

THE EMILY
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Dickinson's Fascicles

THE SUBJECT OF CONTEXT

To look at the history of Dickinson criticism is to see that what is memorialized are her ellipses, her canceled connections, the "revoked . . . referentiality" of the poetry. The phrase is from Geoffrey Hartman's *Criticism in the Wilderness* (129), but one thinks also of Jay Leyda's description of Dickinson as writing "riddle[s]," poems of the "omitted center" (1: xxi); of Robert Weisbuch's characterization of this poetry as "sceneless," producing "analogical language which exists in parallel to a world of experience, as its definition" (*Poetry* 19); of David Porter's assessment that "here is the verbal equivalent of *sfumato*, the technique in expressionistic painting whereby information . . . on a canvas is given only piecemeal and thereby necessarily stimulates the imaginative projection of the viewer, who, out of his own experience, supplies the missing . . . context" (*Early Poetry* 99) of an earlier claim of my own that the poems "excavate the territory that lies past the range of all phenomenal sense" (*Lyric Time* 9). Or, to allow Hartman to make the point one more time: Dickinson, the "dangerous" purifier, italicizes "leanness," more than leanness even—the "zero" meaning of the hyphen that punctuates the poetry (130–31). In Hartman's discussion, the hyphen becomes emblematic. "Perhaps because it both joins and divides, [it is like] a hymen. . . . That hyphen-hymen persephtonates Emily" (126).

But does it? What if this way of reading her poetry belies the way it was written or, once written, put together (both internally structured and also made contiguous)? What if these poems are less alien than we had supposed? Or not alien in the way we had supposed? What if they are not quite as sceneless or cryptic (even apparently subjectless) as the characterizations insist? Or what if the scenes and subjects can be said to unfold between and among the poems as well as within them?

To consider poems as individual lyrics is to suppose boundedness. To consider poems as related—as, say, a sequence would relate them—is differently to suppose boundedness, in that poems which are seen to be connected must first be seen to be discrete. To consider poems as not discrete but also as not

related is to complicate the negotiations between interior and exterior. This Dickinson does by raising questions about the identity of the text. With respect to Dickinson's fascicles—to anticipate my argument—the variant is a way of getting at what the text "is." That is, in Dickinson's poems, variant words (and poems which we come to see as variants of each other) raise the question of what counts as the identity of the text in question. The question raised is: if this word—or this second poem—conventionally understood to be *outside* the poem is rather *integral* to the poem, how is the poem delimited? What is the poem? I shall argue that words that are variants are part of the poem outside of which they ostensibly lie, as poems in the same fascicle may sometimes be seen as variants of each other. In Dickinson's fascicles—where "variants" are more than the editorial term for discrete delimited choices—variants indicate both the desire for limit and the difficulty in enforcing it. The difficulty in enforcing a limit to the poems turns into a kind of limitlessness, for, as I shall demonstrate, it is impossible to say where the text ends because the variants extend the text's identity in ways that make it seem potentially limitless.²

Initially, however, my aim is to ask how the situation for understanding Dickinson's poems changes when we consider that they are at once isolated lyrics, as Thomas H. Johnson presented them in *The Complete Poems* (and in the variorum text), and poems that have the appearance of a sequence, as R. W. Franklin presented them when he published *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, a volume crucial for our reassessment of this poetry, about which I shall therefore say a few words before proceeding.³ First, the assertion that Franklin presents Dickinson's poems in sequences is one he would not accept. Dickinson organized most of her nearly 1,800 poems into her own form of bookmaking: selected poems copied in ink onto bifolia "sheets of letter paper already folded by the manufacturer to produce two leaves" (Franklin 1: xi). Then she stabbed them and bound them with string. Franklin has argued that no aesthetic principle governs their binding. It was, nevertheless, Franklin's goal to reproduce in facsimile the manuscripts that Dickinson bound with string into forty fascicles from about 1858 to 1864 and the fifteen "sets"—poems which, primarily after 1864, she copied but never bound.⁴

Second, Franklin claims the binding was a means of keeping order among her poems. But an alternative speculation is that the fascicles were a form of private publication.⁵ Franklin's assumption that they were a means of keeping order among her poems begs the question of what such an order would be. The alternative, that the fascicles were a form of private publication—halfheartedly endorsed by Franklin in the introduction to the facsimile, and (as I shall explain) contested by him elsewhere—has its plausibility heightened by reference to "New Poetry," an essay of Emerson's printed in *The Dial* in

1840, in which he advised authors, in distinction to the dominant strain of poetic tradition, to collect album poetry, for, Emerson writes, a “revolution in literature is now giving importance to the portfolio over the book.” (Porte 169). In making her lyrics into manuscript books—in effect, constituting manuscripts as if they were books—Dickinson may have been responding to a revolution like the one predicated by Emerson. Indeed, once Dickinson had copied poems into fascicles she usually destroyed her worksheets. Such a practice invites us to regard the poems copied in the fascicles in the same way that her manner of collecting them suggests she might herself have regarded them: as definitive, if privately published, texts. The copying and binding, and the destruction of the worksheets, insist that this is the fascicles’ status, despite the fact that Dickinson subsequently adopted variants from the fascicle sheets in the “text” she sent to friends, and despite the fact that it is one of the characteristics of the fascicle texts, especially after 1861, that variants to words also exist in fair copy, indeed exist as *part* of the text of the last thirty fascicles.⁶

When Franklin writes that the fascicles were a means of keeping order among Dickinson’s poems, he means that they literally helped her to tidy up: “The disorder that fascicle sheets forestalled may be seen in the ‘scraps’ of the later years. When she did not copy such sheets and destroy the previous versions, her poems are found on hundreds of odds and ends—brown paper bags, magazine clippings, discarded envelopes and letters, the backs of recipes” (“Fascicles” 16). Thus Franklin imagines Dickinson’s keeping order as her means of making the poems consistent with respect to their physical appearance, rather than as her means of organizing them. According to his explanation, the poems are not “artistic gatherings” at all but rather “private documents with practical uses, gatherings of convenience for poems finished or unfinished” (17).

When Franklin speculates that the fascicles are meant to order (tidy up) rather than to arrange (make significant), as evidence of this he cites the fact that Dickinson may have had a backlog of poems written before they were copied and bound. This was probably the case in 1862 when, Franklin writes, “Emily Dickinson could have had a significant number of poems in her pool and, in that year, perhaps spurred on by the correspondence with Higginson, set in vigorously to organizing them, now letting poems enter the fascicles trailing many alternates” (“Fascicles” 15). An opposite assumption is that Dickinson was saving these poems to see *how* they would go together, allowing single lyrics, or several lyrics copied onto one bifolium, to remain temporarily separate or piecemeal so that she could ultimately stitch them into the different comprehensive entity that the fascicle gathering made of them. And if it is more probable to suppose (as Franklin also does; see “Fascicles” 13) that the poems in twenty of Dickinson’s forty fascicles were *copied* rather than all (nec-

essarily) written in 1862, then whether Dickinson saved her poems with the idea of eventually organizing them or whether in 1862 she came to group and identify poems previously seen as discrete—identifications marked by the copying and the fascicle binding—is in a sense less significant than that we consider what the gatherings made of these poems. It is important that we consider, as the copying most dramatically in that year instructs us to do, whether structures are being created out of ostensibly discrete entities. Sometimes sheets were copied in different years and only subsequently bound. Of these Franklin writes: “Binding followed copying, sometimes years later mixing sheets from different years. That such sheets were copied in different years suggests that no fascicle-level order governed their preparation” (17). Yet sheets copied in different years and only subsequently bound rather suggest to me sheets over which a high degree of order has been exercised, suggest that, in the delay between the copying and the binding, what is precisely being governed, made visible, and materially determined is the preparation of an entity.

Whatever his suppositions about Dickinson’s texts, Ralph Franklin’s re-establishment of the order in which the sheets in each fascicle were bound is of inestimable value to all readers of Dickinson, and in fact to all readers of poetry. Indeed, Franklin’s restoration of the internal sequence of the fascicles—no internal order could be established for the sets since they were never bound—in *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* has immediate practical consequences for Dickinson’s reader, for reading Franklin’s text of the poems is different from reading Johnson’s text of the poems. This is the case even when Franklin and Johnson ascribe identical dates to the poems so that there is the same consecutive relation among several poems in both editions. In the Johnson edition the unit of sense is the individual poem; beyond that, it is whatever arbitrary place the reader decides to close the book. In fact, although Johnson arranges the poems chronologically, that arrangement of poems gives the reader the impression of no arrangement at all, because in a year like 1862 there are over 300 poems. In the facsimile, these poems do not follow on the page as they do in the Johnson variorum. Rather, as I hope to show, in Franklin they exist in groups with internal sequences.⁷ Thus, in the Franklin edition the unit of sense is not the individual poem but rather the fascicle book, and one wonders about the relation among the fascicles as well as about the relation between the fascicles and the sets—or at least the question of such relations is raised by the contiguity of these units.⁸

That Dickinson ordered her poems is argued by other evidence of the manuscripts: by the fact that, for example, on the first leaf of fascicle 9 (dated by Franklin and Johnson as copied in 1860) Dickinson added “Bound — a trouble —” (P269, dated as added about 1861), although there would have

been room to add this poem elsewhere in the same fascicle (on the second side of the next leaf), and by the fact that in fascicles 12 and 14 poems from different years—from 1860 and 1861, in the case of 12, and from 1861, 1858, and 1862, in the case of 14—are bound together, although in each of these years Dickinson wrote numerous poems and in other fascicles she characteristically bound poems from the same year together. It is further argued by the example of fascicle 8, in which a poem is copied twice in different places in the fascicle with variant first lines (“Portraits are to daily faces” [P 170] becomes in the second instance of copying “Pictures are to daily faces”), as if each were a separate poem. Since the repeated poems are separated by several leaves and by nine intervening poems, and since there is space earlier in the fascicle to have copied “Pictures are to daily faces,” Dickinson may have been structuring the fascicle by her disparate placements of the so-called same poem. This arrangement of poems—perceptible in Dickinson’s copying practices; in her adding to a “completed” fascicle, in her repeating a poem within a fascicle, in her copying on matching leaves poems she then placed in separate fascicles, in her composing a fascicle with poems from different years—suggests a conceptual scheme, although fascicle 9, the same fascicle that suggests that scheme by virtue of the added poem, also leaves the reader uncertain how the scheme is to be understood, because it is not clear to what the poem is “added” (the immediate sequence of poems? the specific poem preceding it? the whole fascicle?).

Here one could equivocate about questions of order by saying that whether Dickinson produced the order or whether the reader produces the order of the fascicles by registering the poems’ juxtaposition there is immaterial, since the question of the author’s intention is always undecidable. But the question of intention, at least at one level, is not undecidable—because we know that Dickinson intended something. After all, she copied the poems into the fascicles. The question then is: in doing so, what did she intend? Looking at the fascicles it might even appear that Dickinson’s intention was to be indeterminate with respect to the relation among these poems, since lyric structures whose boundaries are conventionally left intact are in the fascicles characteristically punctured by the “outside” (which I shall argue is not an “outside”) composed of variants and other poems. Or, to explain the situation in positive terms, it seems that given such violations of boundaries it might differently appear that Dickinson intended to redetermine our very understanding of how the identity of a poetic structure is to be construed. With respect to the binding, we do know, however minimal this knowledge may initially be deemed to be, that Dickinson intended to associate these poems with each other. Thus the question is not whether intentions are relevant. The question is rather how to understand the extraordinarily complex, perhaps even con-

flicted, set of intentions, beliefs, desires that are registered when Dickinson’s poems are read in the fascicles in which she copied them. For to read the poems in the fascicles is to see that the contextual sense of Dickinson is not the canonical sense of Dickinson.

The point, then, is to examine what kinds of connections among poems are apparent when they are read in the fascicles, and perhaps even on what principle the “apparent” will be produced. Connections, while not possible to illustrate in all of the poems in a given fascicle, are demonstrable in a sufficient number of the poems to give the fascicle as a whole the appearance of a structure. This apparent structure consequently affects our understanding of the subjects of the poems. Specifically, as I shall explain, it affects our understanding of what subjects are. By “subjects” I do not here mean the first-person speaker, but I also do not mean the conventionally defined headings that Johnson produces in his “Subject Index,” which designate rhetorical and wholly unproblematic topics or themes. In fact, while the poem I shall consider at the beginning of the next section of this essay confirms the standard notion that a lyric of Dickinson’s is devoid of a subject; when one returns that lyric to the fascicle context the question of the subject comes back in a different way as a question about the nature of poetic subjects.

To sum up, then, I mean to ask how reading a lyric in a sequence is different from reading the lyric as independent, for to do the latter is to suppress the context and the relations that govern the lyric in context—a suppression generating that understanding of Dickinson’s poems as enigmatic, isolated, culturally incomprehensible phenomena which has dominated most Dickinson criticism, including my own. At issue in the following examination is the question of what happens when context—when the sequence—is not suppressed.

THE FASCICLES INVITE us to read Dickinson’s poems in the context of other sequences—Herbert’s *The Temple*, Barrett Browning’s sonnets, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, Shakespeare’s sonnets—which we can presume Dickinson had read.⁹ Yet to place Dickinson’s poems in the context of other lyric sequences does not imply that we should read her poems only in sequence, or even mainly in sequence, rather than as isolated lyrics. Therefore, demonstrating that the poems can be read in sequence, and demonstrating the multiple ways in which sequences can be read (as I shall in fascicle 15), does not clarify whether the poems are to be read in sequence or isolation. But the reason it does not illuminate this, I shall argue, is that Dickinson herself was uncertain about how her poems should be read, an uncertainty demonstrated by the fact that she both sent her poems to friends as individual lyrics and copied them in the fascicles in sequences. Or, to formulate the point more strongly, it is not merely that Dickinson was uncertain, but that she refused to make up her

mind about how her poems should be read. This refusal — another aspect of what I have called choosing not to choose — is crucial to the problematic of reading her poetry.

Multiple ways of reading Dickinson's poems are consonant with the multiple variants in those poems; I have touched on this topic earlier. Interestingly, the variants have characteristically been understood as a nuisance by her readers. In 1890 Dickinson's first editors, T. W. Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, eliminated all variants when they made other substantive textual changes. In 1960 Thomas Johnson did the equivalent, as he chose among the variants he had recorded to make a reader's edition. But what if we are to see the variants interlineated in a poem as posing alternatives to given words, which — this is crucial — are part of the poem? What if what Dickinson has to teach us is the multiplicity of meanings that, properly understood, resist exclusion? In other words, Dickinson appears to be understanding variants as non-exclusive alternatives — a phenomenon that would have analogues in Christopher Ricks's description of the antipun in which a poet "creates meanings which take into account those absent senses of a word which his verse is aware of fending off" (99). In Ricks's discussion of antipuns, though, these senses are absent in the sense of being implied while also being precluded. They are incorporated, for instance, in the second sense of a word which is implicitly ruled out. In Dickinson's poems alternative senses are displaced but not decisively so because they remain ambiguously counterpointed to the word to which they stand in explicit juxtaposition, and to which they often stand in direct proximity on the manuscript page. Thus, whereas in Ricks's notion of the antipun a second sense is entertained and then dismissed, in Dickinson's poems alternative words collide without particular words being clearly made secondary or subordinate. For alternatives to various words are not treated in Dickinson's text as *other* than those words.

One way of understanding variants is that a reader is required to choose between them and there is even evidence for both choices. Preliminary dilemmas aside, one is supposed to choose, and, indeed, if one had the right evidence, one could make the right choice. There is nothing ontologically tricky about such a situation.

A second way of understanding the problem of two entities that look like variants is that while they look as if they require to be chosen between, they do not so require because both are clearly part of the poem or of the single entity, as the following from Whitman's and Yeats's poetry clarify. Thus, for instance, in section 4 of *Song of Myself* where we are told of the grass, "I guess it must be the flag of my disposition . . . / Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord / Or I guess the grass is itself a child . . ." we are not meant to choose among these possibilities. Similarly, in the last stanza of Yeats's "Among the School

Children," where "nor" in effect means "or," when we are told that "Labour is blossoming or dancing where / The body is not bruised to pleasure soul, / Nor beauty born out of its own despair / Nor bleary-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil" we are not meant to choose among the possibilities. Not only is no choice required, but a choice would in fact be a mistake.

A third way of understanding variants — a way of understanding them necessitated by reading Dickinson's fascicles — is that they are meant to be experienced *as* variants, and so one is also meant to be experiencing the necessity of choosing between them. Thus the situation exemplified by Dickinson's variants is more like the first case than it is like the second. But it is different from the first case because there are no possible criteria that could enable one to choose. So, in this third case, the reader experiences the necessity for choosing, without access to the criteria by which she could make a choice. In other words, the problem is not solved by having more evidence, because the problem is not raised as a question of evidence. And in fact, as I have argued elsewhere, there is no way that the problem posed by the imperative to choose countered by the prohibition against choosing could be simplified or solved.¹⁰

One implication of not being able to choose among the variants is that we would have only one adequate text of Dickinson's poems — that of the facsimile — an unsatisfactory solution because in effect no one reads this text. That problem would seem to be solved if the decision were made to print a transcript of the fascicle texts, for then people would read them. Yet even if a transcript of the fascicle texts were printed, such publication would not address what I take to be the real problem: the nature of the relation between poem and text. That is, there is the "text" that is the document; there is the "text" that is the poem as the published or, in Dickinson's case, publishable entity; and there is the more contemporary sense of "text," which is what the poem becomes as "read." In Dickinson's case the contemporary or semiotic nature of "text" depends on the text as document. It specifically depends on the felt ladenness of the document's *alternatives* in some exacerbated way.

What is central here is the question of form. What the fascicles raise is precisely a question about the relation between text and poem (about the nonidentity of text and poem), a relation shown to be problematic by the fact that our difficulty of reading is not solved once one has chosen which text (Johnson's or Franklin's) one is going to read. For once a text has been chosen, if there are variants to that text, one has still not cleared up the question of how to read the variants. The metrics of the poem insist we choose only one of the variants. But the presence of the variants insists on the impossibility of doing so. Another way to describe the dilemma is that, since Dickinson refuses to choose among the variants, she disallows us from doing so. The conventional interpretation of this situation is that there are as many poems as there are

variants. This is precisely the wrong way to understand how words work in poems. The variants exert pressure against each other in a *particular* poem and at particular places *within* that poem.

DICKINSON'S NOT CHOOSING among the variants opens onto other aspects of not choosing in her poetry. I enumerate, albeit briefly, other aspects of doubleness — of choosing not to choose — in Dickinson's poetry that the examination of the textual situation helps to enlarge.

1. First, it is a commonplace that at the level of syntax Dickinson is characteristically choosing not to choose. It is not, for instance, clear whether "Slow Gold — but Everlasting —" in "Some Work for Immortality — / The Chieffer part, for Time —" (P406) refers to the compensations of "Time" or those of "Immortality." By association with the previous line the tenor of the metaphor would be "Immortality," not "Time," but in light of the following line it would be "Time" rather than "Immortality." Nothing will produce a resolution to the question about reference, since the syntax is unresolved, and definitively so, for according to the indeterminacy conveyed by the dashes the line cannot but be read in opposite directions and this simultaneously. Such doubleness, both syntactical and semantic, is less complicated in "At least — to pray — is left — is left —" (P502). But it is quite complicated in the last stanza of "Rehearsal to Ourselves" (P379): "We will not drop the Dirk — / Because We love the Wound / The Dirk Commemorate — Itself / Remind Us that we died." In these lines there is a choice between reading "Itself" as allied with "Dirk," with the reflexivity applied to the instrument, and reading "Itself" as applied to the wound inflicted by the dirk. In the second interpretation of the syntax the recollection is still fatal, but it is not, as in the first, futile. Since the fatality is caused by the loss — rather than by the recollection of the loss — it is compensated by being also caused by the "Bliss" associated with the loss, and inevitably recollected at the same time. And this choice is unresolvable since no amount of parsing will convert the syntax into conventionally punctuated lines that indicate which noun is underscored as object of the self-reflexive action. The dashes permit, even insist on, these overlapping, disparate meanings, suggesting both the futility of recollection and its compensations.

2. But if Dickinson characteristically does not choose syntactically, she also characteristically does not choose between the story ostensibly being told and the story actually being told. In "I cannot live with You —" (P640), for instance, choosing not to be with a lover rather means choosing the grounds on which to meet him: it means equating him with the God for whom he has ostensibly been given up. Often apparent in the difficulty of this poetry is the fact that two conflicting stories are told simultaneously (see Cameron, *Lyric Time* chap. 2). While the disruption caused by the doubleness punctuates the

experience of reading the poems, it is also a characteristic of these poems not to acknowledge the existence of double stories, hence not to establish alliances with one or the other of the stories, and thus to predicate a seamlessness belied by what is being voiced. So voice is at odds with itself in these poems, so much so that the proper term for the disagreement is in fact heteroglossia.

3. Dickinson is also choosing not to choose between the suggestion that certain experiences can be mapped — can be made comprehensible in terms of geographies and exteriors — and the suggestion made by the same poems that such experiences cannot be. Thus, for example, in a poem like "Bereaved of all, I went abroad —" (P784) a speaker attempts to reside elsewhere than where the loss is, literally to place herself at a geographic distance from loss, although the speaker is more explicit about the futility of such efforts than elsewhere. Such poems, in search of correlatives for interior experience, often resort to the language of measurement in order to insist on the impossibility of it (as in "A nearness to Tremendousness —" [P963]). Or they raise questions about what it means to define experience in terms of categories without content ("I stepped from Plank to Plank" [P875]). These poems might be described as sceneless, but in fact they avail themselves of quite elaborate maps, geographies, scenes, and coordinates ("Behind Me — dips Eternity — / Before Me — Immortality — / Myself — the Term between —" [P721]), even if the claim made by the elaborate representations is countered by the categorical emptiness of the same representations, by the fact that what is being mapped is only technically or terminologically coherent. In the poems Dickinson is choosing not to choose whether certain experiences *can* be mapped — whether something that is only categorically comprehensible is comprehensible or not. She is choosing not to choose what the coordinates of an experience are, choosing not to choose whether internal scenes can have external coordinates. And she is choosing not to choose whether certain exteriorizations ("a Funeral, in my Brain" [P280]) fulfill the task assigned to them — here to make a conceit of repression — or whether, in not forestalling the repression, the exteriorization fails to fulfill the task assigned to it. In fact, this exteriorization is itself equivocal; it gives literal, external form to an inner event but immediately relocates it within ("in my Brain").

4. Dickinson is also not choosing how particular words are to be read. Consider "None may teach it — Any —" in "There's a certain Slant of light" (P258) where what is implied is "None may teach it — [not] Any[one else] —"; "None may teach it — Any[thing]" (it is not subject to alteration); and "None may teach it — [to] Any[one else] —." In "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," consider the poem's last line: "And Finished knowing — then —," where it is ambiguous whether knowing is finished or whether the experience which prevents knowing is finished. And consider the last line of "After great pain, a

formal feeling comes —” (P341), “First — Chill — then Stupor — then the letting go —” with its ambiguity about whether what “letting go” implies is the ability to feel, which would reverse the “Chill” and “Stupor” that have preceded it, or whether what is oppositely implied by the whole series of nouns are the final stages of the inability to feel that terminate in death.

5. The refusal to choose — choosing not to choose — how syntax is to be read, how double voices and sometimes contradictory stories are related to each other, how lines which *can* be read in antithetical ways *should* in fact be read, is reiterated in the question mark with which so many of Dickinson’s poems conclude: “Which Anguish was the utterest — then / To perish, or to live?” (P414), “Could it be Madness — this?” (P410), “And could I, further, ‘No’?” (P446), “Say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth — / Hast thou no Arm for Me?” (P502), “‘My Husband — women say / Stroking the Melody — / Is *this* — the way?” (P1072), and so on.

6. Finally, Dickinson’s choosing not to choose is dramatically reiterated in the questions raised by the discrepancy between the boundedness implied by the quatrain form and the apparent boundlessness implied by the variant. Not choosing in Dickinson’s poetry thus results in a heteroglossia whose manifestations inform every aspect of the poetry.

EXCESS

In an atypical but logically first example of what we might expect from consideration of a poem in its fascicle placement, recourse to the fascicle context can prove simply clarifying. Consider the following poem (P378) as an isolated lyric:

I saw no Way — The Heavens were stitched —
 I felt the Columns close —
 The Earth reversed her Hemispheres —
 I touched the Universe —

 And back it slid — and I alone —
 A Speck upon a Ball —
 Went out upon Circumference —
 Beyond the Dip of Bell —

Read thus — as an isolated lyric — the poem seems like an exercise in solecism, as well as solipsism, having not only no referent but also no context: barely comprehensible.

But to read the poem differently in the context of the poem that precedes it on the same bifolium in fascicle 31 is to see that there could be a referent for the experience. For the first line of the previous poem, copied on the other

side of the page of “I saw no Way” is “To lose one’s faith — surpass / The loss of an Estate —” (P377), and this proximity, however loosely, establishes the poems in a relation to each other, suggesting that the cause of the disorientation might not be mysterious at all, but rather loss of faith. Moreover, to read “I saw no Way” in relation to yet a different poem, the first in the same bifolium, “The Soul’s Superior instants” (P306), is to see that it too represents a geography in which recognizable features of a scene are abolished, the speaker in “The Soul’s Superior instants” being said to have “ascended / To too remote a Hight / For lower Recognition” — to have ascended, in other words, to a sphere in which what occurs is called “Mortal Abolition,” the abolition of the mortal world which is then replaced by an apparitional world not dissimilar to that in “I saw no Way.”

Yet to establish a relation between and among poems is not yet to clarify it. Would, for instance, the epithet “Superior,” which characterizes the moments of dissociation from the earthly world in “The Soul’s Superior instants,” equally apply to similar moments in “I saw no Way”? Or would it rather be the case that the exaltation and the despair of such alien moments were, in the two poems, being counterpointed to each other? Ultimately, in the second of the poems in the same bifolium (“Me prove it now — Whoever doubt” [P537]) what is represented simultaneously is the imminence of a *speaker’s* death and the recollection of her lover’s death. As “Me prove it now” precedes “To lose one’s faith — surpass / The loss of an Estate,” would the lover’s death in one poem be the cause of the loss of faith in the next, a loss of faith whose *consequences*, one could say, are demonstrated in the apocalyptic imagery of the poem “I saw no Way — the Heavens were stitched —” with which we began? To ask these questions, as the poem read in the fascicle context makes it inevitable that we do, is not to arrive at a more stable interpretive situation, but it is to arrive at a different interpretive situation than that in which the poem is read elliptically as a decontextualized utterance. It is to be confronted by a different interpretive situation just to the extent that there are relations among poems that we cannot disregard and, as much to the point, that we do not precisely know how to comprehend.

To see a poem contextualized by a fascicle is sometimes to see that it has an altogether different, rather than only a relationally more complex, meaning when it is read in sequence rather than as an isolated lyric. For example, to read “Because I could not stop for Death —” (P712) with reference to other fascicles and to other poems in fascicle 23 is to see that the speaker’s journey may not be solitary, not because she is accompanied by the abstract figures of death and immortality but perhaps rather because she is accompanied by a lost lover here personified as death. This way of understanding the poem would be consonant with the many poems in the other fascicles and some of the poems

in this one, poems in which a lover has died, and it would explain why in "Because I could not stop for Death —" death is figured as a lover or in any case as a suitor. Such a contextualization changes the sense of the poem. It changes it since the speaker's inability to imagine an end to the journey because death cannot be imagined (the conventional reading of the poem) is different from her inability to imagine death's end because she is not in fact dead. Reread in the context of the fascicles, "Because I could not stop for Death —" proposes a haunted relation to a death, which, though always there in memory, *cannot* deliver passage to eternity since, though death is always present, it is never, in fact, one's own.¹¹

Yet if to read a poem in the fascicle context is potentially to domesticate it — to make it less uncanny than the conventional interpretation does — in other instances poems read in the fascicle context call such a domestication into question. Thus, in fascicle 24, "This is my letter to the World / That never wrote to Me — / The simple News that Nature told — / With tender Majesty" (P441) — that poem anthologized in high-school textbooks to epitomize Dickinson at her most saccharine — is not necessarily a poem about a benign telling of nature's secret. Rather, at least with reference to surrounding poems in the fascicle, the secret being told is ominous. One poem in the same fascicle, for example, describes the earth as "A Pit — but Heaven over it —" (P1712); in others, life extends without significance or value, one speaker explaining: "Therefore — we do life's labor — / Though life's Reward — be done — / With scrupulous exactness — / To hold our Senses — on —" (P443). In still another poem, "It sifts from Leaden Sieves —" (P311), nature in the form of a snowstorm obfuscates the visible, making it unrecognizable, as negation makes things unrecognizable. In "This is my letter to the World," the telling of nature's story is not benign but rather informed by sinister aspects of the fascicle's other poems. For the letter to the world, its delivery to our "Hands," to hands the speaker "cannot see," is inescapably to be read as analogous to those stern communications the speaker has herself received.

But if reading poems in the fascicle context specifies subjects for poems and even in some cases their antecedents, it also raises problems about how the very groupings that contextualize poems are related to each other within the fascicles. I want now to sketch out these problems with respect to two issues raised in fascicle 15: the way in which the pairings of poems within a fascicle govern lyrics not implicated in the pairing; and conversely, the way in which a central poem in a fascicle can be seen to govern poems that appear paired or clustered.

By "paired" I mean the following: In several of the fascicles the first and last poems are either complementary or antithetical, or the poems are complementary *and* antithetical. In fascicle 28, for instance, the first poem ("My

period had come for Prayer —" [P564]) and the last ("I prayed, at first, a little Girl" [P576]) refute each other, in that while one suggests that prayer is transcended by worship the other suggests that prayer is deflected by the impossibility of worship. In fascicle 34 the first poem ("Bereavement in their death to feel" [P645]) represents a speaker's experience of a death for which there is no recompense, while the last poem "Essential Oils — are wrung —" [P675]) represents consolation for death in the essence that survives it: "this" ("The Attar from the Rose") "Make Summer — When the Lady lie / In Ceaseless Rosemary —." In fascicle 40, the last of the fascicles, the first and last poems ("The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality" [P827] and "Unfulfilled to Observation —" [P972]) represent speakers who perceive immortality and who, oppositely, are unable to do so. Thus the first and last poems of many of the fascicles, while differently related to each other, are undeniably linked, often by the reversal or countering of the idea in the initial poem. While outside of the fascicle context to see the same theme treated differently in disparate poems can seem an accident resulting from arbitrarily placing these poems in proximity, within a fascicle context, in the instances I have described, it is impossible to see such conjunctions as arbitrary, since, placed by Dickinson at the beginning and end, they in effect frame what lies between them.

Fascicle 15 exemplifies the terms in which the phenomenon of pairing — and the heteroglossia made manifest in the pairing — is significant. Fascicle 15 contains paired poems governed by three sets of antithetical assertions: first, that madness can't be stopped ("The first Day's Night had come —" [P410]) and that it *can* be ("We grow accustomed to the Dark —" [P419]); second, that losing a lover — and therefore only having him speculatively — is unbearable ("It is dead — Find it —" [P417]) and, conversely, that having him only speculatively is entirely bearable ("Not in this World to see his face —" [P418] and "If I may have it, when it's dead" [P577]); third, that direct knowledge is desired ("You'll know it — as you know 'tis Noon —" [P420]) and, conversely, that oblique knowledge is superior ("A Charm invests a face / Imperfectly beheld —" [P421]). Moreover, these three apparently unrelated topics may be seen to be connected because, in the fascicle context, through the proximity of the poems, antithetical attitudes toward madness and toward knowing are generated by the specific subjects of not knowing — and of not having — the lover. Therefore a narrative not suggested by any of the poems read singly is suggested by the poems read in relation, though not in chronological relation.

In fascicle 15, as noted, the connections among paired poems also affect a reader's understanding of poems not implicated in the pairing. More, poems that are not part of a pair, and not apparently implicated in the concerns of any of the pairs, may seem to govern all of the pairs by applying, if only indeter-

minately, to even one of the three concerns they manifest. This is the case with "I found the words to every thought / I ever had — but One —" (P581), because which *one*—which thought—seems to refer to one of the fascicle's three central topics (not having the lover, not knowing [the lover], madness [because of not knowing or not having the lover]) without being definitively identified with any one of these. The indeterminacy has the effect of retaining the ambiguity of the one subject for which words cannot be found. Indeed, it has the effect of heightening the tension around the poem's ambiguity since the possibilities are narrowed to three without being reduced to one. Similarly, "I had been hungry, all the Years —" (P579), that poem which, even read singly, presents hunger as a conventional metaphor for desire, addresses, by changing the terms of, the three topics that dominate the fascicle. It does so because, as this is the last poem in the fascicle, "I had been hungry, all the Years —" would seem to advocate *not* having, *not* knowing, *not* wanting, except speculatively, the lover of whose presence the speaker had—in the paired antitheses—earlier been *deprived*. Thus the final poem in the fascicle, which in effect specifies a complicated connection between having and desiring, itself exists in opposition to the attitude toward desire expressed by the poems that have preceded it. They adopt various stances toward what the speaker desires but does not have. The final poem oppositely defines having as itself antithetical to desire.

That a fascicle's various paired antitheses should, by proximity or contiguity, be associated with each other; that poems unimplicated in any of the fascicle's antithetically paired poems should nevertheless seem to refer to them (as "I found the words to every thought / I ever had — but One —" does); that a single poem should come into definitive antithetical relation to the series of paired opposites against which that single poem chronologically positions itself (as "I had been hungry, all the Years —" does)—in other words, that patterns discernible in some of the poems should inevitably affect a reader's perception of other poems ostensibly outside of that pattern—reveals yet another order a fascicle imposes on the poems within it. The order not of a narrative, and not of a single structure, it is, in the case of fascicle 15, the order of antithetical perspectives that come to seem complementary, come even to seem unified when they are read in opposition to a poem—the last in the fascicle—whose assertions assault the supposition on which the oppositions are founded. It is the order of poems whose allegiances shift, and can be seen to do so.

To exemplify, one last time, the differences between reading in the fascicles and reading lyrics singly, consider the relationship between two celebrated poems, "Of Bronze — and Blaze —" (P290) and "There's a certain Slant of light" (P258), that follow each other in fascicle 13, a juxtaposition which is

X

Of Bronze and Blaze -
 The South - tonight -
 So adequate - it - forms -
 So por concerted with itself -
 So distant - to - Alarm -
 An Unconcern so sovereign
 To - Universe , or nu -
 Subject my simple spirit -
 With faints of Mapoli -
 Till I take vast attitudes
 And stand upon my stem - manners
 Disdaining men , and Oxygen ,
 For arrogance of them -

My Splendors , an Menagerie -
 But - their Compulsive Show
 Will entertain the Centuries
 When I , am long ago ,
 An Island in dishonored
 Grass .

Exhum nam out - Elavio , known .
 B.C.C.S -

+ some -

1. Fascicle 13, "Of bronze and blaze." By permission of The Houghton Library, Harvard University. (Ms Am 1118, 3 [74]). © The President and Fellows of Harvard College.

There's a certain Slant of Light,
 Winter Afternoons,
 That oppresses, like the Great-
 Of Cathedral Tunes—
 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—
 We can find no scar,
 But internal Difference
 When the Meanings, are—
 None may teach it—Any—
 'Tis the Seal of Despair—
 An Imperial Affliction
 Sent us of the Air—
 When it comes, the Landscape Lists
 Shadows—hold their breath—
 When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
 On the Look of Death.

fascinating for the disparate stances it offers toward the attempt to take loss impersonally, to reconstrue nature's manifestations of indifference to persons as benign. In "Of Bronze — and Blaze —" nature's indifference to us is what we are to cultivate in relation to ourselves. But if "Of Bronze — and Blaze —" records the indifference to the self that the self should and does adopt, "There's a certain Slant of light" cannot do this, the speaker there rather internalizing indifference as the difference that is betrayal — as a sign of despair and death. Fascicle 13 records a series of connected attempts to understand loss as natural, as a mere conversion, say, of day into night. To the extent that the speakers accept the impersonality of such a metaphor (as "Of Bronze — and Blaze —" does), loss is inconsequential; to the extent that loss seems only alien, the speaker is afflicted by the difference that registers as internal ("Where the Meanings, are"). For with respect to the shifting light that "comes," that "goes," this shifting, when internalized, when taken in or taken personally, turns to despair. "Of Bronze — and Blaze —" does not, then, simply contextualize "There's a certain Slant of light"; it also changes its meaning, for when the two poems are read as retorts to each other, the second becomes a denial of the neutral perspective advanced as natural in the poem that precedes it. Or rather the second poem makes clear that the *natural* perspective is not the *person's* perspective and cannot be made so.

In my discussion of Dickinson's fascicles in general and of fascicle 15 in particular, I have raised questions rather than answering them: What is the difference between reading a poem in a fascicle context and reading it as an isolated lyric? What are the distinct ways in which poems are related in a fascicle? How do poems which seem grouped in clusters or pairs affect poems not ostensibly implicated in that grouping? How do single poems become central poems in the fascicle context? Finally, I would want to ask why these are not merely formal questions. Or in what way do formal questions have theoretical implications for rethinking the very nature and limits of form? I conclude this essay by briefly taking up the last of these questions.

BLAKE SYSTEMATIZED MEANING. Spenser allegorized it. Whitman eroticized it. More than any other poet Dickinson economizes it: makes the question of its economy (how much or little) and the question of its relativity, its in(ter)determinacy (how much and how little in relation to what), central to the poetry. For while a first, cursory understanding of economy would endorse the ideology of leanness as an absolute condition of Dickinson's poems and of their meaning, in fact what Dickinson is ultimately always questioning is the economy according to which poems are written, as she is also always questioning the economics within them, endlessly raising questions of relation and magnitude. It is as if sense for Dickinson were defined in the tension between too

2. Fascicle 13, "There's a certain slant of light." By permission of The Houghton Library, Harvard University. (Ms Am 1118, 3 [74]). © The President and Fellows of Harvard College.

little and too much—specifically the tension occasioned by how subjects are construed, given delimited boundaries and related—that imperfectly regulates the experience of her poems. This too little or too much is easily recognizable in the thematics of her poetry, as in the disequilibrium of the “one Draught of Life” paid for by “existence —” (P1725) or the temporal disequilibrium of “Transporting must the moment be — / Brewed from decades of Agony!” (P207). And there are other examples: “Because You saturated Sight — / And I had no more Eyes / For sordid excellence / As Paradise” (P640); “Why Floods be served to Us — in Bowls — / I speculate no more —” (P756); “I had not minded — Walls — / Were Universe — one Rock . . . But ’tis a single Hair — / A filament — a law — / A Cobweb — wove in Adamant — / A Battlement — of Straw —” (P398). But this too little or too much is also recognizable in the disequilibrium of excess—words crowding each other out in the displacements of variants that don’t in fact displace each other, in alternative ways of reading that are not really alternative.

As this description implies, if Dickinson’s poems economize meaning, in so doing they make it problematically relational, illuminating what could be described as a central discovery of Dickinson’s poems, perhaps even the thing they most have to teach us: how relations specify subjects by obliquity and juxtaposition, and indeed specify subjects in the process of either evolving or shifting. I have now indicated preliminarily how this works in a fascicle context where poems are paired in ways that are both antithetical and fluid. In conclusion I touch on how meaning is made relational in a single instance. For although one manifestation of Dickinson’s presumed intention may be seen to confine the reading of poems to the fascicle, when lyrics are nevertheless read outside this context the poems may newly be seen to reveal, perhaps by virtue of the fascicle reading, what the boundaries of their subjects are and how those boundaries must be seen to shift. Or perhaps it is the case that the multiple shifts that we see in the fascicles suddenly make sense of—even actually make visible—shifts that have always, albeit unaccountably, marked aspects of our reading of the poems considered singly.

At the end of “Because I could not stop for Death —” (P712), the “Horses Heads” loom over the edge of the poem, claiming our attention, for these heads, which are regarded from the vantage of the carriage, block or obstruct. The “Horses Heads” are not, then, only a synecdoche for the horses; they are also, more precisely, a way of delineating that impediment to the speaker’s vision: they are all she can see, or what she cannot see beyond. What I mean to emphasize in this familiar instance is the way in which the subject is made to change as the part subsumes the whole, or potentially does so—synecdoche being a governing as well as a topical issue—even while its unspecified relation to that whole remains insisted on, in the vision of the “Horses Heads” that

replaces the vision of “Death.” The formal concerns raised by the fascicles duplicate the formal concerns raised by single lyrics, occasioning, not incidentally, questions that are not formal.

What is a subject? How is it bounded? What are the boundaries around what something is? Dickinson raises these questions because she writes into being subjects (in the sense of topics) that are conventionally written out of it. But she also raises these questions by reconstructing the subject as something that is at once economized and relational; by insistently treating the subject as something not given and also not single (one specific relation in question being that of part to whole); by amplifying the idea of a subject to include its variants as well as variant ways of conceiving it. Finally, Dickinson raises these questions by producing utterances that are extrageneric, even unclassifiable, and (for that reason, in a way that it seems to me no one yet has quite explained) untitled.

NOTES

1. Certainly the history of Dickinson criticism from the 1890s to the present, as the quotations above indicate, has preserved a consistent account of the poet. It has stressed the separations in the poems (among grammatical and syntactical units), as well as the separation of any given utterance from a decipherable situation that it could be said to represent; and it has stressed vexed connections among them. Specifically, as the chronology of the poems is not seen to signal development, critics are deprived of one conventional way of discussing the poetry, and this deprivation is often countered by certain primitive groupings of the poems, according to thematic similarities, formal properties, evaluative assessments that discriminate poems that are successful from those that are not—with the constant implication that there is no inherent way of understanding relations among the poems. The taxonomies advanced for Dickinson’s poems are different from those advanced for other poets, because when the poems are sorted it is precisely to emphasize idiosyncrasies and repetitions (of traits, themes, syntactic features), as if what Dickinson had to teach us were that there is no way to comprehend the alien except by the most critically reductive strategies of categorizing and comparison.

2. In this essay I primarily exemplify the ways in which poems are associated, rather than also the ways in which variants to words in lines are associated. However, as variants to words in the line and variant poems are central features of the fascicle text, both are discussed. For an amplified discussion of the two subjects, see Cameron, *Choosing*.

3. When in my discussion I consider a single line that includes variants, I enclose the variants in brackets, with slash marks separating the alternative words. When I discuss variants without quoting a whole line, brackets are omitted, and a slash mark alone indicates the presence of alternatives.

4. The sets have many of the characteristics of the fascicles except that they were not stab-bound and tied. According to Franklin, Dickinson stopped *binding* fascicle sheets around 1864, though there are a few unbound sheets as early as 1862 (set 1 is dated 1862 by Franklin; sets 2–4, 1864). In the late 1860s Dickinson stopped *copying*

fascicle sheets. In the 1870s she began copying fascicle sheets again (sets 5–7 are dated between 1864 and 1866, though, as noted, the majority of the poems in the remaining sets [8–15] are from the 1870s), but she never again bound them (see *Manuscript Books* 1: xii–xiii). For a concise discussion of the differences among the bound fascicles, the unbound fascicle sheets, the worksheets, and the miscellaneous fair copies, as well as for Franklin's speculations about the ways Dickinson variously used the bound fascicles, and for a detailed description of how Franklin reassembled them, see the introduction to *Manuscript Books*.

5. It is important to reiterate that this and the following assertions about Dickinson's intentions with respect to the fascicles are speculative. While the following pages produce an empirical argument about how the fascicles work, and about what the fascicles are, the basis of that argument is, and could only be, speculative.

6. The earliest fascicles have no variants; the first occurrence of a variant is in fascicle 5, and there are only five other variants for poems through fascicle 10. These variants, often multiple and not uniformly positioned at the end of the poem, as in the Johnson edition, are sometimes signaled in the facsimile text by the little "+" signs that Dickinson used near a word to indicate variants to that word. In the facsimile text the variants appear in the following diverse positions: at the end of the poem, to the side of the poem, and underneath or above a particular stanza, word, or line. Sometimes the variants to words are virtually inseparable from the text, as in the second stanza of "I think the Hemlock" (P525). Frequently a variant appears above the word: "The [maddest/nearest] dream — recedes — unrealized —" (P319). Or to the side of the line: "The Cordiality of Death — / Who [drills/nails] his Welcome in —" (P286). Or to the side of and at right angles to the poem, as in "There is a pain — so utter —" (P599) and "Like Some Old fashioned Miracle —" (P302). Or underneath the word: "An Island in dishonored Grass — Whom none but [Daisies / Beetles —] know" (P290). In the same poem another variant ("manners") is also noted below the word ("attitudes") that is on the line. But a third variant appears at the end of the poem, "An/Some — Island," making it seem that different ways of noting variants indicate different ways of understanding alternatives in relation to each other. Only in the later years of the copying are the variants positioned characteristically at the poem's end, Dickinson having apparently standardized her placement of them.

Infrequently Dickinson drew a line through words to signal their replacement by alternatives. See, e.g., P241, "I like a look of Agony," in which in the first line of the second stanza, "Death comes," is decisively crossed out and replaced by "The Eyes glaze once — and that is Death —," and P322, "There came a Day — at Summer's full —," where substantive decisions against word choices are marked by lines through those words, with the preferred alternatives unambiguously chosen. I say "unambiguously chosen," but even here the choice unambiguously made may subsequently have been *unmade*. A second fair copy, for which no manuscript is extant presumably written after the fascicle copying, is reproduced in facsimile on four pages preceding the title page of *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, Second Series, ed. T. W. Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd (1891). That fair copy adopts some of the canceled fascicle readings which had appeared (erroneously) to have been definitively deleted. There Dickinson restores words in the second, third, and penultimate stanzas.

However exceptional, these excisions insist, by distinction, that Dickinson's typical way of *noting* variants is not random but indicates her way of *understanding* variants. I elaborate in the body of the text.

7. In the fascicles Dickinson often, though not always, drew a line after the variants that concluded a poem, thereby indicating an end to the unit of sense. But because the poems are ordered and bound and because there are sometimes several poems to the bifolium, the collocation oppositely implies a potential relation among poems. (In fascicle 14, where poems from 1861, 1858, 1862 are bound in that sequence, the implications of "order" are differently unmistakable.)

Moreover, within the bifolium, the method of copying is varied. It is varied because, as indicated, a line is frequently but not always drawn after a poem, and because, although the bifolia are customarily filled, there are instances of blank half rectos and versos. This is particularly the case in fascicle 11, where whole sheets and half sheets are left blank. But there is also a three-quarters blank first verso in fascicle 15; nine blank lines and a blank verso conclude fascicle 18, while in fascicle 13 the first bifolium contains a three-quarters blank second recto. Such variations indicate that Dickinson may be regulating *which*, as well as *how many*, poems belong in a particular bifolium. The method of copying is also varied because, while the fascicles are ordinarily composed of single, folded sheets — with a disjunct leaf or slip added rarely, where necessary, to continue a poem — fascicle 11 contains as many as four disjunct leaves (see Franklin's tables for Dickinson's manner of accommodating overflow of poems and for the locations of disjunct leaves within particular fascicles, in *Manuscript Books* 2: 1413 and 2: 1414, respectively).

Further, while Dickinson characteristically tries to complete a poem on a single page, and if it runs over, it characteristically does so by as many as four lines, in fascicle 11 there are only two lines on the verso of the fourth sheet. Finally, although Franklin is right to say that the sheet or bifolium is the unit of *manuscript* integrity (an assumption borne out by Dickinson's manner of accommodating overflow from the sheet), the sheet or bifolium is not the unit of *thematic* integrity.

8. The relation "among" the fascicles is itself problematic because, in Franklin's words, Dickinson "did not number or otherwise label" or index them (*Manuscript Books* 1: x). Thus, though in the facsimile they are now arranged according to a presumed chronology, it is only arbitrarily that fascicle 13 precedes fascicle 14. This is the case because, while one can determine that certain fascicles were copied in the same year, it is now impossible to determine the particular order in which they were copied within that year. Fascicle 13 would seem to precede fascicle 14 in that the former dates from 1861 while the latter has poems which Franklin dates from 1862, as well as from 1858 and 1861. But fascicle 11, too, has poems from 1861, and fascicle 12 has poems from 1861 as well as 1860. Moreover, by virtue of these different dates, it would appear that in binding the sheets Dickinson worked from a pool of manuscripts, and therefore the exact relation of fascicle 13 to fascicle 14, if Dickinson intended one, cannot be surmised. Fascicles 11 through 14 are the most problematic of the fascicles, since in them the binding practices are inconsistent. Specifically, Dickinson there deviates from her practice of binding poems presumably copied in the same year.

9. Herbert was anthologized in Chambers's *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, as he also was in Griswold's *Sacred Poets of England and America* (New York: Appleton; dated 1849 on the title page and 1848 on the copyright page). Susan Gilbert Dickinson owned the 1844 edition of the *Cyclopaedia* published in Edinburgh by William and Robert Chambers; Edward Dickinson's copy was printed in Boston in 1847 by Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln. A separate edition of *The Temple* was owned by Susan Gilbert Dickinson. Finally, although there is no proof that Dickinson read Shakespeare's son-

nets, since her letters do not allude to them in particular, Edward Dickinson had a copy of the sonnets in his eight-volume 1853 edition of Shakespeare's *Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, and Poems*, which we know Dickinson had read, and which Richard Sewall tells us Edward Dickinson purchased in 1857. See Capps, *Reading* 12, 68–69, and *Life* 2: 467. See, too, Sewall's list of books in the Dickinson Collection at Houghton Library, some of them, as indicated by the library's register, containing markings "probably" or "perhaps" by Dickinson (*Life* 2: 678–79). Dickinson mentions Tennyson and Barrett Browning in her letters, and the collections of their poems owned by the Dickinson family are in the Houghton Library.

10. See, e.g., the discussion of P319, "The [maddest/nearest] dream recedes unrealized," in which I argue that the variants must be considered in relation to each other rather than as alternative possibilities: "maddest" and "nearest"; "maddest" because "nearest" — the intoxication being caused by the proximity, not simply conjunctive but perhaps more, strongly, consequent (in *Choosing* 63–66). With respect to variants like these Dickinson sets up a situation that seems exclusionary, and, in letting both alternatives stand she refuses choices she presents as inevitable.

11. Other poems in fascicle 23 about the apprehension of death ("The Whole of it came not at once — / 'Twas Murder by degrees —" [P762], "Presentiment — is that long Shadow — on the Lawn —" [P764], "He fought like those Who've nought to lose —" [P759]) and about apprehension of another's death ("You constituted Time — / I deemed Eternity / A Revelation of Yourself —" [P765]) substantiate that possible reading.

THE LETTERS