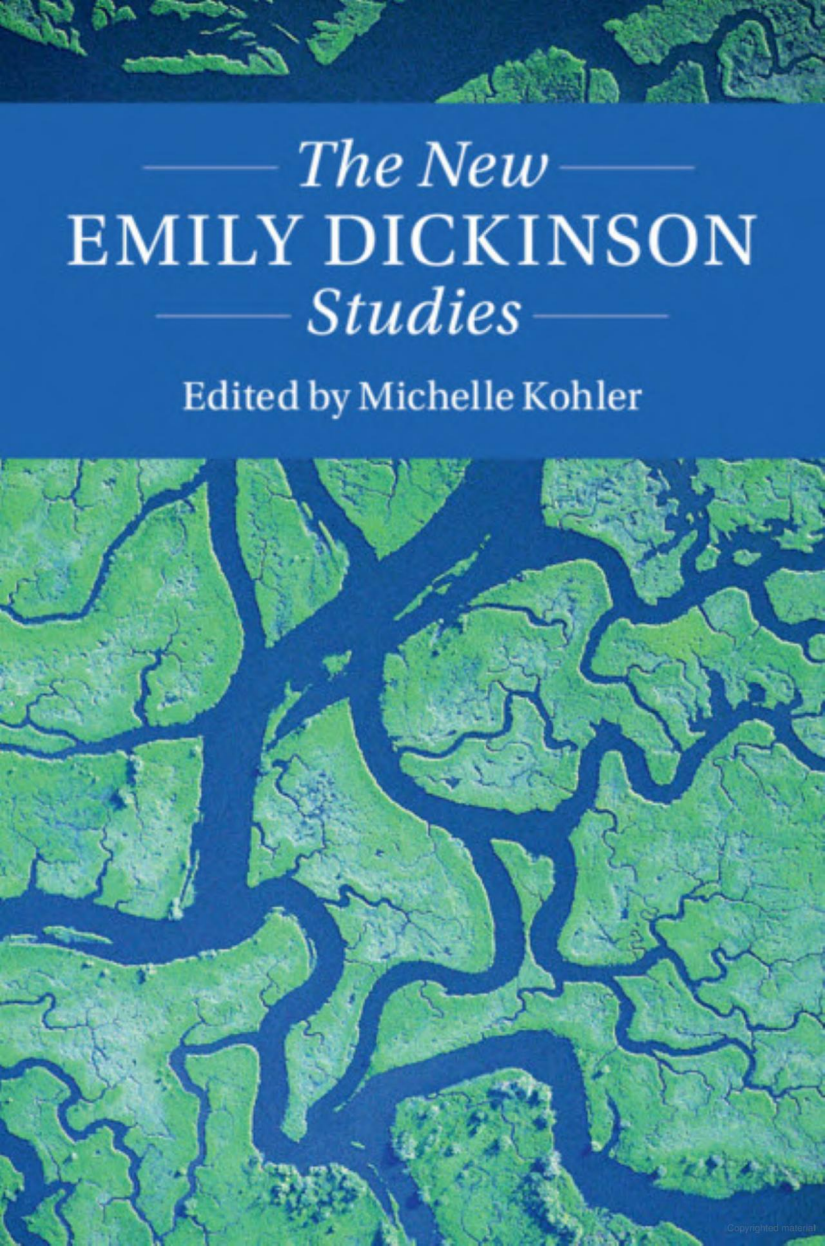

The New EMILY DICKINSON *Studies*

Edited by Michelle Kohler

THE NEW EMILY DICKINSON STUDIES

EDITED BY

MICHELLE KOHLER

Tulane University

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Abbreviations and Textual Note

EDJ	*The Emily Dickinson Journal* (Johns Hopkins University Press).
F	Franklin, R. W., ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).
L	Johnson, Thomas H., and Theodora Ward, eds., *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958).

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Dickinson's poems follow the text of Franklin's variorum edition, and Franklin numbers are cited parenthetically within the text. Dickinson's letters are cited by the numbers in Johnson and Ward's edition.

Introduction: Dickinson Dispersed

Michelle Kohler

The most startling encounter I've had with Emily Dickinson's poetry was in New Orleans in December 2014 at the breathtaking ExhibitBE, a massive, collaborative graffiti exhibit initiated by artist Brandan "Bmike" Odums. Graffiti artists painted the exhibit on the vast exterior and interior walls of DeGaulle Manor, an abandoned five-story, block-long public housing complex with a long history of racial and economic struggle. Over 100 families, largely African American, were evicted from the DeGaulle apartments just days before Thanksgiving in 2006. When I approached the entryway to the exhibit, I faced a brilliant orange brick wall and was surprised to see, in bright green letters shadowed in white, a line I know well: FOREVER IS COMPOSED OF NOWS. The line was painted without attribution to Dickinson, and the graffiti artist did not identify him- or herself. (Moreover, the wall stood just outside the gated area that enclosed the official exhibit, so when I recently queried Odums regarding who the artist might be, he said s/he was likely not among the thirty-five named collaborators.) Once a person walked past this wall, he or she entered the stunning scene of ExhibitBE: towering paintings on exterior walls that were awaiting demolition[1]; chilling installations inside apartments, memorializing evicted families; enormous portraits of and quotations from Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, James Baldwin, and other civil rights leaders.

There are many components of ExhibitBE that warrant attention, and the line from Dickinson is pretty far down the list. And, in part, I begin *The New Emily Dickinson Studies* with this example precisely because of this demotion – its placing of Dickinson in the margins, unattributed, subordinate to the urgency of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century politics that shaped both the history and the artistry of the space. Paul Crumbley has recently described Dickinson as one who sought to be a writer of memes, of phrases that anonymously enter the "linguistic stream," offering up detachable fragments of her poems to be placed in entirely new contexts

without attribution.[2] Herein lies the capacity for language to do its most revolutionary work, argues Crumbley: not in its transcendence of norms or in the uniqueness or personhood of its author but in its absorbability, its becoming generic, its collaborative reach toward future readers and writers, its propensity to circulate and recirculate, to fall into an ongoing stream of Nows that belong to everyone and no one. Dickinsonian details did not matter at ExhibitBE (indeed, how many of its 30,000 visitors even knew the words were hers?). The line was missing the dashes and capitalizations of the original ("Forever – is composed of Nows –"); it was pulled from its context in Fascicle 32; it was not in Dickinson's handwriting but someone else's; it created new line breaks ("FOREVER IS / COMPOSED / OF NOWS"); it was drawn into a new visual field, with "Q ^{N} A / =" painted in black above it among other non-Dickinsonian marks in sky blue, hot pink, purple, and yellow, all against that bright orange backdrop. But I have never thought more about what this line might mean than I did at ExhibitBE. The line's original context – a three-stanza poem that thinks about the phenomenology of eternity – was supplanted by a graffiti exhibit that insisted on the phenomenology of racial and socioeconomic *history* and the need to attend to the real, felt, often violent Nows that compose it. The anonymous graffiti artist pulled the line into new political meaning alongside quotidian domestic spaces from which people were unexpectedly evicted (thousands of household possessions remain uncannily in the apartments, as if arrested in time); the line was made adjacent to depictions of crucial moments in civil rights history and to the entire structure's own temporariness in the face of its impending demolition. Regardless of what Dickinson herself intended by this line, or whether she would have embraced the exhibit's politics, or whether Crumbley is right that Dickinson wanted her poetry swept into the linguistic stream, here the line powerfully expressed the political refusal of a temporality in which Nows don't matter in the eternal scheme of things and in which the later of Forever is a way to dismiss the socioeconomic suffering of Now. It is a call to activism that Dickinson almost certainly did not intend.

There is no question that Dickinson and her poems are the focus of the chapters that follow. But the volume blurs Dickinson in ways exemplified by this opening example. Many of these chapters find her in unfamiliar contexts – off-center, embedded in collaborative spaces, and caught in circulations she does not control. And while much of the volume situates her in the nineteenth century, the chapters also often look toward the ways she might (or might not) further our thinking about contemporary issues. Such decentering is not easy to do with a writer like Dickinson, for

Dickinson scholarship has invested a great deal of intellectual energy insisting on her strength and exceptionality. This insistence has been a crucial project, pushing against stubborn mythologies that had rendered Dickinson isolated and deviant, an accidental writer of symptomatic poems. Over the past fifty years, scholars have productively recast her isolation and deviance, first characterizing her as a skillful proto-modernist (even if, in David Porter's terms, one "without a project") and then as a strategic, sovereign feminist.[3] These moves toward emphasizing Dickinson's control over her own poetics laid the groundwork for the late twentieth-century/early twenty-first-century Dickinson with whom we are familiar: a poet who is decidedly not withdrawn from the world but is attentive to many nineteenth-century American cultural, literary, and political contexts.

The transformation of Dickinson from alone and idiosyncratic (for better or for worse) to avidly engaged and often exemplary in her critical and poetic acumen has crucially deepened our understanding of Dickinson's canny attention to her nineteenth-century world. Given the mythical versions of her biography and the feminist politics at stake, it has been important to outline not only Dickinson's cultural engagement but also her agency, to see this woman poet *choosing*, even when her choice is, as Sharon Cameron argues, not to choose.[4] We have turned symptom to skill; recluse to citizen; a confined feminine body to a capacious human mind. As we often know her now, Dickinson thinks and writes firmly *in* the world; she is firmly in control of her engagement with the world; and she is engaged with everything: nineteenth-century religion, war, politics, literary culture, philosophy, music, art, science, Darwinism, trains, and telegraphy. She is war critic, legal analyst, political theorist, wry lampooner of transcendentalism, William Jamesian philosopher, and avid reader of popular and journalistic discourses.[5]

This emphasis on agency and engagement remains important – anyone who has taught Dickinson's poetry knows well that cultural myths about her still shape initial tendencies to read her poetics as unwitting and symptomatic. At the same time, while the attention to her intellectual sovereignty has given us a more sophisticated, saner Dickinson, it also to some extent perpetuates a notion of bounded, controlled selfhood and authorship that we resist (indeed, deconstruct) in many other critical contexts in the wake of post-structuralism. If we have celebrated Dickinson's own penchant for yielding to the unpredictable play of meaning and for destabilizing centers of meaning, we have often proceeded to insist on a stable Dickinson, one who may think through a variety of

emerge in her writing, which an investment in Dickinson's exceptionality has made hard to do.[11] The fact that we have accrued a wide understanding of Dickinson's interest in many historical and intellectual contexts means that we are poised, indeed have begun, to think in new ways about how context functions and how it forms subjectivity, embodied experience, poetics, and the political scope of her poems.

The book is divided into four sections: Poetics and the Imagination; New Theoretical Frameworks; Nineteenth-Century Histories; and Receptions, Archives, Readerships. The first section gathers essays that consider new ways of thinking about the literary imagination in terms of environments and systems, arguing for the need to move away from models of authorship that focus on isolation, genius, and agency in favor of such concepts as collaboration, media networks, generic conventions, non-public circulations, and historical readerships. As Socarides argues in Chapter 1, "Collaborative Dickinson," many of these frameworks have been hard for us to apply to Dickinson but are in fact very much aligned with the ways nineteenth-century poets and readers encountered poems. These models of literary creativity allow us to consider interactions that fall beyond the writer's control and that either deliberately or unwittingly include other agencies and influences. In part, this is Dickinson's creative process seen through the lenses of historical poetics, which aims to understand genre, prosody, and other elements of form in terms of historical-political readerships and conventions. It might also be seen as a poetics Wai Chee Dimock has described as a "cumulative reuse . . . [that is] profoundly unoriginal" and that prides experimental reception over originality or exceptionalism.[12] In Chapter 2, "Generic Dickinson," Michael C. Cohen argues that Dickinson's notion of what poetry is and does, which we have repeatedly cast as unique, is profoundly conventional. Both Socarides and Cohen build on Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery*, which radically rethinks Dickinson's relationship to genre by asking us to historicize reading practices and consider audience and address in terms of actual historical circulations rather than contemporary notions of lyric.

In Chapter 3, "Dickinson, Media, and Imagination," Eliza Richards looks at Dickinson's own ways of figuring the imagination as a faculty that works less like an inspired solitaire and more like part of an external network or circuitry: her poems experiment with tracking the mind's movement through complex layers of human media networks and "elemental media" (the weather, for example), obliterating the boundaries of individual thought and perception. Chapter 4, Christina Pugh's

"Dickinson and Sound," joins emerging scholarship that supplements long-standing critical attention to the visual features of Dickinson's manuscripts by attending both to the sonic features of Dickinson's poems (meter, rhyme, and so forth) and to the extra-poetic sounds that filled her nineteenth-century physical surroundings (technology and music, for example); Pugh argues that Dickinson's poems embrace sound as a crucial component of prosody and daily life, even as the poems issue sharp critiques of sounds that risk captivating the ear at the expense of reason and complexity.

Section 2 brings Dickinson into conversation with theoretical developments in feminist theory, disability studies, queer theory, posthumanism, animal studies, and ecocriticism. In all cases, it is not only that these frameworks help us say something about Dickinson's poems but also that the poems help us, to echo Jed Deppman, "try to think" about these twenty-first-century discourses in all their urgency. My own essay in Chapter 5 enlists object-oriented feminism (a wry off-shoot of/retort to object-oriented ontology) to elicit new readings of Dickinson's poems that resonate with twenty-first-century feminisms and feminist politics, shifting attention from individual subjectivity to camaraderies with objects, human and nonhuman. In Chapter 6, Michael D. Snediker reads chronic pain and its relationship to figuration within the context of queer phenomenology and disability studies. Resisting Sharon Cameron's long-standing account of Dickinson's lyric pain as "atemporal," he attends to the *chronicity* of pain in "chronic pain," arguing that time is in fact the medium of pain. Figuration, he argues, is the mode of language most akin to how chronic pain works because the two share a similar temporality; Dickinson's work exemplifies this relationship. Snediker's chapter is one of several in the volume that help us consider the way making poetry is an embodied activity: how, these chapters ask, do Dickinson's poems register the unavoidable, ongoing force of the body's being-in-the-world?

Whereas Snediker focuses on the *body*'s being-in-the-world (as does Clare Mullaney in a later chapter on disability and editing), Colleen Glenney Boggs's Chapter 7, "Emily Dickinson's Posthuman Worlds," stresses the way meaning-making is fundamentally tied to being-in-the-*world*. She situates Dickinson's poetry within conversations about biosemiotics, arguing that Dickinson was preoccupied by how relationships to the nonhuman world fundamentally shape subjectivity and produce meaning. In her Chapter 8, on "Dickinson and Historical Ecopoetics," Gillian Kidd Osborne similarly argues that locale matters for the production of texts, though she ultimately lands on a historical ecopoetics attentive to the environmental context of *reading*. Poetry, she argues, is "comprised of

relation . . . [I]ts own nullifications, absences, holes, can guide us to read both through and with a text, towards both the time and place in which it appeared and into the time and place where it is received."

Chapters in Section 3 turn to various nineteenth-century contexts in ways that are new both for the histories they address and for the ways these histories come into view differently via twenty-first-century perspectives on science, new materialism, globalization, and race. In Chapter 9, "Dickinson's Physics," Cody Marrs explores Dickinson's treatment of force and matter in light of nineteenth-century physics and twenty-first-century posthumanism; Dickinson, he argues, might help us theorize the latter anew. Grant Rosson, in Chapter 10, examines Dickinson in relation to geography, a nineteenth-century school subject and popular discourse that has received scant attention from Dickinson scholars; he demonstrates her surprising pattern of using specific geographic methods and lexicons not to refer to foreign places but to map out for readers the space of her own home and of heaven.

By contrast, Páraic Finnerty's Chapter 11, on "Global Dickinson," comprehensively explores Dickinson's references to foreign places and their entanglements with the United States. Drawing on Dimock, Finnerty argues that Dickinson folds this global expansiveness into the compressed space of her poems, intensifying her depiction of global interdependence and its shaping of nineteenth-century subjectivity. Finnerty also considers Dickinson's use of racial and ethnic stereotypes and notes how much more work remains to be done to understand her racial logic and politics. In Chapter 12, Faith Barrett's essay "Dickinson and George Moses Horton" brings Dickinson's poems into surprising conversation with Horton, an enslaved poet; Barrett argues that reading Dickinson's references to confinement alongside Horton's underscore the whiteness of her feminism. Desirée Henderson's Chapter 13, on "Dickinson and the Diary," considers Dickinson in relation to a nineteenth-century archive that seems to be on Dickinson's periphery at best and has thus not been seen as an important context for interpreting her poems. Henderson's chapter offers not only a reading of Dickinson's poetic treatment of diary-keeping but also a meditation on how such peripheral archives might enrich Dickinson scholarship and, conversely, how bringing Dickinson into the conversation might inform our understanding of such archives.

Section 4 includes essays that newly address a range of receptions and the bibliographic contexts for those receptions. But reception and context become (or require) intervention in each case. Taking up the reading context that has perhaps seemed the least subjected to editing, Seth

Perlow's Chapter 14 examines the online Dickinson archives from Amherst College and Harvard University, arguing that our long-standing desire for experiential contact with Dickinson's manuscripts, paired especially with the entrenchment of Harvard's print editions, shapes these archives in ways that limit access to productive scholarly research, including the most promising forms of digital research. In Perlow's estimation, the new archives are more old than new and warrant significant rethinking. Evie Shockley's Chapter 15, "Coloring Dickinson: Race, Influence, and Lyric Dis-reading," examines why and how women-of-color poets choose to engage Dickinson's work despite the racism (or elision of race) they may find there: Gwendolyn Brooks and Marilyn Chin engage in what Shockley calls *lyric dis-reading*, a process by which poets neither embrace nor oppose their white canonical forebears (who did not write for readers of color) but rather perform creative labor that racializes their forebears' work. Such dis-reading makes Dickinson's poetics of use to poets of color while also leaving open the possibility of exposing, or at least not excusing, Dickinson's exclusion of non-white readers.

Clare Mullaney, in Chapter 16, "Dickinson, Disability, and a Crip Editorial Practice," takes up another problem of exclusion, asking how we might edit the poems with disability in mind. Mullaney argues on one hand that we should use editorial restraint to avoid erasing textual manifestations of fragility and eyestrain (she questions, for example, the way Marta Werner and Jen Bervin "liberate" the brittle envelopes into the thick, glossy *Gorgeous Nothings*). On the other hand, Mullaney considers the kinds of editorial interventions needed to make the poems accessible to readers with disabilities. Her chapter grapples with the tensions between these two sets of concerns and seeks to establish the ethics and principles of what she calls a crip editorial practice.

The volume concludes with "Emily Dickinson in Baghdad," a striking narrative from Iraqi poet and translator Naseer Hassan, who in Chapter 17 tells the story of finding and translating Dickinson's poems in Baghdad during the 1990s under the threat of political violence from Saddam Hussein's regime. Hassan's narrative, which includes an interpretation and Arabic translation of "Because I could not stop for Death," in many ways resists Western ways of reading Dickinson, circumventing familiar academic pathways and theoretical frameworks – even as Hassan finds that Dickinson's poetry registers as utterly, even uncannily, familiar to Iraqi readers: "it expresses exactly the feeling of a whole people which she almost didn't hear of."[13] Hassan's framing of the way violence might shape writing, reading, and accessibility – and of the way texts resonate across

time and space – is an apt conclusion to a volume that aims in part to think in new ways about our contexts for reading Dickinson. If, as Virginia Jackson has argued, contemporary approaches to lyric reading are so much the critical air we breathe that we cannot see our reading practices as the product of our own constructions, then perhaps Western readers would do well to startle themselves by finding Dickinson's poetry elsewhere and thus to be thrown off-center themselves.[14]

I began this introduction with a focus on US racial politics and then pivoted to posthumanism, enlisting these two frameworks to cast Dickinson into environments that exceed her control and our expectations. Hassan's closing essay invokes a third frame that might help us further reconfigure Dickinson along these lines, in this case to think more cross-culturally and trans-temporally about the relations Dickinson's poems can enter and how they do so. Hassan describes Dickinson as "reaching out to other worlds [she] doesn't know about"; upon reading her, he felt "a friendship of two worlds distant in space and time." As Hassan and I corresponded about his essay during the drafting process, I asked him to do more to emphasize cultural or linguistic differences that come to the fore during the translation process. No, he responded after some thought; Dickinson's poems, particularly those about death, pain, and loss, matter to him and to the Iraqi readers he's talked with because the poems' disposition is similar to theirs – astonishingly and comfortingly so. (As he told me in an exchange, one of his Iraqi readers reports that she carries his translations of Dickinson in her purse, a permanent companion wherever she goes.)

This friendship across space and time is akin to what Dimock posits in *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*, where she aims to upend the national and temporal borders of literary scholarship. She urges us to think not primarily of American literature but of the literature of a "global civil society."[15] "[T]hink of the planet as a plausible whole," she argues: a "crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures . . . input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of attachment . . ."[16] Such pathways "thread America[n] texts into the topical events of other cultures, while also threading the long durations of those cultures into the short chronology of the United States."[17] Just as Pramod K. Nayar radically decenters the "traditional sovereign, coherent and autonomous human," Dimock's crisscrossing of cultural networks and entanglements radically dissolves the boundaries of "sovereign, coherent and autonomous" national literatures that continue to shape our discipline

Nineteenth Century and Emily Dickinson's Regional Specificity," *ESQ* 60.3 (2014): 413–449; and Theo Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Midori Asahina, "'Fascination is absolute of Clime': Reading Dickinson's Correspondence with Higginson as Naturalist," *EDJ* 14.2 (2005): 103–119; Gillian Osborne, "Dickinson's Lyric Materialism," *EDJ* 21.1 (2012): 57–78; and Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

7. Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 2. See also Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Posthumanism has its roots in Donna Haraway's work, especially her "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–182.
8. Nayar, 29.
9. On new materialism and related discourses, see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Mechanics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds.) (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–43. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone, 1997); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
10. Jennifer Putzi and Alexandra Socarides, "Introduction – Making History: Thinking about Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry," in *A History of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry*, Jennifer Putzi and Alexandra Socarides (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5.
11. See Vivian Pollak, "Dickinson and the Poetics of Whiteness," *EDJ* 9.2 (2000): 84–95; Wesley King, "The White Symbolic of Emily Dickinson," *EDJ* 18.1 (2009): 44–68; and Erica Fretwell, "Emily Dickinson in Domingo," *J19* 1.1 (2013): 71–96.
12. Wai Chee Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," *PMLA* 122.5 (2007): 1380.
13. Hassan's chapter addressing Iraqi/Arabic receptions of Dickinson joins, and expands the scope of, the essays collected in *The International Reception of Emily Dickinson*, Domhnall Mitchell and Maria Stuart (eds.) (London: Continuum, 2009); these essays address translation and readerships in many

European countries, including Ukraine, as well as in Brazil, Japan, and Australia, and there is a chapter on Hebrew translations.

14. See Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
15. Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.
16. Dimock, 5, 3.
17. Ibid., 3.
18. Ibid., 8.

PART I

Poetics and the Imagination

CHAPTER 1

Collaborative Dickinson

Alexandra Socarides

Ever since Emily Dickinson was first introduced to a reading public in 1890, she has been cast as one of the least collaborative of poets. The story of her aversion to people, friendship, and company was introduced by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in his "Preface" to the first volume of her poems, when he wrote: "A recluse by temperament and habit, literally spending years without setting foot beyond the doorstep, and many more years during which her walks were strictly limited to her father's grounds, she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a very few friends."[1] Critics were quick to pick up on this aspect of her life as a way to read her poems. As early as December 6, 1890, a critic for the *Literary World* wrote, in a particularly damning review: "Here surely is the record of a soul that suffered from isolation, and the stress of dumb emotion, and the desire to make itself understood by means of a voice so long unused that the sound was strange even to her own ears."[2] Here, the result of Dickinson's isolation is her semi-muteness. This is what it sounds like, the reviewer suggests, when one has no social intercourse. Less than two months later, a reviewer for the *Christian Advocate* took this logic to the next level by pathologizing Dickinson: "In reading her poems," he writes, "we cannot resist the impression that there is something unhealthy in a life of isolation. Perpetual introspection is the mother of melancholy, and melancholy the half sister of madness."[3] While later readers embraced a more benign story of Dickinson as an isolated writer, this became the dominant narrative through which she gained her enormous popularity.

And, of course, Dickinson herself contributed to this narrative. We can find evidence of this disposition in her poems themselves, for when she writes, in 1863, "In thy long Paradise of Light / No moment will there be / When I shall long for Earthly Play / And mortal Company –" (F1145), the appeal of heaven is firmly rooted not just in an image of isolation but in the absence of even the possibility to "long for" anything but. It is unsurprising, then, that very few twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics – myself


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available

echoes and allusions to other texts and writers; have scoured her correspondence, especially with key figures like Higginson and Helen Hunt Jackson, for evidence of an engaged and self-conscious poetic cross-pollination; and, following the hugely important work begun by Martha Nell Smith, have traced and analyzed her workshop practices with Susan Huntington Dickinson.[10] Such investigations have sometimes allowed for the emergence of a Dickinson different from the one presented by those late nineteenth-century reviewers. In *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare*, for instance, Páraic Finnerty presents Dickinson as a poet who was "attentive to the possibility of indebtedness" and was "interested in the ways in which ideas and thoughts are shared."[11] Additionally, Dickinson's poems about Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Charlotte Brontë situate her as a poet who depended upon a form of communion with distant poets, and her reliance on correspondence about her own poetry that she initiated with friends and family reveals just how much she understood conversation and consultation to be an integral part of her process.

Each of our attempts to think about Dickinson in these ways produces a version of her that was engaged with others and that saw her poetry (and, in the case of her exchanges with Susan, the actual revisions of her poems) in conversation with writers and thinkers of her time. Yet even these instances of what we might call "collaboration" are often cast as exceptional moments, singular instances, or specific and personal engagements in an *otherwise* solitary woman's life. For example, in Smith's paradigm-shifting analysis of Dickinson's poems and letters to Susan, she refers to theirs as a "singular relationship."[12] In other words, one might argue that casting these relationships as somehow extraordinary or anomolous perpetuates the image of a non-collaborative Dickinson who had moments of collaboration or select people with whom she collaborated.

Dickinson studies has always benefited from turning to the places, networks, and methods that are not regularly associated with her and her poetry, and when it comes to thinking about Dickinson's relationship to collaboration I would argue that this again may be true. Along these lines, I would like to suggest that we take our cue from work done on the collection, curation, and preservation of writings that come out of specific communities, namely Alana Kumbier's work in *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive*, a study that maps the mass-produced ephemera that has been central to queer communities across America and theorizes everything from constructions of collective memory to the processes of archival labor. I turn to Kumbier not because she thinks explicitly about

Dickinson but because her reflections on material culture as a context for consideration are particularly suggestive when opened up to Dickinson.

In her final chapter on zines – small, low-budget magazines made by communities of feminists (among others) in the late 1990s that were not produced for profit – Kumbier writes that "the zines' materiality enables the production of embodied communities."[13] Whereas the typical way to understand the relationship between materiality and community is to say that communities enable the production of certain materials, Kumbier suggests instead that the makers of certain objects in fact produce the communities. The makers of these objects project themselves (and their texts) as agents of a collaborative enterprise – a process that depends on some imagined community's understanding of what the materials are and how they might be read.[14] The power of these texts, then, comes not just from the actual communities that produce, consume, read, and collect them but from the very production of those communities themselves. These communities, in other words, are constituted by both the creation and reception of specific materials. In this case one might say that the materiality of these zines embodies a collaborative logic in that it both imagines and produces not simply one reader, one "you," one historically-situated responder to the text, but whole communities toward whom the texts pitch themselves. Given that most considerations of Dickinson have posited any reception (real or imagined) of her poems as singular – she is writing either to herself or to a specific individual – Kumbier's connection between materials and communities allows us to resituate Dickinson's poetic practices within nineteenth-century cultures of collaboration.

Following from this logic, I would like to propose that we re-look at the dominant material structure of Dickinson's writing life – namely, the fascicles – and investigate them for the qualities that might allow us to read them as also embodying a similar collaborative logic. To do so is not to begin with the actual writers or readers with whom Dickinson was surrounded and clearly engaged but with the materials themselves, asking how they might have projected communities that were always present in her acts of making. Instead of highlighting Dickinson as a poet who wrote, copied, sewed, preserved, and revised these fascicles in isolation, we might foreground instead the materials themselves – and her particular processes with and uses of them – as objects that employ a fundamentally collaborative logic.

Often referred to as "enclosed textual space[s]," the fascicles have long been saddled with the story of their own discovery: objects found in a private trunk have become forty small private trunks of their own,

never circulated (as far as we know), distinct from each other by the string that held the chosen sheets of stationery together.[15] Yet, as recent scholarship has shown, the fascicles were not objects of Dickinson's own invention. Because of the way they were constructed, the fascicles are related to commonplace books, autograph albums, and scrapbooks – all popular materials used by nineteenth-century Americans. Dickinson did not use already-bound blank books in which to copy her poems but instead took folded sheets of stationery, copied poems onto all four sides of each sheet, stacked completed sheets one on top of the other, and sewed between four and seven of them together with often red string, at the left-hand side of the page. Like the communities of women who made zines in the 1990s, communities of nineteenth-century women made, used, circulated, and kept such homemade objects. It was in these material objects that nineteenth-century women copied verses of their own and others, verses they often consulted in private but also shared with friends, family, and neighbors.[16]

When we think about the fascicles in relation to these other material objects, we are necessarily situating them within the context of gift exchange – one in which verses were written down, copied, and clipped into the private space of an individually made or owned book, with the intention that one's intimates would read them and sometimes even add to them. And it is this intention that matters – not only as it applies to Dickinson but as it applies to the materials themselves. As Paul Crumbley has written, "A central feature of gift culture is the collaboration of giver and receiver that takes the place of ownership."[17] Regardless of the fact that Dickinson probably never shared or circulated her fascicles – an act (or non-act) that we have long used to justify her privatization (and our re-privatization) of them – we might say that the specific materiality of the fascicles themselves posits a community of imagined receivers that they didn't constitute until long after Dickinson's death. Unlike writing that isn't framed by the material conventions allowing for the possibility of such exchange, Dickinson's fascicle poems foreground both their dependency on and their contribution to the construction of those communities.

We can see this collaborative logic at work in both the topics Dickinson takes up in her fascicle poems and in their embrace of certain poetic strategies. For instance, no topic was more thoroughly explored in women's commonplace and album books of the nineteenth century than that of death. Women shared such texts as part of mourning and consolation rituals. Dickinson's fascicle poems engage in every one of these texts' conventions, figuring specific deaths, asking questions about death and the

afterlife, re-imagining particularly meaningful scenes from dead people's lives, and positioning Biblical and historical stories as a way to understand death. Regardless of whether Dickinson ever showed the fascicles to anyone, she made them knowing full well about the communities that were writing and sharing similar texts, communities that depended on such materials.

Let's look, for instance, at the first sheet of Fascicle 3, which opens with a poem that reads as a complex reflection on death's tendency to have bad timing, on the living's struggle to console, and on the notion of success or "victory" in this life:

> Delayed till she had ceased to know –
> Delayed till in it's vest of snow
> Her loving bosom lay –
> An hour behind the fleeting breath –
> Later by just an hour than Death –
> Oh lagging Yesterday!
>
> Could she have guessed that it w'd be –
> Could but a crier of the joy
> Have climbed the distant hill –
> Had not the bliss so slow a pace
> Who knows but this surrendered face
> Were undefeated still?
>
> Oh if there may departing be
> Any forgot by Victory
> In her imperial round –
> Show them this meek apparreled thing
> That could not stop to be a king –
> Doubtful if it be crowned! (F67)

Dickinson begins this fascicle sheet by invoking, and then responding to, many of her culture's ideas and questions about death. The poem speaks to those for whom these are pressing topics, figuring the singular dead woman as a stand-in for all the dead. "Show them this meek apparreled thing," Dickinson writes, as a way of both registering her anger at death and presenting a response to others' grief in this situation. It is also, though, a phrase that conjures the community that would read such a poem, for it is women mourners who would be engaged in this act of showing. When we read this poem as one that posits not just readers but participants – people on whom the poem's very existence depends but who are also themselves imagined in the process of the poem's creation – we can see the ways in

which it is engaged in a kind of collaborative logic whereby the poem both illustrates and suggests answers to a situation that many face. It's not simply that Dickinson picks up on her culture's concerns and uses the poem to elaborate on them but that the poem materializes a community on which the fascicle depends.

By not nesting the individual fascicle sheets within one another and then copying poems onto pages in that order – a far more common practice when making homemade books – Dickinson invites later readers not to read all of the poems in a given fascicle in relation to each other and instead highlights the particular relationships of poems on a single sheet. In the case of the first sheet of Fascicle 3, Dickinson uses the poems that follow to employ and deepen into the logic that drives "Delayed till she had ceased to know –," all the while bolstering the very community of mourners that it posits along the way. In "Some things that fly there be –" (F68), Dickinson presents death as a riddle; in "Within my reach!" (F69), she abstracts lessons from the particular death of the particular woman in the first poem; in "So bashful when I spied her!" (F70), she explores the hidden aspect of the dead (both in their lives and in their deaths); in "My friend must be a Bird –" (F71), she asserts that death poses a problem for our understanding of permanence; and in "Went up a year this evening!" (F72), she celebrates the anniversary of Jesus' death. Throughout the poems she copied onto the first sheet of Fascicle 3, then, Dickinson conjures a community of mourners who depend on her poems and on whom her poems depend. By positing these dependencies, Dickinson reveals the collaborative logic that is at play: the poems can't exist without the community, and the community is brought into being by the poems.

The first sheet of Fascicle 16 makes a similar move as the first sheet of Fascicle 3 but this time in relation to a different community: those who are reading poetry about the Civil War. Critics have long noted that the years in which Dickinson made the fascicles largely coincided with the Civil War, leading many to read these poems as war poems.[18] But another way of thinking about this historical circumstance is to investigate the relationships among the materials Dickinson used to make the fascicles, the poems themselves, and the culture of contemporary Civil War poetry that Dickinson encountered in newspapers and magazines. Like attention to the context of mourning culture, focusing on the context of Civil War-era periodical poetry allows us to see the creation of the fascicles as informed by structures deeply ingrained in the reading habits of nineteenth-century Americans. For, as Faith Barrett has shown in her thorough analysis of periodical poetry, songs, and elegies from the war years, Dickinson was

names and the details of the dead, but to experience the news of the dead must have also felt, at times, like being struck oneself.[25]

This poem performs one version of what Civil War poetry was, one version that would have been, with the turn of both the newspaper page and the fascicle page, contradicted by another version. As American poets attempted to both get and render the news through poetry, as Richards has argued, they experimented with a variety of voices and perspectives, all of which produced anything but unity. While Bennett has pointed out that there are a number of poems narrated by soldiers, non-combatant observers, and the dead throughout this fascicle – a shift in perspective that, one might argue, is undergirded by the gaps between fascicle sheets – even looking at just the other poem on this fascicle sheet, "Of nearness to her sundered Things" (F337), shows the multiplicity of viewpoints on display. Whereas "Before I got my eye put out –" reflects on how one might digest the "news" of a changed world, "Of nearness to her sundered Things" displays a clarity (and confidence) about the difficult things that it sees. The poem is filled with images of the dead, and yet it renders them as "Bright Knots of Apparitions" that, when seen through this state of "Distinctness," seem more at peace in the world than the living. By mimicking the shifting stances that were an integral part of periodical poetry of the time, Dickinson employs a collaborative logic that relies on the mutually constitutive relations of poems and the communities produced through them. In the case of her Civil War poems, Dickinson is both writing in response to poems about the war and writing these poems in the context of poetry's accumulation and foregrounding of a diversity of perspectives on the war. Highlighting this collaborative logic allows us to push one step beyond Bennett's point that this fascicle creates empathy for its subjects, as we can now see how it also foregrounds those subjects as participants in the poetic culture that has sprung up around and through them.[26] The "other creatures" referenced in the first and last stanzas of "Before I got my eye put out –" may, on the surface, be there for comparative purposes, but they also gesture to all the other poems about all the other people and communities affected by the war.

Reading Dickinson's Civil War poems as part of a collaborative poetics that the fascicles participate in, undergird, and even at times set in motion allows us to come to a different conclusion about Dickinson's relation to that war. Whereas Marrs has argued that the war ultimately pushed Dickinson into greater privacy, that "the war, in short, disillusions Dickinson of the idea that poetry should be made public," my consideration of how the fascicles mimic the public structures and rhetorics of

periodical publications leads us to see Dickinson facing outwards.[27] One of the things I have hoped to show here is that circulation need not be the primary way we think about Dickinson's turn toward the world outside of her home. As she modeled her fascicles on the kinds of materials that would have been made, read, circulated, and consumed by communities who depended on them for their very existence, Dickinson engaged with her culture in ways that have been largely invisible to us. This may be due, in part, to the fact that history is reticent to acknowledge the ways in which women writers are affected by the world of men, but it is also due to the perception that Dickinson in particular only registered the pain of the war in the most private of ways.

I want to close by turning to a poem that touches on the specific matrix of issues concerning mourning, news, and materiality that I have constellated in relationship to this question of Dickinson's collaborative poetics:

The Birds reported from the South –
A News express to Me –
A spicy Charge, My little Posts –
But I am deaf – Today –

The Flowers – appealed – a timid Throng –
I reinforced the Door –
Go blossom to the Bees – I said –
And trouble Me – no More –

The Summer Grace, for notice strove –
Remote – Her best Array –
The Heart – to stimulate the Eye
Refused too utterly –

At length, a Mourner, like Myself,
She drew away austere –
Her frosts to ponder – then it was
I recollected Her –

She suffered Me, for I had mourned –
I offered Her no word –
My Witness – was the Crape I bore –
Her – Witness – was Her Dead –

Thenceforward – We – together dwelt –
She – never questioned Me –
Nor I – Herself –
Our Contract
A Wiser Sympathy (F780)

Copied as the first poem on the third sheet of what we have come to call Fascicle 37 in late 1863, this poem highlights the variety of avenues that news traveled both toward and away from the poet. The first mode of communication is reporting, and this is one that the "I" of the poem rejects over and over again. No matter who or what this news comes from, the method is rejected outright, as she claims deafness, creates a physical barrier ("reinforced the Door"), and articulates her desire not to be "trouble[d]" by such information. But halfway through the poem a shift occurs as "Summer" becomes "a Mourner." Faced with someone "like Myself," the "I" approaches this transformed figure, although without the speech that the earlier part of the poem has revealed as undesirable and suspect. It is through the shared yet unarticulated experience of mourning (they know it by the physical details of dress and the psychic knowledge of the dead's presence) that communion occurs, until we learn that "Thenceforward – We – together dwelt –" without the burden of explanation or proof for such a "Contract." If Dickinson has an ars poetica of collaborative poetics, it might be this one, as here we can see the poem's rejection of a certain kind of sharing and its embrace of another. What ultimately works to console is the connection that is registered through a material artifact (the variant for "Crape" is "Black" on the manuscript) and through "Sympathy." Built into and constitutive of that material is the potential for communion with others, a dynamic that I hope to have shown is integral to the fascicles as Dickinson's cherished material objects.

Reading Dickinson's collaborative poetics allow us to read her poems in a different kind of dialogue, as they imagine a reader who is neither some version of lyric self-address nor a specific, identifiable, historically specific "you" (although there are also surely those throughout), but instead is a "you" who is everywhere on the horizon. Reading Dickinson in the act of putting her poems in a material position to be read – in the cases above, as a writer engaged in a collaborative poetics with women mourners as well as with readers of Civil War poetry – necessarily shifts our understanding of those poems from exceptional specimens of lyric isolation or one-on-one dialogue to those engaged in pervasive and widespread culturally embedded exchanges. When we begin by not assuming that Dickinson is talking to herself or to one other person, and when we take her choice of materials as an indicator that she was, instead, driven by a kind of collaborative logic that both depended upon and embodied the potential to constitute that community, then we can begin to see all of the ways that her fascicles position her as a collaborative poet.

In conclusion, the great contradiction that exists at the heart of Dickinson studies is that Dickinson stands in for *the* nineteenth-century American woman poet at the same time that she is cast as the very *opposite* of all other nineteenth-century American women poets. This contradiction asks us to vigorously recover the contexts in which Dickinson lived and wrote at the same time that it suppresses those contexts in the name of her exceptionality. I raise this critical contradiction in relation to a culture of collaboration with which other poets of the nineteenth century were deeply engaged in part to foreground the questions with which I am left: Even if we make the context of nineteenth-century collaborative poetics visible, could we bring this to bear on our study of Dickinson? Would we want to? Why or why not? What might it show us, and, inversely, why might it be particularly threatening to what has been the clearly popular and productive narrative of what we might call "Uncollaborative Dickinson"? For those engaged with the collaborative poetics of nineteenth-century American women's poetry, reading Dickinson's fascicles in this way may seem like an entirely natural undertaking. But we must remember that it is still the dominant inclination to treat all that is operative among Dickinson's contemporaries as absent from her life. In spite of all the work that has been done to recover her contexts, this is the one that may face the largest resistance.

Notes

1. Emily Dickinson, *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson (eds.) (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), iii–iv.
2. Quoted from "Emily Dickinson's Poems," Willis J. Buckingham, ed., *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s: A Documentary History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 48.
3. Quoted from "Strange Poems," Buckingham, 107.
4. Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnership* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 9.
5. Ibid.
6. Holly Laird, *Women Coauthors* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 2.
7. John Stuart Mill, "What Is Poetry?," quoted from *The Broadview Anthology of Poetry and Poetic Theory: Concise Edition*, Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (eds.), (New York: Broadview Press, 2000), 566.
8. Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
9. For a further discussion of Sigourney's collaborations with her readers, see Jennifer Putzi, "Remodeling the Kitchen in Parnassus: Lydia Sigourney's

Poetics of Collaboration," in *Lydia Sigourney: Critical Essays and Cultural Views*, Mary Louise Kete and Elizabeth Petrino eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018).

10. See Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).
11. Páraic Finnerty, *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2006), 85. In fact, he points to specific poems in which Dickinson "presents poetry as a collaboration between poets . . . and later readers" (85–86).
12. Smith, *Rowing in Eden*, 33.
13. Alana Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2014), 194.
14. My use of the term "imagined community," here and elsewhere in this piece, is obviously indebted to Benedict Anderson's use of this term in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983) but also to Michael Warner's crucial work on this concept, particularly in *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn: Zone Press, 2002).
15. Marta L. Werner, ed., *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 12.
16. For more on how Dickinson made the fascicles and their relationship to other materials in nineteenth-century America, see Alexandra Socarides, *Dickinson Unbound: Paper, Process, Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20–48. The great irony of my analysis is that while the fascicles may have been the materials by and through which Dickinson indicates to critics today that she was engaged in a collaborate poetics, almost none of us gain access to her poetry through the fascicles. We read Dickinson through a variety of materials and in a variety of formats – in print, in variorums, in archives, on screens, in reading editions, in fascimile – but very rarely does anyone open a fascicle and begin to turn its pages. In other words, seeing Dickinson as a collaborative poet because of her fascicle-making project takes some imagination, since it is almost impossible for her present-day readers to simulate what it would have been like to hold them, and read them, and put them up against all of the other material objects that looked and felt like them.
17. Paul Crumbley, "Dickinson's Correspondence and the Politics of Gift-Based Circulation," in *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays*, Jane Donahue Eberwein and Cindy MacKenzie (eds.) (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 33.
18. See Cody Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), where he writes of "just how foundational that struggle was to Dickinson's conception of poetry itself" (124).
19. Faith Barrett, *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 161–180.

I cannot see" (F519). Imagining, as it is tempting to do, that such hands must belong to future readers – namely, us – places Dickinson outside her era, as though she were too modern for her own time. She did not write like other nineteenth-century writers, because she did not write for them; she writes more like we do, because she writes for us. Or so we might want to think. To read Dickinson this way is to envisage her transcending convention by refusing to be contemporary to her moment. "Before I got my eye put out," she writes in another poem, "I liked as well to see / As other creatures." The lost eye makes all the difference, though, since her blindness prompts a turning away: "were it told to me, Today, / That I might have the Sky . . . The news would strike me dead." Much safer, she archly concludes, to look "with just my soul / Opon the window pane" (F336).

Even scholars who link Dickinson's work to nineteenth-century practices of reading and writing tend to emphasize her exceptionality, the ways in which her methods exceeded or diverged from those of her friends and fellow poets. Negation and withdrawal have been keys to unlocking her work: Dickinson "chooses not to choose" among variants within her poems, and she rejects publication so as to maintain indeterminacy in "a private space in which conventions could be revised without the revision's being contested"; her "liberties with poetic form and style assert . . . her inalienable individual right to craft discordance, difficulty, and rarity out of common American materials"; "the visible handwritten sequence" of a Dickinson poem "establishes an enunciative clearing outside intention while obeying intuition's agonistic necessity," in which "free from limitations of genre Language finds true knowledge estranged in it self."[5] Clearly, many readers have productively idealized an Emily Dickinson who magisterially breaks the rules of language, style, genre, and media, in order to write poetry that later readers will finally know how to grasp.

By searching for a "generic" Dickinson, I do not mean that her work is somehow more formulaic or less interesting than previously believed. Nor do I intend to rehash the various genres (hymn, elegy, ballad, etc.) Dickinson could be said to have written in or against. To call a poem "generic" is not, in my vocabulary, an insult. Instead, by seeking the "generic" I insist that her poems take form inside a field of practices that constituted the meaning of poetic writing in midcentury America. *Dickinson did not dwell outside this field of meaning-making.* As I hope to show, some of Dickinson's most powerful poems draw their power from the play of conventions that defined how poetry was read and written in the nineteenth century. If we focus on the ways conventional thinking about poetry molded her, we can appreciate some under-recognized patterns in

her work. Recognition renders genres generic; it is the gesture of relation that links readers, writers, reading, and writing. As Virginia Jackson has argued, controversies over reading and recognition have shaped Dickinson's poems (both figuratively and literally) since their initial publication in the 1890s.[6] In the "generic Dickinson" I hope to locate the powers of recognition that influenced her sense of what poetry was, thereby helping twenty-first-century readers better recognize the generic-ness of Dickinson's own notions of poetics.

The law that makes genres generic is circular: a poem is what readers read as a poem. The nineteenth century had rich and complex ideas of what poems were and how they could mold social and intellectual life, though much of that knowledge has been lost.[7] From her childhood, Dickinson was an energetic consumer of poetry, and she wove the pedagogical verses learned during her schooldays into her earliest extant letters, a practice of playful citation, combination, and exchange that continued throughout her life. Scholars have mapped with admirable precision the books she owned, accessed, and quoted, so I will not rehearse those details.[8] I am more interested in what Dickinson thought reading a poem could do. "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry" (L342a). So she told Thomas Wentworth Higginson in August 1870, though we have only his version of her words. At first glance, to describe reading a poem through the sensations of freezing or decapitation seems to fit the model of negation or cancellation that governs many accounts of Dickinson's poetics, as the imagined diminishment of embodied life initiates a far more expansive inward experience of the poetry. Some of her most quotable lines link aesthetic perception with bodily withdrawal:

> After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
> The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
> The stiff Heart questions "was it He, that bore,"
> And "Yesterday, or Centuries before"? . . .
>
> This is the Hour of Lead –
> Remembered, if outlived,
> As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
> First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go – (F372)

The formal feeling – the affect of form – becomes appreciable in the wake of a pain that deadens perception while enabling self-reflection, like having an eye put out in order better to see, so that the resulting loss of self-

identity, marked here by the ceremoniously tomblike nerves, can prompt the Heart to question itself. The experience of poetic form (the metrical "feet" of the fifth line) is retrospective, conceived from the vantage of an imagined moment of "letting go" that comes in the wake of feeling "so cold no fire ever can warm me": "First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go." Moments of reading that can freeze or trepan thus seem akin to perceptions sharp enough to halt life at the limit of language. Such a sensibility requires a reader open to the encounter of the poem, but in a stance of extreme removal, which sounds like the familiar version of Emily Dickinson, nonconformist.

Except that this mode of understanding poetic form was, in fact, conventional to nineteenth-century poetics. Dickinson's way of threading together poetry and pain (and mutually unraveling them) strongly resembles the reading of reading a poem that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow models in "The Day Is Done" (1845).

> The day is done, and the darkness
> Falls from the wings of Night,
> As a feather is wafted downward
> From an eagle in his flight.
>
> I see the lights of the village
> Gleam through the rain and mist,
> And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
> That my soul cannot resist:
>
> A feeling of sadness and longing,
> That is not akin to pain,
> And resembles sorrow only
> As the mist resembles the rain.
>
> Come, read to me some poem,
> Some simple and heartfelt lay,
> That shall soothe this restless feeling,
> And banish the thoughts of day. . . .
>
> Read from some humbler poet,
> Whose songs gushed from his heart,
> As showers from the clouds of summer,
> Or tears from the eyelids start . . .
>
> Such songs have power to quiet
> The restless pulse of care,
> And come like the benediction
> That follows after prayer. . . .[9]

Like Dickinson's poem, "The Day Is Done" cultivates a formal feeling through the desire to withdraw; the aesthetic melancholy of "sadness and longing" are linked to pain by an act of disavowal that seems to distinguish them but then fails to do so (lines 6 and 12 show that the differences between mist and rain are less than their shared capacity to elicit sorrow). Longfellow's sensibility also functions negatively: reading "from some humbler poet" soothes feelings and banishes thoughts, achieving the "letting go" sought for in Dickinson's poem but which Longfellow's humble poet never achieved amid "long days of labor, / And nights devoid of ease." That humble poet's double negation (his nights lack the lack of care nights should have) lies in the ongoing worldliness of his world, the condition from which reading his work will relieve his reader. If Longfellow thus desires poems capable of projecting a nature homologous to human feeling – poems that pour forth like rainfall or tears – such responsive-seeming verse must also cancel "the restless pulse of care" set racing by the "endless toil and endeavor" of modern life. Such an impossibly paradoxical letting-go comes only through hyperbolic self-cancellation. Don't let your footsteps echo through the corridors of time, poets, the poem seems to say, but listen instead to the wonderful melodies only your soul can hear. Give up even the choice of your text: "read from the treasured volume / The poem of thy choice," Longfellow tells his silent companion, "And lend to the rhyme of the poet / The beauty of thy voice." Whatever poem that reader finally chooses will be not the prayer but the benediction that *follows* prayer: what Longfellow seeks is not the ritual of praying but the affect of having prayed, a formal feeling of removal that comes, as it does in Dickinson's poem, after.

No poet was more conventionally nineteenth-century than Longfellow, and no poem more conventional than "The Day Is Done." Dickinson cites Longfellow in her correspondence as much as any other author, and his books featured among her favorites; there is no reason to assume that she ironizes his sentiments in her own work. Dickinson's modern readers should not be shy about claiming this affiliation. "After great pain" is neither a critique of nor a response to "The Day Is Done" but is instead a play upon the terms of meaning-making that Longfellow sets in motion in that poem. If we think of poems like "After great pain" as efforts to create "wonderful melodies" heard by way of the "restless pulse of care" that "long days of labor, / And nights devoid of ease" generate, then we can glimpse the poet I am calling the "generic Dickinson," who models even her posture of attenuated distance through close engagements with the poetry surrounding her.

Dickinson's accounts of reading, told in her letters and poems, offer many examples of a poet playfully inhabiting the conventions of poetic creativity that her century promulgated. The nineteenth century abounded in tropes and truisms regarding books and reading.[10] For example, in his 1858 essay "Books," Emerson writes how "in a library we are surrounded by many hundreds of dear friends, but they are imprisoned by an enchanter in these paper and leathern boxes," so many of which appear so similar from without that a good reader should read only "what is proper to him, and not waste his memory on a crowd of mediocrities."[11] Emerson's essay, like other didactic treatises about books, goes on to list the best authors that an aspiring reader should choose and concludes that "their communications are not to be given or taken with the lips and the end of the tongue, but out of the glow of the cheek, and with the throbbing heart," as intimate familiars.[12] The tropes of bookish friendship, intimacy, and enchantment, and the curricular suggestion to hold hands with great authors across time, make up the subject of a poem Dickinson wrote in 1862 or 1863.

A precious – mouldering pleasure – 'tis –
To meet an Antique Book –
In just the Dress his Century wore –
A privilege – I think –

His venerable Hand to take –
And warming in our own –
A passage back – or two – to make –
To Times when he – was young – . . .
When Plato – was a Certainty –
And Sophocles – a Man –

When Sappho – was a living Girl –
And Beatrice wore
The Gown that Dante – deified –
Facts Centuries before

He traverses – familiar –
As One should come to Town –
And tell you all your Dreams – were true –
He lived – where Dreams were born –

His presence is enchantment –
You beg him not to go –
Old Volumes shake their Vellum Heads
And tantalize – just so – (F569)[13]