

Dickinson's Misery

A THEORY OF LYRIC READING



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CHAPTER THREE

Dickinson's Figure of Address

"THE ONLY POETS"

IN HER TRANSLATION of Sappho, Anne Carson asks her reader to compare a fragment that begins,

]Sardis
Often turning her thoughts here
]
you like a goddess
And in your song most of all she rejoiced.

But now she is conspicuous among Lydian women
as sometimes at sunset
The rosyfingered moon
surpasses all the stars . . .

to a letter that Emily Dickinson wrote to Susan Gilbert in 1851:

I wept a tear here, Susie, on purpose for *you*—because this "sweet silver moon" smiles in on me and Vinnie, and then it goes so far before it gets to you—and then you never told me if there *was* any moon in Baltimore—and how do I know Susie—that you see her sweet face at all? She looks like a fairy tonight, sailing around the sky in a little silver gondola with stars for gondoliers. I asked her to let me ride a little while ago—and told her I would *get out* when she got as far as Baltimore, but she only smiled to herself and went sailing on.

I think she was quite ungenerous—but I have learned the lesson and shant ever ask her again. To day it rained at home—sometimes it rained so hard that I fancied you could hear it's patter—patter, patter, as it fell upon the leaves—and the fancy pleased me so, that I sat and listened to it—and watched it earnestly. *Did* you hear it—or was it *only* fancy? Bye and bye the sun came out—just in time to bid us goodnight, and as I told you sometime, the moon is shining now.

It is such an evening Susie, as you and I would walk and have such pleasant musings, if you were only here—perhaps we would have a "Reverie" after the form of "Ik Marvel," indeed I do not know why it

wouldn't be just as charming as that of that lonely Bachelor, smoking his cigar—and it would be far more profitable as "Marvel" *only* marvelled, and you and I would *try* to make a little destiny to have for our own.¹

Carson points out that "more explicitly than Sappho, Emily Dickinson evokes the dripping fecundity of daylight as foil for the mind's voyaging at night. Almost comically, she personifies the moon as chief navigator of the liquid thoughts that women like to share in the dark, in writing" (371n). It is a long, odd, suggestive comparison, especially since the Dickinson passage seems on the face of it to have so little to do with the Sapphic fragment. The equation of Sappho and Dickinson as types of feminine lyricism is an old one—or rather, it is a specifically dated association, since as Yopie Prins has shown, "what we now call 'Sappho' is, in many ways, an artifact of Victorian poetics" and, as we have begun to see, what we now call "Dickinson" is certainly an artifact of Victorian and modern poetics.² Thus Carson's note may associate Sappho and Dickinson on the basis of their exemplary lyrical status, or in order to attribute to Sappho a familiar modernity and to Dickinson an archaic Sapphism that would be simultaneously the desire for a woman and the desire for writing. Yet despite all the forms of literary and personal desire that align these texts with one another, one difference is obvious: Sappho's is a lyric and Dickinson's is a letter. Wherever or whoever or whenever Sappho's "you" was meant to be, Dickinson's "you" was Susan, and she was not there.

This is to say that where or who "you" are makes a difference in, among other things, historical questions of genre. If we thought that Sappho's object of address was sitting before her as she played this particular song on her lyre, we would still think of her fragment as a lyric. But if we thought that Dickinson's object of address was sitting before her as she spoke these words, we would not think of her letter as a letter. And if we thought that the "you" of and to whom Dickinson wrote was a fictive person, an object of imagination, and we printed her lines like this:

She looks like a Fairy tonight,
Sailing around the sky—
In a little silver
Gondola, with Stars for—
Gondoliers—

we would think that she had written a lyric poem.³ Yet if we thought that Sappho had written her lyric first as a letter, it would not be a lyric in the strict sense for her place and time—though, of course, such enticing printing as Carson's is how Sappho's letters have survived as lyrics, or as evidence of the "artifact" she has become. The difference between Sappho's

lyric and Dickinson's lyric would then also be a difference in genre, since as Carson puts it, "Sappho was a musician," whose verse was (or so the story goes) meant to be heard in performance, and Dickinson was a writer, whose verse was intended for performance by a reader.⁴ But what sort of performance by what sort of reader? The Dickinson letter cited by Carson is not a lyric, yet in it Dickinson worries over and over that it will be read as if it were. Why would Dickinson *not* want to be read as if she were writing lyrics?

Dickinson's letter begins by lamenting that she cannot offer Susan a particular lyric, "this 'sweet silver moon.'" Since the letter goes on to invoke other publications that were all the rage in 1850, a likely candidate for the allusion is a song that Tennyson added to *The Princess* (1847) in 1850. *The Princess*, a poem in several genres that Tennyson called "A Medley" and that Isobel Armstrong has succinctly described as "a burlesque and a feminist tract," was read by both young women in 1848, and by Susan with particular interest.⁵ Yet Dickinson's letter does not allude explicitly to the poem's vexed treatment (and elaborate story) of the issues of female education and equal rights (issues that formed so much of the exchange between Dickinson and Gilbert at the time), invoking instead one of the interpellated songs that seems to have little to do with the narrative parts of the poem—except that it insists on affectionate attachment, which in Tennyson is woman's proper sphere. The song is a lullaby, and it begins with the line "Sweet and low, sweet and low" (which later became the song's title), and ends with the lines,

Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails out of the west
Under the silver moon:
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.⁶

Tennyson's song may have been influenced by an English folk song, "Roll on Silver Moon" (often called just "Silver Moon"), that was published as sheet music for the piano in both England and the United States in 1847. The song begins,

Roll on silver moon, point the trav'ler this way
While the nightingale's song is in tune . . .⁷

Given Dickinson's reputation as a pianist, and her home's collection of popular sheet music, "Silver Moon" is just the sort of thing she would have played—and, given her reputation for musical improvisation, may have played variations on. In any case, the slight mention of "the 'sweet silver moon'" at the beginning of the letter summons a lyrical presence (of the moon, of domestic tranquility, of literate conversation, of music, of po-

etry) that the letter quickly (and rather pathetically) forswears. Unlike the moon in Tennyson or in the folk song, the presence of the moon over the heads of the separated friends marks distance rather than union: "it goes so far before it gets to you . . . you never told me if there *was* any moon in Baltimore." The reassuring personification of the moon's "sweet face" that *would* be apparent to Susan if such a lyrical illusion of presence were possible is in doubt in Dickinson's letter, though for it she substitutes another fanciful personification, an extended simile. The pathos of the simile is that a fairy moon "with stars for gondoliers" cannot, of course, give Dickinson a lift to Baltimore, so although the moon "smiled to herself" and thus finally did assume an imaginary face, she "went sailing on" away from both writer and reader rather than, as in the songs, sailing or rolling "this way."

The distance between Dickinson and Baltimore surely required no further elaboration, so why does the letter keep returning to it? In the second paragraph, what Carson dubs "daylight's fecundity" takes another fanciful form, the "patter—patter, patter" of the rain on the leaves. Unlike the moon's face, the sound of the rain is not a wishful or imaginary effect; this time, the trope is not prosopoeia but onomotopoeia, and it represents, in cliché (or perhaps in a variation on Longfellow's "pitter-patter"), what Dickinson heard, not what she could not pretend Susan heard or saw, or what she pretended to see. Yet the letter is still anxious: "Did you hear it, Susie—or was it *only* fancy?" The question is rhetorical, and banal; if it rained in Baltimore at the same time that it rained in Amherst, then the answer would be yes, and if not, no. There is no poetry here. The shift, then, to the 1850 bestseller *Reveries of a Bachelor* by "Ik Marvel" (Donald Grant Mitchell) may be a way of putting fiction in its proper place, between the covers of a book. Indeed, Marvel's (or Mitchell's) book is all about the difference between imagining and living, and especially about the difference between fantasizing about the desired other and touching her. In the book's first three chapters, the Bachelor thinks of the reasons not to marry, then imagines the sort of woman he *would* marry if he were to do so, and then laments the death of the woman he ends by being glad he did not marry after all (all the while "smoking his cigar").⁸ Against such fireside fancy, Dickinson places the "far more profitable" intimacy that she and Susan "would *try* to make" between them, "if you were only here." That intimacy is not only something that Dickinson cannot write about because it is queer, or can only share, as Carson puts it, "in the dark," but something that she wants, for some reason, not to turn into literature.⁹

The fact that Dickinson's letter itself *is* now literature—a footnote to a famous poet's translation of a famous poet, several pages in this and several other books of literary criticism—makes Dickinson's distinction be-

tween her writing and at least some kinds of literature harder for us to see, or to read. But in passages not cited by Carson, the letter goes on to insist upon that distinction:

Longfellow's "golden Legend" has come to town I hear—and may be seen *in state* on Mr. Adams'[s] bookshelves. It always makes me think of "Pegasus in the pound"—when I find a gracious author sitting side by side with "Murray" and "Wells" and "Walker" in that renowned store—and like *him* I half expect to hear that they have "*flown*" some morning and in their native ether revel all the day; but for our sakes dear Susie, who please ourselves with the fancy that we are the only poets, and everyone else is *prose*, let us hope they will yet be willing to share our humble world and feed upon such aliment as *we* consent to do! You thank me for the Rice cake—you tell me Susie, you have just been tasting it . . .

The letter's rehearsal of the women's exchange over and through books (their own version of Tennyson's ill-fated women's college in *The Princess*) takes an interesting turn here, not accidentally when it gets to Longfellow. If "Marvel" was popular romance (what Dickinson's upstanding father later called, as she phrased the condemnation, "'somebody's *rev-e-ries*,' he didn't know whose they were, that he thought were very ridiculous"), Harvard's Professor Longfellow was the modern classic.¹⁰ His translation of *The Golden Legend*, or *Lives of the Saints* (Jacobus de Voragine, 1260) was offered to the American reading public in 1850 as a sort of crash course on medieval European culture (crash courses on European culture being Longfellow's specialty). Dickinson's use of the phrase "*in state*" to describe the book's appearance as if it were a dead body parodies the consequences of admission to the print public sphere, a condition in which the display of the body (or book) is also a kind of disembodiment, or self-abstraction.¹¹ Since such abstracted disembodiment was also the fate of the saints, the joke may seem to elevate Longfellow, but cultural elevation, especially as disembodied transcendence, itself turns out to be the joke.

Dickinson's invocation of "Pegasus in Pound," the proem to *The Estray* (1847), associates Longfellow's allegory of the visit of "the poet's winged steed" to "a quiet village" with the book's visit to the bookstore in Amherst. In the proem, "the school-boys" find Pegasus "upon the village common," and "the wise men, in their wisdom, / Put him straightway into pound." In Dickinson's letter, the book's analogous captivity is represented by its place on the shelf alongside Murray's *English Grammar* (1795), Wells's *A Grammar of the English Language* (1846), and Walker's *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, and Expositor of the English Language* (1827).¹² Between quotation marks, the names of the lexicographers are

personified "sitting side by side" with Longfellow, as if to imprison literature in a lesson on grammar (a relevant issue, not only because of the theme of imaginative or imaginary education that runs through the letter, but also because Susan was in Baltimore to teach grammar school). The sense of the rest of the sentence must be that "a gracious author" can, like Pegasus, break free of such mundane constraint, but "Murray" and "Wells" and "Walker" would not approve of the grammar of the analogy. "Like *him* [Pegasus? Longfellow?] I half expect [I and he both expect? I expect that they will be like him?] to hear that they [the grammarians? Pegasus and Longfellow?] have '*flown*' some morning and in their [whose?] native ether revel all the day." The confusion between pronouns probably will not bear too much scrutiny, which may be one of the problems with reading a twenty-year-old's personal letter to her girlfriend as if it were a literary text.¹³ But it is a letter *about* reading literary texts, and finally about not wanting to be read in the ways those were read. For we "who please ourselves with the fancy that we are the only poets, and everyone else is *prose*," know the difference, and know, too, that the fancy cannot cheat so well that one should be mistaken for the other, or that the moon could take someone from Amherst to Baltimore, that sexual fantasy is as good as sex, or that rice cakes are available in print.

The elaborate relation between the pleasures of private embodiment and the perils of public disembodiment could also be the stuff of lyric, as we shall see in the last chapter of this book when we turn to Dickinson's relation to nineteenth-century female lyric sentimentalism. But in the early letter to Susan, which is so often cited as evidence of the young poet's literary aspirations, the allusions point beyond the letter's text toward readings or conversations or jokes or songs the correspondents had shared in what is ordinarily referred to as private life. That is a generic convention, of course, but Dickinson seems particularly anxious to call attention to it. Like the leaf attached to the early letter to Austin or the dead cricket folded within the square of paper within the letter to Mabel Todd, or the flowers sent with her notes to everybody, the "you" addressed by Dickinson's letter has more in common with Baltimore and rice cakes than with the moon or fairies or gondolas or reveries or flying horses—or lyric poetry. Perhaps this is because as long as the addressee is elsewhere, she is not like the fading leaf or disintegrating cricket or dying flowers or "Pegasus in Pound." In order to keep the pathos of life's appropriation by literature from becoming the pathos of literature, Dickinson makes it into something else. But what *is* that something else—a letter or a poem? Poetry or prose? Like Sappho's fragment, Dickinson's letter to Susan is missing its last page so, like the genre of the Sapphic fragment, the genre of Dickinson's fragmentary letter may now be up to us. Yet unlike Sappho's

fragment, in which the "you" is tantalizingly indeterminate, Dickinson's letter's address is historically determined, with a vengeance: this letter is for Susan and no one else. Thus the generic poles with which this comparison began—Sappho performed her own lyrics, Dickinson's writing is performed by a reader—can now be reversed: when we now read Sappho, we can (like Marvel's Bachelor) imagine "you" as anyone we like (usually ourselves), but only Susan knew what to make of most of Dickinson's letter, and she is not the one who made it into poetry.

Or prose. Since the time of Dickinson's publication, the distinction between the two has been at issue, as has the distinction between poems and letters, life and literature, privacy and publicity. As we have seen, Dickinson's early editors claimed to know the difference, as does the most recent editor of the two three-volume Harvard sets of the *Poems* and *Letters*. But lots of readers in between, especially readers of Dickinson's manuscripts, have been more confused. Reviewing Johnson's 1955 variorum edition of the *Poems*, John L. Spicer commented in 1956 that

one of the most difficult problems of the editor has been the separation of prose from poetry. This may come as a surprise to some readers. The only surviving prose Emily Dickinson wrote occurs in her letters, and, in their published form, the poetry in them is always neatly set off from the prose. In her manuscripts, however, things are not so simple. She would often spread out her poetry on the page as if it were prose and even, at times, indent her prose as poetry. . . . Assuming that what Emily meant as poetry must be taken out of the letters, how does one go about it? Should one only print variants of lines which she has used somewhere else in her poems? Should one set up a standard for indentation, rhyme, or meter? Or should one merely do again what Mrs. Todd tried to do and divide the poetry from the prose by guessing the poet's intentions?¹⁴

Pointing out that "Johnson seems to have chosen this last solution," Spicer concludes instead that "the reason for the difficulty of drawing a line between the poetry and prose in Emily Dickinson's letters may be that she did not wish such a line to be drawn. If large portions of her correspondence are considered not as mere letters—and, indeed, they seldom communicate information, or have much to do with the person to whom they were written—but as experiments in a heightened prose combined with poetry, a new approach to both her letters and her poetry opens up" (140). Since "John L. Spicer" was otherwise known as the avant-garde California poet Jack Spicer, his suggestion that Dickinson's writing be read as experimental prose-poetry was a way of making Dickinson avant-garde, of recasting old manuscripts as modern literature.

As we have seen, as novel as Spicer's suggestion was (and, as we shall

see, prescient of contemporary approaches such as Susan Howe's and Marta Werner's), he followed in what was already an established tradition. If Todd and Higginson, in the 1890s, drew a line between poetry and prose in order to make Dickinson's poetry into late Victorian literature and her letters into the story of the Victorian Poetess, and Susan Gilbert Dickinson's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, published, in 1914, the verse Dickinson sent to her mother as a series of Imagist poems, and Johnson, in 1955, separated poetry and prose according to a New Critical idea of the poem as divorced from its maker, then Spicer's idea of Dickinson's letters "as experiments in a heightened prose" made Dickinson into the precursor of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, a position occupied by Spicer himself. Yet Dickinson's private letter took several nineteenth-century literary genres in and spit them out before the history of her publication and reception began. The difference between "the only poets" and "prose" in that letter is not a difference in genre but a difference between us and everyone else, between personal and personified address.

As I began by suggesting, a difference in address can become a difference in genre as the public transmission of a text makes it so, but that historical process does not mean that the writer originally intended that form of address to make such a difference. Many of the debates in recent Dickinson scholarship have taken place over the question of whether Dickinson intended to write poems or letters, or letter-poems, or poem-letters. When, in 1995, Ellen Hart followed in Spicer's wake by suggesting that "the relationship between poetry and prose is so complex in Dickinson's writing that lineating poetry but not prose [in print] sets up artificial genre distinctions," Domhnall Mitchell responded in 1998 by measuring various lines of "prose" and "poetry" in the manuscripts in tenths of centimeters, concluding that "contrary to Hart's view . . . there does seem to be *some* visual indication of a generic shift" in some letters.¹⁵

If Mitchell went to an extreme to prove that the difference in genre that Hart claimed was "artificial" *might* be inherent after all (and thus, ultimately, might justify Franklin's editorial procedure in the 1998 *Poems*) that may be because what is at stake in such fine distinctions is not the existence of Dickinson's writing as either poetic or epistolary but the existence of literary criticism. The reason that the distinction between genres seems an important point of debate for literary critics is that once the genre of a text is established, then, as we saw in the last chapter on lyric reading, protocols of interpretation will follow. In other words, what is at stake in establishing the genre of Dickinson's writing is nothing less than its literary afterlife. Even Hart and Martha Nell Smith, whose work on the Dickinson Electronic Archives and in *Open Me Carefully* seeks to deconstruct "genre distinctions as the dominant way of organizing Dickinson's writings" by

posting those writings on the Web as various "Correspondences" and by making a volume that does not distinguish between poems and letters, suggest that "Dickinson's blending of poetry with prose, making poems of letters and letters of poems, [was] a deliberate artistic strategy."¹⁶

But to motivate generic confusion by attributing it to an "artistic strategy" is to emphasize generic distinctions once again, and especially to emphasize Dickinson's authority as a poet. As I have suggested in the previous chapters, that authority is an effect of lyric reading, or of the sort of interpretation Dickinson's early letter to Susan is so anxious not to attract. Dickinson's early letter is careful not to turn her reader into a personification rather than a person, yet that is exactly the change that a history of lyric reading has worked on Dickinson. Rather than try to decide whether Dickinson wrote poems or letters, or letters as poems, or poems in letters, I want to focus on the figures of address in her writing, on how and why and where Dickinson invokes "you." Rather than measure the length of her lines or isolate metrical passages or concentrate on texts in the fascicles not included (as far as we know) in letters, we might want to notice how Dickinson's figures of address tend to insist that we not make about her writing the very generic decisions we have made.

LYRIC MEDIA

We have already noticed that in his preface to the first publication of Dickinson's poems in 1890, Higginson began by warning his readers that "the verses of Emily Dickinson belong emphatically to what Emerson long since called 'the Poetry of the Portfolio,'—something produced absolutely without the thought of publication, and solely by way of expression of the writer's own mind." Dickinson herself could not be "persuaded to print," Higginson continued, because although the daughter of "the leading lawyer of Amherst," she "habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a very few friends . . . she was as invisible to the world as if she had dwelt in a nunnery." The Dickinson that Higginson thus introduced is "emphatically," "absolutely," "solely" private, a creature of privilege (one of her own favorite words), a law unto herself. Modern readers have often complained of Higginson's apologetic presentation of the poet whose fame would so far outstrip his own, and many have sought to qualify his notion of Dickinson's isolation. Higginson's placement of Dickinson's audience has gone largely unchallenged, however, and it is worth asking why we have been so content to stay in the position he bequeathed to us. What his introduction made sure of was that those first readers of the poems in "print" knew that what they were being allowed to read was

not intended to be read by *them*. As we have seen, the response in the 1890s was immediate and popular interest: Dickinson's *Poems* became a sensation, a bestseller, a "fad."¹⁷ If the notion of a published privacy—a privacy that circulates—has proven immensely attractive ever since, perhaps this is not because of the way we read Emily Dickinson, but because of the way we read lyrics.

Nowhere is the definition of lyric poetry as privacy gone public more striking than in the publisher's advertisement for the second volume of the *Poems* in 1891 (Buckingham 387). Beside several citations from reviews proclaiming Dickinson's "original genius," Roberts Brothers chose to include this perplexing notice:

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.—*Literary World*

16mo, cloth, \$1.25 each; white and gold, \$1.50 each; two volumes in one, \$2.00

How could such a comment be expected to sell books? The publisher's motive becomes even more difficult to assign when we take into account the context of this citation, for it is drawn from Dickinson's first bad review. Reacting against Dickinson's sudden popularity in 1890, the reviewer for Boston's *Literary World* compared Dickinson to the first deaf-mute to be educated, called her "a case of arrested development," and commended "this strange book of verse—with its sober, old-maidenly binding, on which is a silver Indian pipe, half fungus, half flower—to pitying and kindly regard" (Buckingham 48). The publisher, having reduced the price of the first edition of the *Poems*, seems to have anticipated what is only clear now, in retrospect: even this extremity of condescension merely exaggerated the appetite of the reading public. The "old-maidenly" pathos of Dickinson's isolation (here notably, as in Higginson's preface, transferred from person to book) answered to an idea that what the poetic voice registered was "the record of a soul that suffered" from an exemplary self-enclosure. The reviewer's comment on the book's ornament ("half fungus, half flower") also slips curiously across the border between writer and text, and while it is certainly meant to sound disparaging, it partakes as well of the idea that darkness and deprivation produce a lyric beauty.

This sort of transference from person to text to symbol of poetic inspiration goes on frequently in the early reviews, and always in the interest of opposing a valued and implicitly feminized lyric quality to public con-

vention. "It is a rare thing in these days of universal print to find a poet who is averse to seeing his or her work before the public," wrote a reviewer for the Boston *Daily Traveller*. "The freedom and fullness of verse written only as expression of the inward thought, without heed of criticism or regard for praise, has a charm as indefinable as the song of a wild bird that sings out of the fullness of its heart" (Buckingham 23). Wittingly or unwittingly, the reviewer was glossing his own echo of Higginson by echoing Shelley's classic description of the poet as "a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why."¹⁸ Entranced by Higginson's revelation of the invisibility of the source, the readers to whom Dickinson's first editor addressed her poems responded by understanding that his portrait of a wealthy white woman shut up in her house made Dickinson the perfect figure of the lyric poet.¹⁹ In order to grasp in detail the relation between Higginson's Dickinson and later versions of lyric isolation, we would need to trace the reception history that transformed Dickinson's lyricism from unseen birdsong to the alienated personal voice essential to the New Critical reception of Dickinson. Along the way, we would want to stop to notice that one moment in that transformation was the modernist version of Dickinson's voice as distinct from the public voice of mass culture. As Percy Lubbock phrased that view (in a review of Conrad Aiken's landmark modernist edition of *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*) in 1924, "her voice was unique, and she flung out the short cry of her joy or pain or mockery with a note that cannot be forgotten. It is much to say in a world where voices are so many."²⁰ The few decades that separate Higginson's Dickinson from Lubbock's had already made a difference in the interpretation of Dickinson's figure of lyric address, and a careful study of those decades would give us a better idea of the figure we have inherited.

But this is not such a reception study, and what I want to pursue here instead is the structure of address supposed by the consistent postpublication definition of Dickinson's as a private—and therefore transcendent—lyric voice. If her old-maidenly strangeness, her nunlike privacy worked (and still works) to make her poetry seem to readers like the voice that speaks to no one and therefore to all of us, this must be because from the moment that Dickinson's writing was published and received as lyric poetry has devolved a history of reading a particular structure of address into the poems. This structure is one in which saying "I" can stand for saying "you," in which the poet's solitude stands in for the solitude of the individual reader—a self-address so absolute that every self can identify it as his own. The fact that it was *her* own seems in effect to have made Dick-

inson a clearer mirror for the poetics of the single ego. Already consigned to the private sphere by reason of gender (and kept comfortably there by benefit of class), Dickinson could represent in person and in poem (the two so quickly becoming indistinguishable) the prerogative of the private individual—namely, the privilege to gain public power by means of a well-protected self-sufficiency.²¹ The ease with which "I" can become "you," "she" becomes "he," and the private self is coined as public property in a poetics of individualism was aptly exemplified by William Dean Howells's influential literary championship of Dickinson in her first year of publication: "The strange *Poems of Emily Dickinson* we think will form something of an intrinsic experience with the understanding reader of them," Howells began. Just how "intrinsic" that experience was for Howells he reveals at the end of his essay: "this poetry is as characteristic of our life as our business enterprise, our political turmoil, our demagogism, our millionarism."²² The poetry Higginson was so careful to cast "emphatically" as the "expression of the writer's own mind" immediately became the expression of the reader's own identity. What Howells so explicitly says—and he says it not just for himself but for each of "us"—is "Emily Dickinson, *c'est moi*." It is as much as to say, as has so often been said since and in so many ways, "Emily Dickinson, *c'est le moi*."

To say that in remaining closed upon herself Dickinson managed to represent the self and therefore to become "characteristic of *our* life" is to trace in her poetry the syllogistic logic of address that, as we have seen, dominates postromantic theories of lyric reading. Put simply, that logic converts the isolated "I" into the universal "we" by bypassing the mediation of any particular "you." This bypass or evasion serves the purpose of what Herbert Tucker has called "the thirst for intersubjective confirmation of the self, which has made the overhearing of a persona our principal means of understanding a poem."²³ The key term here is "overhearing": the "intersubjective confirmation of the self" performed by a reading of lyric based upon the identity between poet and reader must be achieved by denying to the poem any intersubjective economy of its own. On this view, in order to have an audience the lyric must not have one. The paradox is audible in Shelley's 1821 "Defence," and is fixed into definition by John Stuart Mill in 1833 in a moment to which reference was made in the first chapter on lyric discourse, though Tucker's self-conscious repetition of that moment makes it worth repeating here. "Eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*," Mill writes, "Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude."²⁴ In order to overhear such a radically internalized solitude, the reader is supposed to partake of a parallel—that is, identical—seclusion.

Mill's later figure for this parallelism is striking: lyric "song," he continues, "has always seemed to us like the lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell, ourselves listening, unseen in the next."²⁵ Cell to cell, one prisoner to another, this form of address is sustained by the pathos of solitary confinement—but who or what has imposed the sentence?

When, in 1957, Northrop Frye repeated without alteration Mill's version of lyric as "preeminently the utterance that is overheard," he went so far as to say that there is "no word for the audience of the lyric" because "the poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners."²⁶ In Frye's repetition of Mill, "the lament of the prisoner" has become the individual poet's choice; the poet "turns his back" on a real, historical audience in order to create ("so to speak") a fictive one. In Frye's words, "the lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse . . . a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object."²⁷ As the range of Frye's list suggests, by not addressing anyone in particular the poet "pretends" to address everything in general—to achieve a form of transcendently apostrophic address. But Mill's prison scene poses questions that haunt Frye's modern lyric inwardness: why should the poet pretend? What are the conditions of such isolation? Is all lyric, then, imaginary address? Is there no difference between an apostrophe to a natural object and an intimation to a personal friend? Does the poet choose to turn his back or is he somehow constrained to do so—by history, by circumstance, or by the very theory of reading that defines lyric address as the subject's self-address, as not directed toward any specific destination and therefore universally applicable to objects of imagination, objects of tradition, objects of desire, objects of worship, objects of thought, and objects of perception alike?

It is worth noticing Mill's own shift in metaphors for lyric self-address in order to begin to answer these questions, especially since later lyric theorists in the Anglo-American tradition like Frye and Tucker tend to invoke the same metaphors almost word for word. In his 1833 essay "What is Poetry?" Mill begins by dismissing what he calls the "vulgarest" of the many answers to the title's question, "that which confounds poetry with metrical composition." He thus does away with neoclassical distinctions between genres, preferring to emphasize that "the object of poetry is confessedly to act upon the emotions." Yet that ambition (which he attributes to Wordsworth) is not sufficient for Mill, since novels, for example, also act upon the emotions, and yet "there is a radical distinction between the interest felt in novels as such, and the interest excited by poetry." Committed to a definition of poetry based on affective response, Mill's will to lyricize then takes a long turn through narrative and descriptive forms, which

he finally finds insufficiently direct in their address to the "human soul." It is this further narrowing of what is "essential" in poetry to a form of direct address that necessitates Mill's famous distinction between poetry and eloquence.

In insisting upon address as the defining feature of the poetic, Mill risks making lyric into personally interested discourse. The metaphor of the "soliloquy" is a way for Mill to emphasize the effect of poetic address on its reader and at the same time insist that such an effect is unintentional. But is it? Mill's extension of the metaphor makes his double bind clearer: "it may be said that poetry, which is printed on hot-pressed paper, and sold at a bookseller's shop, is a soliloquy in full dress, and upon the stage. But there is nothing absurd in the idea of such a mode of soliloquizing. . . . The actor knows that there is an audience present; but if he act as though he knew it, he acts ill." Of course, an actor *does* intend to produce an effect in his audience, so while the theatrical metaphor allows Mill to distinguish lyric from public or persuasive rhetoric, it also breaks down the distinction he wants to maintain: it makes lyric into a public performance that only pretends to be self-addressed.

It is this rhetorical predicament that may prompt Mill to alter or intensify the metaphor when he writes of the lyrical effect of music on its listeners. "Who can hear these words," Mill writes, "which speak so touchingly the sorrows of a mountaineer in exile:

My heart's in the Highlands—my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer,
A-chasing the wild deer, and following the roe—
My heart's in the Highlands. Wherever I go.

Who can hear those affecting words, married to as affecting an air, and fancy that he sees the singer? That song has always seemed to us like the lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell, ourselves listening, unseen, in the next."²⁸

Mill's substitution of the performance of a song (by Burns) for the performance of an actor's soliloquy, of "unseen" voice for stagelit speech, speaks volumes about the complexity of the figure of address he wanted to claim as the special object of the lyric. In 1833, Mill's definition of poetry as essentially lyric still needed to negotiate several genres, and not accidentally, he found what he was looking for in a genre that may be literally overheard rather than figuratively "overheard," in an archaic version of lyric as song rather than in modern "poetry, which is printed on hot-pressed paper, and sold at a bookseller's shop."

This is to say that Mill's answers to the questions raised by what has become his definitive emphasis on lyric isolation were, in 1833, still enmeshed in the complexity of various genres of address, especially in written verse. Yet later critics of the lyric have often taken up Mill's influential metaphors for lyric address while ignoring both their generic complication and their concern about the relation between writing and voice. Helen Vendler, for example, introduced her 1997 book on Shakespeare's sonnets by explaining that "lyric, though it may *refer* to the social, remains the genre that directs its *mimesis* toward the performance of the mind in *solitary* speech. Because lyric is intended to be voiceable by anyone reading it. . . . The act of the lyric is to offer its reader a script to say. . . . The lyric . . . gives us the mind alone with itself. Lyric can present no 'other' as alive and listening or responding in the same room as the solitary speaker."²⁹ Vendler includes at the back of her book a CD recording of herself reading the sonnets. By the late twentieth century, then, the normative reading of the lyric as normative poetic genre had collapsed Mill's fine distinctions into the reader's soliloquy, the reader's isolation, the reader's expression. That collapse was enabled by Vendler's complete erasure of the "other" Mill kept marginally alive, out of sight. Mill's fantasy that the reader of lyric is an unseen listener to distant music turns into Vendler's fantasy that her reader will, thanks to a medium unavailable to Mill, listen to the literary critic's voice reading the poet's script "in person" in the solitude created by Walkman or stereo.

The literary critical interpretation of Dickinson's writing as lyric has often veered perilously close to the scene of reading suggested by Mill and personified by Vendler. As Higginson and his contemporaries were the first to notice, Dickinson herself seemed to have made literal the seclusion of the lyric self in its solitary cell.³⁰ Those readers were also the first to read that literal confinement back into metaphor, so that the listeners in the next cell become Mill's "ourselves." The metaphor that supports such a reading is *the* lyric metaphor: the figure of the speaking voice. If we think of the lyric as "the lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell," or as "the performance of the mind in *solitary* speech," then we must position ourselves as readers who are hearers or performers "unseen." The metaphor of voice bridges the otherwise incommutable distance between one "solitary cell" and another, between two otherwise mutually exclusive individuals, two "soliloquies." Most importantly, it does so by claiming to transcend the historical circumstances of those individuals or performances, by placing "us" in the same metaphorical moment with the "speaker" ("listening . . . in the next" solitude, or becoming that speaker ourselves).

I would like to suggest another way of placing ourselves in relation to Dickinson's structures of address. Rather than consider the lyric "I" as a

"speaker" or, as Tucker puts it, a "persona" who talks to herself and so speaks for all of us, I want to examine what happens when Dickinson's writing directly addresses a "you," when that writing attempts to turn toward rather than away from a specific audience. In turning from "I" to "you," and from the metaphor of speech to the act of writing, Dickinson's writing traced an economy of reading very different than the one that Higginson and Mill and Vendler projected for the lyric and most readers of Dickinson as a lyric poet have imagined: a circuit of exchange in which the subjective self-address of the speaker is replaced by the intersubjective practice of the writer, in which the writer's seclusion might be mediated by something (or someone) other than ourselves.

"THE MAN WHO MAKES SHEETS OF PAPER"

The way in which I address you depends upon where you are. If you are very near, I can whisper. If you are across the table, I can speak. If you are upstairs or just outside, I can shout. If you are too distant to hear (even to overhear) my voice, I can write. And in the illusion peculiar to written address, the condition of your absence (the condition of my writing) conjures a presence more intimate than the whisper—more intimate, that is, than the metaphor of the voice, of a speaking presence, would allow.³¹ Dickinson acknowledges this property of writing often in her letters, as we noticed in the early letter to Susan with which we began. A little over a year later, she wrote to Susan that "as I sit here Susie, alone with the winds and you, I have the old *king feeling* even more than before, for I know not even the *cracker man* will invade *this* solitude, this Sweet Sabbath of our's" (L 1:77). As Dickinson writes, "*this* solitude" becomes an intersubjective space in which the deictics "here" and "this" can point away from what it is to be alone toward a moment in which, in writing, the writer is "alone with." As Dickinson's emphasis suggests, it is the page itself that offers a communion that displaces in that moment what earlier in the letter she has called "*their* meeting." Their meeting takes place in church; our meeting takes place in "the church within our hearts."

And as she writes, the transmutation of church building to mutual sympathetic investment comes to depend upon the very transit that both threatens and enables such investment "within." Within a sublime solitude ("the old *king feeling*") uncompromised by public commerce (the comical "*cracker man*") Dickinson's letter goes on to imagine a private commerce that does not oppose privacy to community or inside to outside but instead makes the first term inclusive of the second, turning the terms of solitude inside out. This reversal of the normal order (the order in

which the public space would include the private, outside would contain inside) takes place not through a logic of identity but by means of the difference which is the very medium of written address:

I mourn this morning, Susie, that I have no sweet sunset to gild a page for you, nor any bay so blue—not even a chamber way up in the sky, as your's is, to give me thoughts of heaven, which I would give to you. You know how I must write you, down, down, in the terrestrial; no sunset here, no stars; not even a bit of *twilight* which I may poeticize—and send you! Yet Susie, there will be romance in the letter's ride to you—think of the hills and the dales, and the rivers it will pass over, and the drivers and conductors who will hurry it on to you; and wont that make a poem such as can ne'er be written?

What the movement of this letter makes explicit—and I want to maintain that it is very much what is implicit in the movement of several of Dickinson's texts that we now know as lyrics and that, like the letters to Susan, take the direction and destination of address as their subject—is that "*this solitude*" in which I am not alone but "alone with" has everything to do with the material circumstances of writing and little to do with what that writing will be taken to (figuratively) represent. Representation as mimesis, especially in the ideal terms that "I may poeticize," would be inevitably elegiac (in Dickinson's pun, "I mourn this morning," its distance from the "sweet sunset" of which Susan may have written). Rather than send a metaphorical "here" there, Dickinson asks her reader to imagine the "romance in the letter's ride"—that is, to retrace the deferral of the letter that Susan now holds in her hands. From Dickinson's hand through the hands of "the drivers and conductors" to Susan's hand, the letter becomes "a poem such as can ne'er be written." It does so, paradoxically, because rather than "poeticize" the celestial it remains "down, down, in the terrestrial" within an economy of hands, hills, dales, rivers, drivers, conductors, and literal letters rather than within an idealized universe of gilded pages, "thoughts of heaven," sunset, stars, "a bit of *twilight*."

The intimacy established in the physical exchange of the letter, the intimacy that makes of its transfer a "romance," is a privacy encompassing the public circle already inscribed upon it with the writer's admission of what makes "*this solitude*" of the written page something of our's. What writer and reader mutually possess are not identical solitudes (my sunset like your sunset, my stars like your stars, my little "chamber way up in the sky, as your's is") but is rather the letter itself. That letter substantiates the otherwise purely metaphorical relation between writer and reader. It embodies the separation between their two bodies. But since it is not a metaphor, this third, literal body is also always insufficient, radically con-

tingent. As Dickinson writes at the end of her letter, "Susie, what shall I do—there is'nt room enough; not *half* enough, to hold what I was going to say. Wont you tell the man who makes sheets of paper, that I hav'nt the *slightest respect* for him!" The epistolary convention of complaining that one's time to write has run out has turned here to a mock protest against the page that will not "hold what I was going to say." What the page does hold, however, is what Susan holds and is (thanks nevertheless to "the man who makes sheets of paper" and, like the "drivers and conductors," adds another pair of hands to the letter's history) held within it. The object of address has become its subject, as the letter has implicated everyone "outside" the writer's solitude within the "sheets of paper" that hold not "what I was going to say" but only what can be written, read, held.

The early letters to Susan allow Dickinson to displace the plane geography of here and there, outside and inside, self and other, with the more complex discursive field available to reading and writing because they begin in a pathos of distance or isolation that they then revise by revising the very conditions or media of address. In both letters, the conditions of intimate address are explicitly opposed to the conditions imagined as "poetic." The earnest wit of those letters makes the desire for such revision and the imagery of such opposition especially graphic, but it is a desire evident in almost everything Dickinson wrote. About ten years after the letters to Susan, in 1861, Dickinson sent a note to Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Springfield Republican*, and pinned it around the stub of a pencil (fig. 18):

If it had no pencil,
Would it try mine—
Worn—now—and *dull*—sweet,
Writing much to thee—
If it had no word—
Would it make the Daisy,
Most as big as I was—
When it plucked me?

Emily

The note was printed as poem 654 in 1945 in *Bolts of Melody*, under the heading, "Poems Personal and Occasional." It was then included in Johnson's 1955 edition of the *Poems* as number 921 and in Franklin's 1998 edition of the *Poems* as number 184. None of these twentieth-century publications of the letter as a lyric could, of course, include the pencil—but in any event that was for Bowles's and not for later readers' use. He was meant to write back, or if he could not write (Bowles was ill at the time), at least

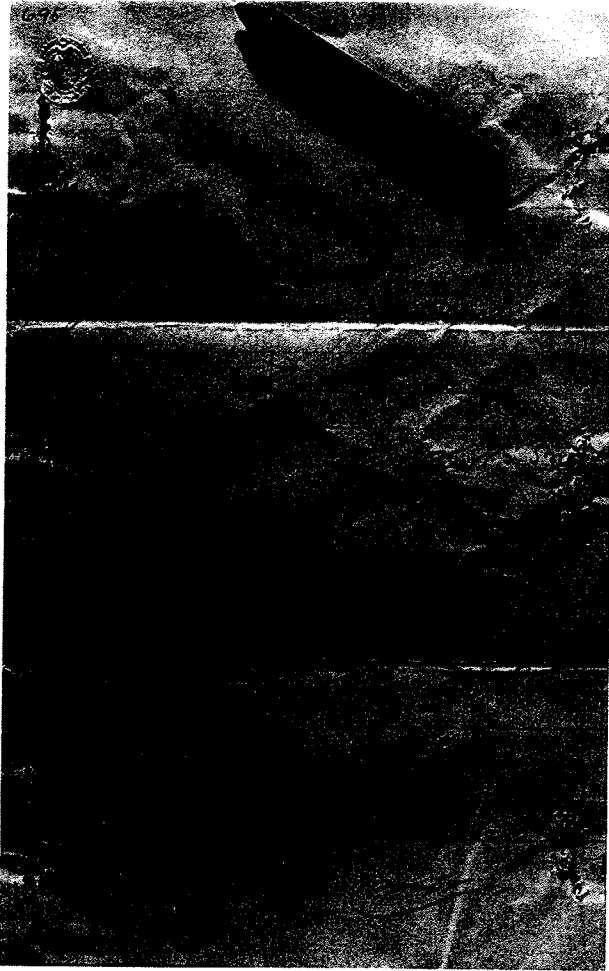


Figure 18. Emily Dickinson to Samuel or Mary Bowles, 1861. The pin marks where the pencil was fastened are visible to the right of the pencil. Courtesy of Amherst College Archives and Special Collections (ED, ms. 695, with enclosure).

draw in response to the direct address of a personal code in which Dickinson sometimes signed herself "Daisy." The "it" with which Dickinson addressed Bowles in this note is grammatically impersonal but rhetorically intimate in the context of their exchange, and a later reader like Vendler would have a hard time identifying herself as the "speaker" of that pronoun. This note is not an overheard soliloquy or "a script to say," but an invitation to written exchange. It is not self-addressed and therefore addressed to all of us; it is—or was—addressed to Samuel (or perhaps Mary)

Bowles. Now, that address may be why Todd and Higginson did not publish the note as a lyric, and Mill and Vendler might also argue that it does not qualify for their definition of the genre. Yet as we have seen, once printed by Bingham and Johnson and Franklin as a lyric, the text is likely to be read as if it were intended for performance by an anonymous reader, difficult as that performance might be to imagine.³²

Between Bowles and Dickinson, on the other hand, the relation between personal and public address, between writing letters and reading poems, between genre and medium, between poetry and the paper it is written on, was already an old joke by 1861, at least since Bowles published Dickinson's first poem in the Springfield *Daily Republican* in February 1852, just days before Dickinson's letter to Susan about the "poem such as can n'er be written." The editor prefaced the valentine that Dickinson had originally addressed to William Howland with a playfully impersonal address to Dickinson, and an invitation to inaugurate a "more direct" correspondence with the print public sphere:

The hand that wrote the following amusing medley to a friend of ours, as "a valentine," is capable of writing very fine things, and there is certainly no presumption in entertaining a private wish that a correspondence, more direct than this, may be established between it and the *Republican*:

"Sic transit gloria mundi,"
 "How doth the busy bee,"
 "Dum vivimus vivamus,"
 I stay mine enemy!

Oh "veni, vidi, vici!"
 Oh caput cap-a-pie!
 And oh "memento mori"
 When I am *far* from thee!

Hurrah for Peter Parley!
 Hurrah for Daniel Boon!
 Three cheers, sir, for the gentleman
 Who first observed the moon!

Peter, put up the sunshine;
 Pattie, arrange the stars;
 Tell Luna, *tea* is waiting,
 And call your brother Mars!

Put down the apple, Adam,
 And come away with me,

So shalt thou have a *pippin*
From off my father's tree!

I climb the "Hill of Science,"
I "view the landscape o'er;"
Such transcendental prospect,
I ne'er beheld before!

Unto the Legislature
My country bids me go;
I'll take my *india rubbers*,
In case the wind should blow!

During my education,
It was announced to me
That *gravitation, stumbling*,
Fell from an *apple tree*!

The earth upon an axis
Was once supposed to turn,
By way of a *gymnastic*
In honor of the sun!

It *was* the brave Columbus,
A sailing o'er the tide,
Who notified the nations
Of where I would reside!

Mortality is fatal—
Gentility is fine,
Rascality, heroic,
Insolvency, sublime!

Our Fathers being weary,
Laid down on Bunker Hill;
And tho' full many a morning,
Yet they are sleeping still,—

The trumpet, sir, shall wake them,
In dreams I see them rise,
Each with a solemn musket
A marching to the skies!

A coward will remain, Sir,
Until the fight is done;
But an *immortal hero*
Will take his hat, and run!

Good-bye, Sir, I am going;
My country calleth me;
Allow me, Sir, at parting,
To wipe my weeping e'e.

In token of our friendship
Accept this "Bonnie Doon,"
And when the hand that plucked it
Hath passed beyond the moon,

The memory of my ashes
Will consolation be;
Then, farewell, Tuscarora,
And farewell, Sir, to thee! (F 2)

Whatever we make of these lines, it would be difficult to make them a lyric. Bowles uses the Tennysonian term "medley," and that seems about right, combined with the "valentine" that provided the lines' occasion. There are too many lines and they move in too many directions for me to have cited them all, and yet I have done so in order to make just that point: they do not conform to the protocols of critical citation, lyric reprinting, or lyric reading (it would be virtually impossible to offer a reading of them along the lines of de Man's reading of Baudelaire's sonnet). Though they fall into the alternating tetrameter/trimeter measure by which Dickinson's poems would become known, they do not *sound* like "Dickinson." They appear to be what they probably were: a pastiche from various sources, most of them textbooks, one of them Shakespeare, and most of them fairly unmediated by anything we would recognize as a "lyric" perspective. This may in fact be Dickinson's earliest juvenilia.³³ Unlike the letters to Susan, the valentine begins in a pathos of distance or isolation ("When I am *far* from thee!") that is mediated by many, many things that are not the writer or the reader. But unlike the exfoliating allusions in the letter to Susan cited by Carson with which this chapter began, those allusions are not in-jokes between the writer and a particular reader (though Howland was a tutor at Amherst from 1849 to 1851, so some of them may be); they are a cultural grab bag of languages, texts, stories, myths, aphorisms, and bons mots. That is what makes them so *printable* in a daily paper, if not susceptible to the sort of close reading usually performed in a book of literary criticism. Yet the valentine that Bowles printed as newspaper copy may not have been so printable in another sense—or rather, the parts that the *Republican* could not print may already have been cut out of a paper or a book and turned into a material pastiche that accompanied the linguistic pastiche.

Or so one might imagine; there is no surviving manuscript of the valentine to Howland, but the specificity of its wild range of allusions invites the speculation that the copy sent to Howland may have looked very different than the *Republican* version, perhaps something like the valentine that Dickinson sent to William Cowper Dickinson at the same time (fig. 19). Unlike the valentine sent to Howland, the spare text on the valentine sent to Cowper Dickinson borrows from one old ballad called "The Bachelor's Delight," which begins,

The world's a blister sweld with care,
 much like unto a bubble,
 Wherein poor men tormented are
 with women and with trouble,
 And every one that takes a wife
 Adds [toil and] sorrow to his life,
 and makes his burden double.³⁴

But like the valentine published in the *Republican*, the valentine Dickinson sent to Cowper Dickinson incorporated the materials of the schoolroom, this time actual printed materials intended to imprint the student. The small cut-out of the sleeping king, for example, was excised from Dickinson's family's copy of *The New England Primer*, and the other pictures (the man with a stick and the woman with a broom beating dogs, the boys and girls making bubbles, the little boat) were probably taken from primers as well. As Patrica Crain has argued, the domestic dissemination of such animated literacy characterized nineteenth-century American culture, installing the letters of the alphabet "as participants in the doings of everyday life, as players within or even generators of social and intimate life. Agents of action, affiliated with consumption, aligned with money and capital, the alphabetic letters had become ubiquitous [by the nineteenth century]. Bound with the passions and incorporated into personality, such letters produced a form of literacy in which the self is both mirrored and created through silent, solitary reading."³⁵

In Crain's lovely description of the child's—and the culture's—disciplinary incorporation of the ABCs, she evokes a lyric moment of alphabetic mimesis, a moment in which printed letters themselves furnish (in all sorts of lifelike postures) the intersubjective confirmation of the self. Further, Dickinson's pastiche of fragments of ballad and fragments of hot-pressed paper mimes rather exactly Mill's lyric media. Dickinson's valentines to Howland and Cowper Dickinson use the materials of her culture's invitation to lyric imprinting to keep that genre of intersubjective confirmation at a distance. Instead, they invite the reader to share their resistance to popular song's romance as well as the ABC's disciplinary tutelage



Figure 19. Emily Dickinson to William Cowper Dickinson, around 1852. Courtesy Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives.

(thus the calls to arms in the Howland valentine), literally constructing the fantasy of a conspiratorial counterliteracy mediated by sheets of paper converted to purposes that were not intended by the man who made them.

Martha Nell Smith has suggested that we regard Dickinson's cut-outs, occasional sketches, and collages as "cartoons," or send-ups of and challenges to "the literary, political, and family institutions that have helped to reproduce the cartoon-like image of a woman poet commodified."³⁶ Yet that retrospective view of the poetess in white (or, more recently, in leather) has more to do with the cultural caricature of Emily Dickinson after her publication as a lyric poet in the twentieth century than it does with Dickinson's use of the nineteenth-century materials of literate circulation—or of the transmission of various literacies.³⁷ Smith is surely right that recent exposure (for which Smith herself is largely responsible) of what at least some of Dickinson's poems "really looked like" will change popular views of the sort of poetry she wrote, or the kind of poet people think that Dickinson was. But most readers will still think that such youthful pieces of ephemera have little to do with Dickinson's mature lyrics. That may be why the first edition of Dickinson's *Poems* in which the valentine to Howland appeared was Johnson's 1955 scholarly edition, and the valentine to Cowper Dickinson has never been published as a poem at all. As Austin Warren complained at the time of Johnson's edition, "many of [Dickinson's] poems are exercises, or autobiographical notes, or letters in verse, or occasional verses. . . . But the business of the scholar is to publish all the 'literary remains.'"³⁸ We could, like Warren, dismiss such contingent phenomena as of interest only to scholars in order to be *readers* of Dickinson's lyrics, but to do so would mean ignoring the fact that the distinction between poems (in more than one sense) and letters (in more than one sense) was not an issue that simply arose for Dickinson's editors and critics after her "literary remains" were recovered; it was a distinction present to Dickinson and her readers throughout her writing life, from the early gushing letters and occasional verse to the later gushing letters and occasional verse. It was also an issue often agonizingly rather than comically at stake in the verse that has come to be considered not cartoonish or occasional but, above all, lyrical.

"YOU—THERE—I—HERE"

In fascicle 33, three sides of two folded sheets of laid, cream, faintly ruled stationery are taken up by the lines that are now Poem 706 in Franklin's edition (figs. 20a, 20b). These lines were among the poems published in

I cannot live with you -
 It would be long -
 And life is over thus -
 Beyond the sleep

The Sexton keeps the key -
 Putting up
 Our life - his Porcelain -
 Like a Cup -

Discarded of the Housewife -
 Ruined - or
 A never Sings Again -
 O. O. Ours crack.

I could not live with you -
 It would be long -
 To shut the other's bars
 Open -
 Even - could - not -

Figure 20a. From fascicle 33 (H 41). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

the first edition of 1890 (under the title "In Vain"), and they have often been read since as testimony of Dickinson's isolation. Even more often, their invocation of a pathos of literal seclusion has been identified with a pathos of figurative seclusion—that is, with Dickinson's lyric self-address. As far as we know, the lines were not also sent as a letter, and the only manuscript copy of them that has survived is included in the fascicle.³⁹ If, however, "I cannot live with You—" tells us, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff has suggested, "more about Emily Dickinson herself than any other single work," it is remarkable that it should say "I" by saying "you" so often (more often than does any other published Dickinson lyric).⁴⁰ As Sharon Cameron has written, "we must scrutinize the poem carefully to see how renunciation can be so resonant with the presence of what has been given up" (LT 78):

And I - could I stand in
 And see you - press.
 Without my right of frost -
 Without privilege?
 My and I live - with you -
 Because your face
 I could not see -
 On my Grace
 I could not see -
 And you - and know
 My homesick eye -
 When you than he
 Charles J.
 I could not see -
 To see your most -
 You then - J. K. C.
 With me - the true eye
 That - Ocean - eye - and eye
 And that - white - substance -
 The pain - + the - privilege

Figure 20b. From fascicle 33 (H 41). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

DICKINSON'S FIGURE OF ADDRESS

I cannot live with You—
 It would be Life—
 And Life is over there—
 Behind the Shelf
 The Sexton keeps the Key to—
 Putting up
 Our Life—His Porcelain—
 Like a Cup—
 Discarded of the Housewife—
 Quaint—or Broke—
 A newer Sevres pleases—
 Old Ones crack—
 I could not die—with You—
 For one must wait
 To shut the Other's Gaze down—
 You—could not—
 And I—Could I stand by
 And see You—freeze—
 Without my Right of Frost—
 Death's Privilege?
 Nor could I rise—with You—
 Because Your Face
 Would put out Jesus'—
 That New Grace
 Glow plain—and foreign
 On my homesick eye—
 Except that You than He
 Shone closer by—
 They'd judge Us—How—
 For You—served Heaven—You know,
 Or sought to—
 I could not—
 Because You saturated sight—
 And I had no more eyes
 For sordid excellence
 As Paradise
 And were you lost, I would be—
 Though my name

Rang loudest
 On the Heavenly fame—
 And were You—saved—
 And I—condemned to be
 Where You were not
 That self—were Hell to me—

So we must meet apart—
 You there—I—here—
 With just the Door ajar
 That Oceans are—and Prayer—

And that White *Sustenance—
 Despair— *Exercise—Privilege—

These lines are indeed resonant with the presence of what is absent, though perhaps this is because it is not the object of address—the phenomenal “You” her or himself—that is here renounced but instead a figure for “you” (the first of what will be a series of such figures) that is considered and found wanting. What is strategically renounced, in other words, is not the presence of the other but the way in which figurative language works to replace that other with an illusion of presence that would mean the other’s death. It is this illusion that the lines try hard not to forget. The results of forgetting are abruptly enacted in the oddly extended initial comparison of “Our Life” to “a Cup // Discarded of the Housewife—” and locked away by the “Sexton.” When what “would be Life”—that is, the full presence that would cancel language, that would make writing unnecessary—leaves “Our” hands it becomes reified into figure. In Dickinson’s stunningly contracted line, the passage from redundant presence to figurative absence is a matter of shifting pronouns: “Our Life—His Porcelain—.” Like the “cracker man” and “the man who makes sheets of paper” in Dickinson’s letter to Susan, the Sexton who “keeps the Key” seems at first an agent of invasion and constraint, the representative of the (notably masculine) public world imposing his law upon “Our Life.” But what a Sexton does, we recall, is, according to Dickinson’s dictionary, “to take care of the vessels, vestments, &c., belonging to the church.”⁴¹ For the Sexton, sacramental symbols are *things* (“Our Life—His Porcelain—”) and so can be handled “Like a Cup,” valued or devalued (“Discarded”) according to the hands they fall into. The Sexton does not stand for what separates “I” from “You,” for a public law to which “Our [private] Life” is opposed; rather, what the Sexton represents is the transformation of “Our Life” into figure. Once that figure is introduced, the simile takes over, in-

tensifying the sense of referential instability signaled by the change in pronouns and by the apparently arbitrary little narrative of the Housewife. The Sexton and the Housewife are thus the antitypes to the “drivers and conductors” of Dickinson’s letter: they take the figure of the “Cup” literally and, forgetting that it is a figure (as they are figures), they have the potential of delivering it into the wrong hands.

But whose are the right hands? If “Life is over there—” when it becomes a metaphor, where is it if it does not? Is there any alternative to the privative fatality of figuration? These are questions that the lines back away from to then ask over and over with an urgency bordering on obsession. Before considering the litany of responses that make up the body of what is now one of Dickinson’s most famous poems, we may better understand what is at stake for Dickinson in the apparent opposition between life as full presence and life as figure by placing these lines beside others from the same period (about 1862) that she wrote (or copied) on the same stationery bound in a very similar, slightly later fascicle (figs. 21a, 21b, from fascicle 34). The lines (now F 757) begin in a parallel worry over the figuration of address:

I think To Live—may be a
 *Bliss
 To those *who dare to try—
 Beyond my limit to conceive—
 My lip—to testify—

I think the Heart I former
 wore
 Could widen—till to me
 The Other, like the little
 Bank
 Appear—unto the Sea—

I think the Days—could every one
 In Ordination stand—
 And Majesty—be easier—
 Than an inferior kind—

No numb alarm—lest Difference
 come—
 No Goblin—on the Bloom—
 No *start in Apprehension’s Ear,
 No *Bankruptcy—no Doom—

But Certainties of *Sun—
 *Midsummer—in the Mind—

I think to live - may be a
+ Bliss

To those who can't see
Beyond my limit - to conquer -
My lip - to trail -

I think the heart - I found
was

Could widen - all to me
The other, like the little
Bank

Appear - unto the sea -

I think the day - could
was one

In Ordination stand -
And may - be again -
than an inferior kind -

No numb alarm - (est happiness
Come -

No
No Foolish - on the Bloom -
No + Start in Apprehension's ear,
No + Bankruptcy - no Doom -

But Certainties of Sun -
+ Midsummer - in the Mind -
A Steadfast South - upon the Soul -
Her Polar time - behind -

The Vision - pondered long -
So + plain with ~~the~~ to come
That - I esteem the fiction -
+ real -

The + Real - fictitious seems -

How beautiful the dream -
What - Play - it - draw or
Had all my life - an - am - mistakes
Just + escaped - in + all
+ Lip + allowed + Click + Sepulchre -
Wilderness + Moon + Meridian + Night + Tangible -
Positive + True + Truth + Her One + Best + qualified -

Figure 21a. From fascicle 34 (H 50). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Figure 21b. From fascicle 34 (H 50). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

A steadfast South—upon the Soul—
 Her Polar *time—behind—
 The Vision—pondered long—
 So *plausible ~~appears~~ becomes
 That I esteem the fiction—
 *real—
 The *Real—fictitious seems—
 How bountiful the Dream—
 What Plenty—it would be—
 Had all my Life *but been Mistake
 Just *rectified—in Thee
 *Life *allowed click *Sepulchre—
 Wilderness *Noon *Meridian *Night *tangible—
 positive *true *Truth *been one *bleak *qualified—

The first of these lines, especially in the variant version, echoes directly the tautology that launches the lines that begin "I cannot live with you—." In this sense, one line may be read as a variant of the other, or the two sets of lines may be read as proliferating variations on the same theme—though what that theme might be it is hard to say, and it is even harder to say why it seems to require so many variations. Cameron, the best reader of Dickinson's variants, has provocatively suggested that "by amplifying the idea of a subject to include its variants as well as variant ways of conceiving it [Dickinson produces] 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."⁴²

These lines, at least in manuscript, are certainly "extrageneric," but are they an "utterance"? Dickinson's lines have often been *read* by literary critics as represented speech, even when readers try to make their graphic, genre-breaking, "untitled" moves more apparent. Mary Jo Salter typifies the assumption that even variant lines represent the properties of voice when she writes that Dickinson's variants "may have represented to her either revisions or . . . overtones: that is, each well-chosen alternative was at least as right as any other, and possibly most beautiful when held in mind with the other(s), like a chord."⁴³ Yet Cameron's emphasis on the intersubjective, extrageneric quality of the variants also urges one to attend to the words that crowd the bottom of the second page of the manuscript as something other, something stranger, than "utterance," in one or several voices. As Dickinson put it in a letter to Higginson, "a Pen has so many inflections and a Voice but one" (L 2:470). Perhaps so many inflections of the pen riddle the page of "I think To Live—" because to inflect

that initial tautology is the lines' problem. What "I think To Live—may be a / *Bliss [*Life]" and "I cannot live with You— / It would be Life—" share as redundant propositions is the implication that were the possibility of presence not foreclosed, all one could say would be "Life—Life—Life—Life—Life—Life" over and over in a blissful stutter. Put another way, the desire that informs these lines is the desire that they need not be written.

But the lines were written, of course, and so inflected with a desire that diverts the crisscrossing hesitations with which they begin by almost ending. They do proceed, but in a direction that is anything but linear. Loop by metric loop, the lines of "I think To Live—" turn back upon that opening line as if locked by the Sexton's key within its syntax. The lines assume the burden of defining an infinitive that has already been defined as indefinable: "Beyond my limit to conceive— / My lip—to testify—." What the rest of the lines bear witness to is the attempt to write the unsayable, to inflect an ideally uninflected—experience? sense-certainty? "Life," as the term appears here, is an ontological absolute. "Had we the first intimation of the Definition of Life," Dickinson wrote to Elizabeth Holland, "the calmest of us would be Lunatics!" (L 2:492). Not being able (or refusing) to define *what* it is, the lines go on to decline *where* Life "may be" if "it would be." That proleptic "may be" places what follows in the perspective of anticipation, so that what "may be" would be conceivable only in terms of what was: "the Heart I former / wore," "an inferior kind" of time. This entanglement of anticipation and retroaction predicated in the first nine lines by the repetition of "I think" gives way to another anaphora: "No . . . / No . . . / No . . . / No . . . no . . ." We could read the retrograde progression from the ninth to the twelfth lines as a (failing) attempt to extricate thinking from the temporal trap in which the grammatical structure of address has thinking locked. In those lines, "Difference" has already come, the "start [*click] in Apprehension's Ear" has already been registered. The "click" (of the key?) in the variant interrupts the first lines' grasp (apprehension) of what it "may be" "To Live" and marks their suspicion (apprehensiveness) that that *what* is outside the reach of language—or of writing. When the fifth stanza then seeks to deny the denial of the fourth, its "Certainties" are made less certain by the differential (that is, written) framework that they claim to transcend. While the alliteration and subtle assonance of the lines strive to give the impression of sameness (an impression located in their acoustic effects: "Certainties . . . Sun" / "Midsummer . . . Mind" / ". . . steadfast South . . . Soul") "Sun," "Midsummer," and "South" are themselves only articulable in their difference from the ". . . Polar time—behind—." The address, still enmeshed in the tragic temporality of a retroactive anticipation, cannot name the place beyond this predicament until its last two spare monosyllables: "in Thee." The figure of address is

revealed in the end to have been the "what," the subject, that the lines have anticipated all along. In Helen McNeil's reading, "'Thee' is whatever would give the mind whatever the mind desires."⁴⁴

At the end of "I think To Live—," the deferred designation of "Thee" is not, however, merely the vehicle of desire's fulfillment; "Thee" is the name of desire, its unlocatable location. Or perhaps we should say its suspended location, for it is in the end at the dead center of the chiasmus between "the fiction— / *real—[*true]" and "The *Real [*Truth]—fictitious . . ." When desire's prolepsis "So *plausible [*tangible—*positive] becomes" that desire "seems" answerable, its object is canceled by the rhetorical crossroads at which that object is sublated in "seems." That suspension is in effect a refusal to sublimate "Thee" by apprehending the other in figure—that is, to forget that its plausibility would be an effect of the apostrophe that the lines defer. Why go to so much trouble to put it off? In a different mood, Dickinson might have mediated desire's life-and-death alternatives by substituting an enclosure or an allusion or, perhaps, a drawing of a tombstone like the one she penciled on the back of a fragment of stationery (figs. 22a, 22b) that reads,

Soul, take thy risk,
With Death to be
Were better than be not
with thee⁴⁵

But the lines that begin "I think To Live—" just keep doubling back on themselves. Why would Dickinson want to mark and remark, reach toward and away from the object of these lines' address, to stage such a pathetic near-miss? The apostrophe that works retroactively to bring the object of address closer is qualified by its position at the edge of the lines' temporal grasp. Captive of neither the Imaginary "Other" self with which the lines begin nor of the Symbolic register they surround, "Thee" is in the position that Lacan came to name the Real: that point on the horizon of language that sets desire (or language-as-desire) in motion but which language (or the subject constructed from it) cannot (in order to keep desiring) apprehend.⁴⁶ To do so would mean to stop desiring, or to stop living—or to stop writing and rewriting.

What this reading of "I think To Live—" allows us to understand about the anxiety of the first lines of "I cannot live with You—" is that that anxiety stems not only from the distance that separates "I" from "You" but from the consequences of the apostrophe that separation invokes. While "I think To Live—" defers its apostrophe until its last word (so that, in effect, the apostrophe cannot become what de Man would identify as the personal abstraction of a prosopopoeia, cannot attribute to "Thee" a face, a

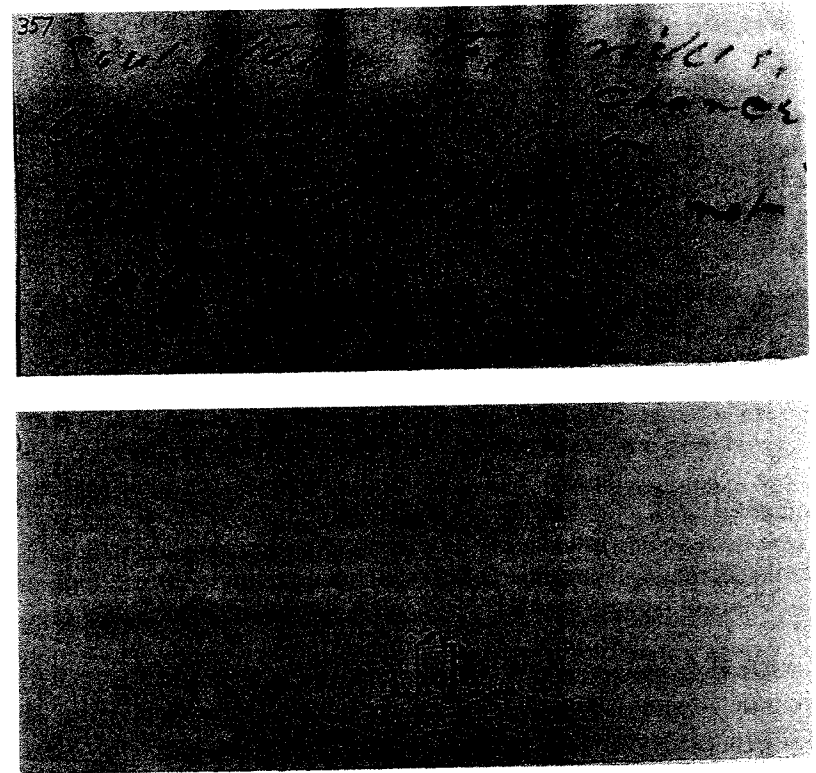


Figure 22a and 22b. Emily Dickinson, about 1867. Courtesy of Amherst College Archives and Special Collections (ED ms. 357).

figure), "I cannot live with You—" begins with the problem of keeping "You" in the Real, outside its own apostrophe's reach. That reach, as the lines demonstrate at length (at fifty lines, this is one of Dickinson's longest published poems) is extensive: it encompasses this life, death, afterlife, heaven, hell, memory, the self:

I could not die—with You—
For One must wait
To shut the Other's Gaze down—
You—could not—

And I—Could I stand by
And see You—freeze—
Without my Right of Frost—
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise—with You—
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus'—
That New Grace

Glow plain—and foreign
On my homesick Eye—
Except that You than He
Shone closer by—

They'd judge Us—How—
For You—served Heaven—You know,
Or sought to—
I could not—

Because You saturated Sight—
And I had no more Eyes
For sordid *excellence *consequence
As Paradise

As Cameron suggests, this “catechism is one of renunciation,” but it is important to notice that what is renounced at each stage of this catechism is a face-to-face encounter with “You” (LT 78). In other words, what is renounced is the performative affect of apostrophe, the trope that brings “You” into the moment of speech. In the fourth and fifth stanzas, that renunciation turns on the moment of death (as “I could not die—with You—” follows almost by catechistic rote upon the first line, save for the graphic stutter of the em dash), or the moment a nineteenth-century reader would recognize as the death vigil. Whether one shuts “the Other’s Gaze down—” or “. . . I stand by / And see You—freeze—” the emphasis is on envisioning an encounter that the lines do not want to envision, not only because doing so would be an admission of mortality but because seeing the other’s face would mean turning “You” into a fiction. That fiction would allow address to transcend the material circumstances of separation, as the abrupt and seamless transition from physical death to life after death insists. If the lines were to admit such transcendence (and this is, after all, the historical moment of Elizabeth Phelps’s *The Gates Ajar*, the popular novel in which reunion after death is carried on in vivid, even domestic detail, and to which the last stanza may contain an allusion), “Your Face / Would put out Jesus’.”⁴⁷ But by not imagining its own apostrophe as transcendent, the lines do not give a “Face” to “You”; what they do instead is to tally the consequences as if they were to do so.

The complexity of this conditional temporality is very much like that of “I think To Live—” and it has, understandably, confused a reader as perceptive as Cameron. “Interestingly enough,” Cameron writes, “what prohibits union seems to be the fact that it has already occurred. . . . For although ‘Because Your Face / Would put out Jesus’—’ seems suppositional, two stanzas later the event is echoed, and located not in the future at all, but rather in the past:

Because You saturated Sight—
And I had no more Eyes
For sordid excellence
As Paradise.” (LT 80)

The problem with this reading is the assumption that the slip into the past tense constitutes the ninth stanza as an “event.” As in the first stanzas of “I cannot live with You”, in which “Our Life” becomes “his Porcelain” when the figure is taken literally, the shift from the sixth quatrain’s “Would” to the seventh stanza’s “Shone” happens at the point at which the lines, for the moment, enter into their own fiction. Not incidentally, “. . . I esteem the fiction— / *real [*true]” at the very moment that the lines turn back upon the I’s “Eye,” and the effect of that turn is blinding. In the fictive vision that the figure of apostrophe would make plausible, the illusion of a full presence would blind the I/Eye to the fact that “Your Face” would be an illusion, an effect of performative utterance (the variant for the “excellence” of figure’s therefore ironically “sordid” Paradise is “consequence”). To mistake the performative dimension of apostrophe for a statement of historical presence would be to become the Sexton, for to imagine that “over there” is already here is to make sure that “You” will dissolve into figment.

As Dickinson wrote in other lines in 1862, also in a fascicle (13), that begin, “You see I cannot see—your lifetime—” (F 313), the representation of desire’s object threatens to take the place of that object itself:

Too vague—the face—
My own—so patient—covers—
Too far—the strength—
My timidity enfolds—
Haunting the Heart—
Like her translated faces—
Teasing the want—
It—only—can suffice!

When what is now the ninth stanza of “I cannot live with You—” enters into the past tense of ideal union *as if* that union had already occurred, the

"translated faces" of desire tease the lines momentarily out of thought. If the lines ended here, we could say that apostrophe (or the fiction of address) had worked its charm. But the three stanzas that issue from this moment deny apostrophe its due, and in so renouncing the "saturated Sight" of figure they must find a way out of its "Haunting" and "Teazing" logic. They must reach toward, in other words, what ". . . only—can suffice!" without appropriating the object in a rhetorical illusion of sufficiency. They must give "You" a figure that is not a "translated face."⁴⁸

As in "I think To Live—," where the inflections of the pen bear witness to what is "Beyond my limit to conceive— / My lip—to testify—," the concluding movement of "I cannot live with You—" sustains an address to a "You" positioned just beyond apostrophe's limit. Stanzas ten and eleven withdraw from the fictive moment of absolute insight to reassert the fallacy of an identity between self and other, here and there. Thus the penultimate stanza sums the danger of a figurative logic of self-projection:

And were You—saved—
And I—condemned to be
Where You were not—
That self—were Hell to Me—

This last line is inflected by two important literary echoes: Satan's "I Myself am Hell" from *Paradise Lost* and Heathcliff's Satanic address to the dead Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. The allusion to *Paradise Lost* has often been noticed, but it has not been noticed that Dickinson's Milton has been mediated here by Brontë's Miltonic hero who, "condemned to be" where Catherine is not, invokes her presence in his own tormented apostrophe, an invocation that grows directly from the question, "Where is she?": "Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? Oh! . . . Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! . . . Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! Only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! *I cannot* live without my life! *I cannot* live without my soul!"⁴⁹ Heathcliff, master of the egotistical sublime that he is, keeps Catherine with him and "Not *there*" in the very form of his address to her. In the novel, the performative force of his utterance actually works: Catherine stays, one of desire's "translated faces." If the pathetic tug beneath the statement "I cannot live with You— / It would be Life—" has been all along "*I cannot* live without my life," that pathos is finally qualified (or "rectified") by the allusion to *Wuthering Heights* and Brontë's ambivalent portrait of her hero's fantastic act of identification through invocation. The concluding stanza of what is now Dickinson's poem suggests an alternative to the sort of romantic selfhood that

Heathcliff—and especially Heathcliff's use of the figure of apostrophe—represents.⁵⁰

That alternative is sketched in lines that offer an appropriately tentative version of a form of address that would not be an act of appropriation and perhaps not even a fiction:

So We must meet apart—
You there—I—here—
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are—and Prayer—
And that White Sustenance— *exercise *privilege
Despair—

These lines are remarkable for what they do not say. They do not say, with Heathcliff, "Be with me always." They do not locate the invoked "You" within the self; they do not claim that your "there" has been transmuted (or, in Dickinson's better word, translated) into my "here." In other words, the lines recognize the threat inherent in the figure of apostrophic address; they register the way in which "this figure," as Jonathan Culler has written, "which seems to establish relations between self and other can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism."⁵¹ In the second chapter, I suggested that the de Manian suspicion of figuration—especially de Man's suspicion of lyric figuration—that Culler invokes is bound up with an idea of the lyric as an ideal, ahistorical genre. The sort of diplomatically erotic "relations" that Dickinson's lines imagine at their close are predicated upon the rejection of such solipsism, as well as such lyric idealization: "You" remain "there—I—"—stranded between dashes—remain "here." And as Cynthia Griffin Wolff has suggested, "what sense can there be in the lines 'So We must meet apart— / You there—I—here—,' unless 'here' refers to the very page on which the poem is printed?"⁵² What sense, indeed. If the directly referential function of "here" persuades us that what the deictic points to is the page we hold in our hands (but not exactly *that* page, of course, once the poem "is printed" and many pages are delivered into many hands), what would the referential function of "there" be? Wolff's solution, that "'We,' reader and poet, do indeed 'meet,' but only 'apart,' through the mediating auspices of the Voice and the verse," ignores the problem to which the extended final stanza is the solution.

What Dickinson offers instead in her last two lines is an alternative to the metaphor of the voice of the poet speaking to herself "here" in the poem we are reading. What we are reading is not a voice (or a "Voice"). It is, as Griffin Wolff herself points out, a page. The difference seems important in a poem so preoccupied with the effects of the very figure of open-

ing one's mouth to say "O," to say "You." Whatever "that White Sustenance—exercise privilege" may be taken to be, it is manifestly silent. That "White Sustenance," like the white page on which she writes, is all that is left to the poem's I/Eye if the transcendence of figurative address is refused. The poem's "I" and "You" are sustained by that page in the sense that they are both (as pronouns) borne by it and (as subjects) hold it as they write and read, but compared to the imagined vision of Paradise, the slight weight of a page is small compensation. It is, in fact, no compensation at all in the Emersonian sense of an ideal reciprocity in which, as Emerson wrote, "the copula is hidden."⁵³ The page rather sustains the tenuous connection between "I" and "You" by materializing that copula, a relation as difficult to read as is the grammatical copula of the poem's last lines.

For in some subtle and disturbing sense, the "White Sustenance" of the page is at once a comforting material presence and as blank as the figure of a figure. The (agrammatical) placement of "are," on which the cat-achrestic series of metaphors of the last lines depends, makes the identity between ". . . that White Sustenance—exercise privilege / Despair—" and the page much more difficult to hold in mind than the simile that I have just ventured can admit. On the basis of this single and singularly awkward copula, "the Door ajar," a metaphor of place that would stabilize the relation of "there" and "here," gives way to "Oceans," a much less stable figure of place, and then to "Prayer," a metaphysical displacement of presence. "Prayer is the little implement," Dickinson wrote,

Through which Men reach
Where Presence—is denied them.
They fling their Speech

By means of it—in God's Ear—(F 623)

Such an ironic apostrophe, a futile "exercise," a pathetic "privilege," presses rather desperately against the "White" page that is itself the trace of apostrophe's ambition. Not I, not you, not here, not there, not this, but "that," if White Sustenance" is a figure for the page then it is a figure without a face. It is the historical, as opposed to the fictive, material of address.

"THE MOST PATHETIC THING I DO"

That address's capacity to mediate—to join "I" and "You" as subjects precisely by keeping the pronouns "apart"—depends, of course, on its successful passage from self to other. To return to the terms of Dickinson's let-

ter to Susan, "the letter's ride to You—" is what allows reading to take place at all. In giving selected lines from the fascicles the sort of attention to grammatical and rhetorical detail known as "close reading," I have made them into the lyrics that they try so hard not to become. Like you, I first read them as lyrics in Johnson's and Franklin's editions, and perhaps like you, I am a literary critic. But Dickinson's highly literate incorporation of just about every literary convention in the book does not make her into a lyric poet—yet, like the white page and its pathetic apostrophe, literal and figurative address are almost impossible to tell apart after a over a century of lyric reading of her writing has rendered them identical. If we knew, for example, that the "you" in the lines "I cannot live with you—" was Susan, and that she would not "overhear" but *respond* to what Dickinson wrote to her, would that mean that the lines are not a lyric?⁵⁴ If we knew that the lines were definitely never sent to anyone at all, that they were written to be locked into a box that Dickinson may or may not have intended for "the world" to see after her death, would that mean that the lines *are* a lyric? I have been suggesting that these questions became pressing for the twentieth-century interpretation of lyric poetry in a way that was not at all pressing for Dickinson. The pathos in Dickinson's writing is located elsewhere, in a place so alien to our reading of the genre we have attributed to her work that we have not been able to see it, though it has been there all along. What most of her "extragenetic" compositions worry about is whether they will literally reach the reader, and whether that reader will respond. Although Dickinson's specifically written forms of address mediate between self and other in a much more directed (Dickinson might say "plausible") way than does the metaphor of lyric voice, as the tentativeness (and desperation) of the conclusion of "I cannot live with You—" suggests, in being more specific than the figure of the transcendently individual voice, the medium of the page is also less sure of its destination. Though a letter or a poem to Susan might imply the historical Susan as its ideal reader, the letters and poems that have come into our hands have, in their passage, implicated us as readers as well. Rather than imagine ourselves voyeurs identified with a privileged lyric solitude or solitary readers of a fragmentary romance novel—that is, rather than worry about whether Dickinson wrote lyrics or letters or letter-poems—we might begin to take account of the way in which a third position has been built into Dickinson's structures of address.

Unlike the reader of a lyric or the reader of (someone else's) personal letter, the reader of the historical materials of Dickinson's various figures of address enjoys no intersubjective confirmation of the self. Far from it. The way in which Dickinson's writing often invites or assumes a reader other than its (often unavailable or out of reach) historical addressee, and

other than an imaginary, sympathetic eavesdropper or theatrical audience in the distant future, is difficult to characterize, or at least contemporary literary criticism has no language for it. But it is definitely there, in the writing—or perhaps it would be better to say that it is there *on* and outside the writing, or on the sheets of paper that sustained that writing and that may have passed between other people to whom it no longer refers. On a flyleaf from her father's copy of Washington Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, for example, Dickinson penciled some lines that seem to be directly addressed (fig. 23):

The most pathetic
 thing I do
 Is play I hear
 from you—
 I make believe
 until my Heart
 Almost believes
 it too
 But when I
 break it with
 the news
 You knew it
 that
 was not true
 I wish I had
 not broken it—
 Goliah—so would
 you—⁵⁵

I suppose that we could read these lines (or we can, now that the flyleaf has been excised from Irving and the lines have been printed) as Mill's "lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell," or as an overheard song, or a soliloquy, or as Vendler's "performance of the mind in *solitary* speech." And I suppose that if we considered them within those received phenomenologies of lyric reading, we might say that it does not matter who or where Dickinson's "Goliah" was, since the address to him or her was obviously so figurative (rather like, say, "Danny Boy" in a Scottish ballad Mill does not invoke), and it does not much matter when or where they were written. Yet if we happen to know that they were written in the early 1870s, and that Dickinson once compared Susan to "Goliah" in a letter in 1854 (L 154), and that in 1869 there was a celebrated discovery (which turned out to be a hoax) in Susan's native upstate New York of "the American Goliah," then we might think that the lines on the flyleaf were the draft of a

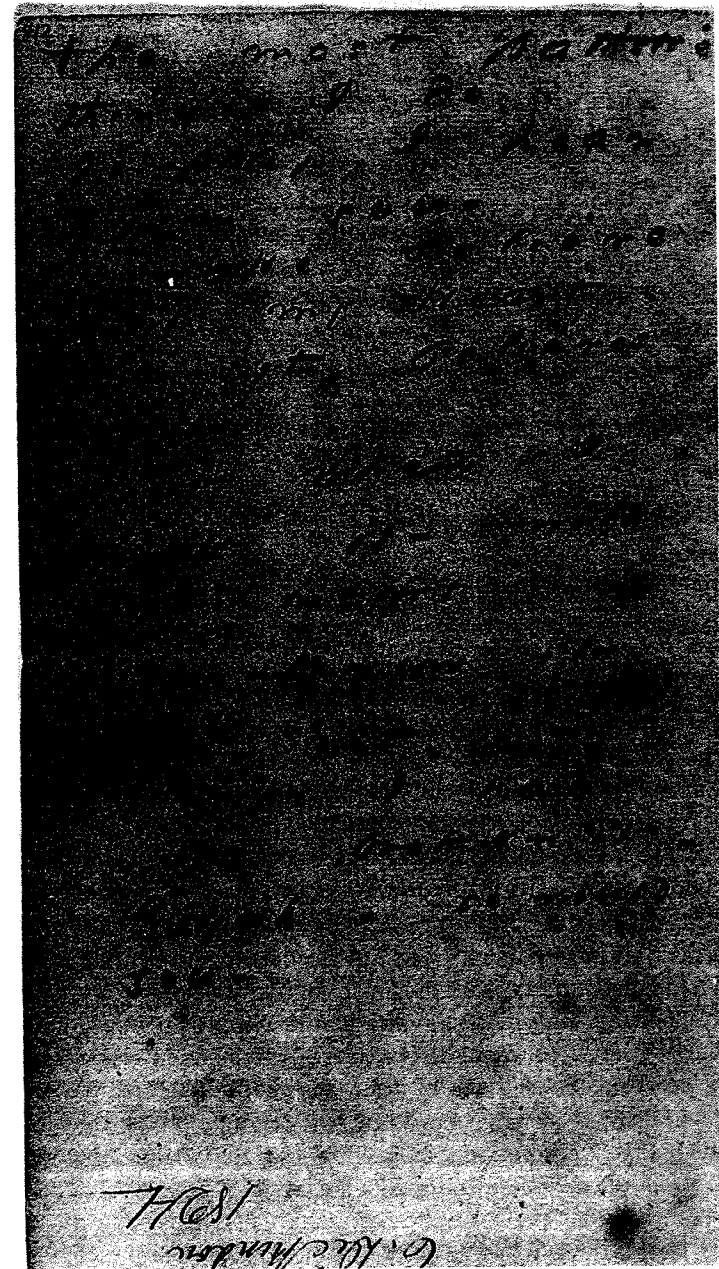


Figure 23. Flyleaf torn from Edward Dickinson's copy of Washington Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*. Courtesy of Amherst College Archives and Special Collections (ED ms. 412).

letter-poem to Susan. "The American Goliath" (a story all over the papers, including the *Springfield Republican*, in October 1869) was a ten-foot figure of a man "discovered" near Syracuse, about which there immediately ensued a debate "whether the colossal figure [was] a petrification or a piece of statuary." A widely circulated ode entitled "To the Giant of Onondaga" consisted of a direct address to the figure, apostrophizing it to "Speak Out, O Giant! . . . thy story tell," in order to solve the controversy.⁵⁶ If the flyleaf lines were the draft of a letter to Susan, we could read "Goliath" as a name for exactly the figure of address I have been attempting to describe, or that Dickinson attempted to resist, the illusion created by apostrophe: the fictive figure with a no longer animate face. On this reading, Susan's lack of personal response in that moment meant that she could only be imagined as a petrified, and mute, figure of address. Yet if the first reading of the flyleaf lines is too indefinitely metaphorical (Emily Dickinson as folk song), the second is perhaps too definitely, or quirkily, historical—though that history does shift toward metaphor, as history tends to do. Between those extremes there is the flyleaf from Dickinson's father's copy of Irving, a piece of paper already part of a printed book that fits into neither account of Dickinson's figure of address. It is even more unreadable, less responsive than the petrified face of "Goliath"; it does not sound or look like us.

In 1914, Susan's daughter and Dickinson's niece, by then named Martha Dickinson Bianchi (because, rather like Margaret Fuller, she had gone to Italy and married an Italian Count, though she came back to Amherst without him), published a small volume of the verse that Dickinson had sent to her mother. In her Preface, Bianchi explained: "The poems here included were written on any chance slip of paper, sometimes the old plaid Quadrille, sometimes a gilt-edged sheet with a Paris mark, often a random scrap of commercial note from her Father's law office. Each of these is folded over, addressed merely 'Sue,' and sent by the first available hand."⁵⁷ Susan had not given her cache of Dickinson manuscripts to Todd and Higginson. Bianchi writes in her preface that she seriously considered burning them, but decided to publish them for the benefit of "the lovers of my Aunt's peculiar genius" (vi). In doing so, she omitted the addresses to "Sue" and printed each of them alone on a separate white page, untitled, as if she had brought her aunt back with her from Europe as a new *Imagiste*. The last poem in her volume evokes in its placement the pathos of what Bianchi calls "the romantic friendship" between her aunt and her mother. One can see why she chose it, since the temporal confusion that we have noticed in the lines that begin "I think to Live—" and "I cannot live with You—" also informs Bianchi's last poem, but this time it is the time of reading itself that proves difficult if not impossible to locate:

I did not reach Thee
 But my feet slip nearer every day
 Three Rivers and a Hill to cross
 One Desert and a Sea
 I shall not count the journey one
 When I am telling thee.

Like the other opening lines of those other forms of address, this stanza opens by closing a possibility to which it must then attempt a different approach. But how can one approach a destination that has already been canceled *as* destination? How can one get from here to there when (to paraphrase Gertrude Stein) there is no there there? The second line's assertion that "my feet slip nearer every day" is logically baffling in its apparently willful denial of the situation that the first line has already stated as fact. In slipping from past to present tense, the line is not progressing but backing up—or, in Robert Weisbuch's phrase for such moves in Dickinson's poems, the lines are "retreating forward."⁵⁸ They do so in order to recount in the fictive present a time the sixth line explicitly identifies as the time of "telling," an encounter that can take place "When" I reach what "I did not reach." As in "I think To Live—," the line between history and fiction is here a treacherous one to tread, and yet for four more stanzas it is literally the line that the "I" does tread, her poetic "feet" (in Dickinson's usage, almost always a pun on metric writing) traversing "Three Rivers and a Hill . . . / One Desert and a Sea." The lines' geography is reminiscent of "the hills and the dales, and the rivers" that Dickinson imagines in the early letter to Susan as the "romance in the letter's ride to you—." In the letter, we recall, Dickinson compares that romance to "a poem such as can ne'er be written." Such a poem, however, was written: it is Poem 1708 in the Franklin edition—although in more than one sense, the poem slipped near its destination.

The text of these lines is available to us only by virtue of a transcript made by Susan herself. There is no manuscript version of this poem in Emily Dickinson's hand, no flyleaf, no slip of paper, no Quadrille, no Paris mark, no ad, no cut-out; the hand from which the published poem was taken is Susan's. If the hand-to-hand economy of written correspondence is to mediate our future reception of Dickinson's writing (as I have been arguing that both the historical form and figurative content of Dickinson's writing suggest that it should), then another message sent to Susan around 1864 acquires an uncanny sense for us (fig. 24): "for the Woman whom I prefer," Dickinson wrote, "Here is Festival—Where my Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside—" (L 288). Removed from the "Festival" of Dickinson's "Here," from the time and place of her writing, not the

for the woman
 whom I prefer,
 when is Festival -
 when my hands
 are cut, then
 fingers will be
 found in evidence.
 Our beautiful night -
 for "mood" in mail -
 It leaves an
 unimportance.
 Take the key, to
 the Lily, now, and
 I will lock the Rose.

Figure 24. Emily Dickinson to Susan Gilbert Dickinson, around 1864. By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

preferred reader of that writing but the readers deferred, future critics of Emily Dickinson would do well to notice that there are more than two pairs of hands complicit in this startling figure of address. Reading Emily Dickinson here and now, ours are the unseen hands most deeply "committed": they are doing the cutting. Whether a literary text always reaches its destination or whether it has always already gone astray, whether Dickinson wrote letters or Dickinson wrote poems, it is worth returning to her forms of address with an eye to the way in which they have anticipated both alternatives and to the corrective they offer retroactively to Higginson's still influential version of Dickinson's writing as privileged self-address—or as a private language addressed, lyrically, to all of us.⁵⁹ At least it is time that we cut more carefully, that we learned to tell the difference.

indicts that "impression" as "the realm of the thoroughly predictable linguistic transcendental" (317). I would argue instead that the impression of authority in de Man's discourse derives from a much more complex identification with the "transcendental" literary moment that holds the critic, despite himself, in its unpredictable and contingent grip.

62. Paul de Man, "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism," in *Blindness and Insight*, 31.

63. Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, 37–38.

64. For a similar recognition of this "typical" critical gesture see, for example, Neil Hertz's tribute to Derrida's "remarkable ability to both fish and cut bait" in *The End of the Line*, 208.

65. My sense of de Man's prose as "in mourning" for its subject is indebted to conversations with Eric Santner; see Santner's suggestive discussion of de Man's "uncompromising elegiac rigor" in *Stranded Objects*, 13–19.

66. For a reading of de Man as a figure for "theory," see Guillory, "Literature After Theory: The Lesson of Paul de Man," in *Cultural Capital*, 176–265. I intentionally leave aside here the scandal of the "discovery" of de Man's career in Europe around World War II, but obviously the surcharge of de Man's personification of "theory" derives from that scandal.

67. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," originally published in *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1982), and reprinted in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 11–30. The Mitchell volume includes the essay itself alongside most of the relevant immediate critical responses to it, as well as Knapp and Michaels's "A Reply to Our Critics" (*Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 4 [Summer 1983]); hereafter citations from the essays included in this volume will be designated AT.

68. See, for example, E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, 227–30 and 238–40; P. D. Juhl's revision or refinement of Hirsch's use of this example in *Interpretation*, 71–72; J. Hillis Miller, "On the Edge: The Crossways of Contemporary Criticism"; and M. H. Abrams, "Construing and Deconstructing," both in Morris Eaves and Michael Fisher, eds., *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*. It is Abrams who recalls that Hirsch's previous use of the poem was already an attempt to adjudicate the conflicting claims of still earlier readers: Cleanth Brooks and F. W. Bateson (145n27).

69. Actually, as William C. Dowling suggests, what Knapp and Michaels had was a paradigm of New Critical interpretations based on the distinction between author and speaker. "What Knapp and Michaels make clear," Dowling writes, "is that the formalist argument succeeded in its season by exploiting to the fullest an intentionality that is already and inevitably entailed by the very notion of meaning" (AT 94). Or by lyric meaning?

70. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 63. Adorno's theory of the lyric as "a sphere of expression whose very essence lies in defying the power of social organization" would seem to grow directly out of Lukács's Hegelian rendering of the lyric (as opposed to the novelistic) subject. Likewise, Heidegger's widely influential idealization of poetry as "the saying of the unconcealedness of what is" seeks

to isolate the lyric subject from "the world's outer space," orienting it at the extreme verge of "the world's inner space" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, 74). For an explicitly Heideggerian reading of Dickinson's poetry, see Sharon Cameron, "The Interior Revision" (CC 190–94).

71. *The Shape of the Signifier*, 9. Michaels's reference here is explicitly to the essays in the posthumously published *Aesthetic Ideology*, essays in which de Man explored the contradictions of textual materialism to which he gestured at the end of "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric." The implications of Michaels's argument as well as his deep reading of de Man (among much else) reach far beyond what I can discuss in these pages, though it is worth noting that his eloquent conclusion that "history, as of this writing, is still over" (182) is not unrelated to de Man's utopian and elegiac sense that history is by definition what cannot be represented in theory.

72. Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 2. Stewart's ambitious project is also an attempt to bridge what has become an intellectual and institutional divide between poets and critics, or to re-establish the American tradition of the poet-critic (a tradition to which Susan Howe also belongs). Because there is some perception that this divide, which dates from the twentieth-century shift between figures like Higginson (a poet-critic who did not teach at a university) to figures like Tate and Winters (poet-critics who did), was more recently a schism caused by literary theory, Stewart explicitly opposes her project to de Man's. In a long footnote, Stewart counters de Man's argument that "the linguistic basis of . . . anthropomorphization is always a kind of defacement, inadequate to its object," by writing that she "would argue that this approach constantly reinscribes the very allegory it seeks to discover" (341–42, n. 107).

CHAPTER THREE: DICKINSON'S FIGURE OF ADDRESS

1. Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter*, fragment 96, 191; note 96.3, 371; (Dickinson L 56).
2. Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 3.
3. The notion that passages of Dickinson's letters that fall into hymnal meter should be excised as individual lyrics is an old one, but its most recent and extreme practitioner is William Shurr in his *New Poems of Emily Dickinson*.
4. Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter*, ix.
5. Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 111. Surprisingly, there has been no real study of Dickinson's relationship to the Victorians, or to the issues raised in Victorian poetry, and especially Victorian lyric. For Susan Dickinson's notes to *The Princess*, see Alfred Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, 266.
6. Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Princess: A Medley* (1847; 1850); this song is the introduction to Part III.
7. "Roll on, silver Moon," arranged by Joseph W. Turner; Oliver Ditson & Co., Boston (1847). This was the most popular arrangement and publication of the song. The Dickinsons had a large collection of sheet music which was (unlike their library, which now has a separate room to itself at the Houghton Library at Harvard) as far as I know not preserved, since it was considered ephemera rather than

literature. That sheet music is clearly one source or basis for many Dickinson lines, and speculation along these lines could open new areas of research for Dickinson scholars and students of American popular culture.

8. Donald Grant Mitchell ("Ik Marvell"), *Reveries of a Bachelor, or, A book of the heart*. The book was a sensation, and was passed back and forth between Dickinson, Austin, and Susan. In the note in which she invokes Dickinson's letter, Carson somewhat startlingly compares Mitchell to Homer in the sense that Sappho adapts Homer's signature adjective "rosy-fingered" for twilight rather than dawn and for lyric rather than epic, and Dickinson "may startle a bit of destiny for herself" out of Mitchell's "clichés" (371 n 96.7).

9. The classic text on nineteenth-century female intimate literary and extraliterary exchange is Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual" in *Disorderly Conduct*.

10. "Father was very severe to me; he thought I'd been trifling with you, so he gave me quite a trimming about 'Uncle Tom' and 'Charles Dickens' and these 'modern Literati' who he says are *nothing*, compared to past generations, who flourished when *he was a boy*. Then he said there were 'somebody's *rev-e-ries*,' he didn't know whose they were, that he thought were very ridiculous, so I'm quite in disgrace at present" (so Dickinson to Austin in April 1853 [L 1:113]).

11. Here I am simply (and, I fear, reductively) condensing the argument of Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

12. On Dickinson's grammars, see Carlton Lowenberg, *Emily Dickinson's Textbooks*.

13. For a lyric reading of Dickinson's frequent exploitation of pronominal confusion, see Cristanne Miller, *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar*.

14. John (Jack) Spicer, "The Poems of Emily Dickinson," 136, 140. The California poet "Jack" was serving a brief stint during 1956–57 as curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library.

15. Ellen Hart is quoted in Domhnall Mitchell's *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception*, 208; I also quote Mitchell from 209. For other serious work on the letters as such, see William Merrill Decker's chapter, "A Letter Always Seemed to Me Like Immortality: Emily Dickinson," in his *Epistolary Practices*, and Marietta Messmer's *A Vice for Voices*. Both are especially good at putting Dickinson's letters back into the nineteenth-century culture of the familiar letter, and Messmer comes close to questioning the distinction between letters and poems.

16. Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, introduction to *Open Me Carefully*, xxvi. On the Dickinson Electronic Archive site, "Correspondences" is the only generic term for Dickinson's and others' writing as it is posted on the site. "Letter-poem" is a hybrid term that editors borrow from Susan Dickinson.

17. Buckingham's *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s* makes the enthusiasm of the immediate reception of Dickinson's poems evident to modern readers. This reception is especially important for, as Buckingham notes, "twentieth-century Dickinson criticism, in many ways, has been a history of mis-characterizing the nineteenth-century reception (as mostly unfavorable) for the purpose of

writing against it" (xii). Hereafter citations to this volume will be designated Buckingham."

18. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in Bromwich, *Romantic Critical Essays* 223. It is important to note that when taken out of context, Shelley's figure of the nightingale can (and has) become a cliché that the argument of Shelley's essay actually works against. Rather than an impression of unmediated voice, what the poem gives to the reader according to Shelley is, as David Bromwich reads the "Defence," "only the text of the poem [which] remains as a positive trace or inscription. Its sense may vanish with the mortality of the author. But its power may revive nevertheless, under a different and unfamiliar aspect, at the coming of later authors and readers who find that the traces concern them after all" (213).

19. For another "account of the relation, for [Dickinson], of privacy to the genre of lyric poetry," see Christopher Benfey, *Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others*, 29–62. While Benfey's concerns parallel my own, he ends by emphasizing, rather than qualifying, the self-enclosure of the poems: what Dickinson "requires above all," Benfey writes, "is that something about her, or *in her*, remain hidden from the view of others. It is the terrible exposure of existence that appalls her" (62).

20. Percy Lubbock, "Determined Little Anchoress," 114. Lubbock's review is of both *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Conrad Aiken (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924), and *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Martha Dickinson Bianchi (reprinted in London by Jonathan Cape, 1924). These were the editions that made such an impression on modernist writers like Faulkner in the twenties.

21. For a discussion of the relation between domestic self-enclosure and the development of American individualism, see Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism*. Brown's premise in this book, "that nineteenth-century American individualism takes on its peculiarly 'individualistic' properties as domesticity inflects it with values of interiority, privacy, and psychology" (1), is very suggestive for a reading of Dickinson that would take into account the specifically domestic (and thus gendered) cast of Dickinson's seclusion. The class-bound privilege of that seclusion certainly worked—as in the famous accounts of the "Myth of Amherst" which became the theatrical production *The Belle of Amherst*—to foster the spectacular domestication of the generic ideal, but one should beware of extending it (as Betsy Erkkila does in "Emily Dickinson and Class") to a caricature of Dickinson's privileged domestic sensibility as that of a bigoted Whig.

22. In Buckingham, *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s*, 64.

23. Herbert F. Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," 242.

24. John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," 348.

25. *Ibid.*, 350n. 33.

26. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249–50. While Frye is citing Mill, it is important to note as well that his emphasis on the poet's own agency in "turning his back on his audience" is mediated by the modernist aesthetics of Joyce (whom he also cites) and, implicitly, Eliot.

27. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249.

28. John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," 350n. 33. Mill re-

moved the reflection on the solitary cell when he revised and combined two 1833 essays for republication in *Dissertations and Discussions* (1859); it appears in his *Works* in a note.

29. Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1–2; 18–19. Vendler claims that she disagrees with Mill's version of the "overheard" as the structure of lyric reading, but she does tend to echo Mill's figures.

30. For a more interesting line of thought about Dickinson's literal "seclusion," see Diana Fuss's chapter on Dickinson, in *The Sense of an Interior*. Fuss emphasizes the public spaces enclosed within the private space of the Dickinson home.

31. This introduction to Dickinson's version of what Derrida has named "the scene of writing" could be read as a reductive gloss on that idea in *The Post Card*. For a related (though very different) understanding of the importance of "the scene of writing" in American literature, see Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, especially 93–161.

32. The pedagogical example is relevant here, since my implicit argument throughout this book is that lyrics have been remade for consumption in the classroom: in the Johnson and Franklin reading editions that include these lines as a single lyric, but that cannot, of course, include the pencil, what will students understand as the subject of this poem?

33. Franklin notes that Eudocia Converse, a cousin of Dickinson's mother, copied "Sic transit gloria mundi" into her 1848–53 commonplace book, and that Higginson later wrote to Todd that "a lady [who] used to live in Amherst & left there about 1852 is quite confident that the valentine to Howland was written some years before that time (she had a copy given [to] her then)" (F 51, 56).

34. I am quite sure that this is the source for "Life is but Strife," and the context makes it a hilarious message to Cowper Dickinson, whom Dickinson, apparently, did not much like. For the ballad, see Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Ballad as Song*.

35. Patricia Crain, *The Story of A*, 217–18. In *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, Jay Leyda prints a page from one of Dickinson's primers, *The Poetic Gift: or Alphabet in Rhyme* (New Haven, 1844), in which, under the engraving for the letter V, accompanied by the rhyme, "For the Virtuous Maidens here, / Partaking of the meal," Dickinson wrote her own name and those of three of her friends. We might note in passing that all of these primer rhymes are in hymnal meter.

36. Martha Nell Smith, "The Poet as Cartoonist," in Juhasz, Miller, and Smith, eds., *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson*, 64, 69. See also Smith's "Dickinson, Cartoonist" on the Dickinson Electronic Archive site, where one can see vivid virtual images of several of Dickinson's more colorful pieces.

37. Camille Paglia's "Amherst's Madame de Sade: Emily Dickinson," in *Sexual Personae*, did much to popularize the whip-and-stiletto S & M Dickinson as anti-thesis to the poetess in white. One measure of the influence of Paglia's intentionally shocking caricature, which was published in 1990, showed up in a cartoon I happened to see with my young son one afternoon in 1995. The show, called "Superwriters," and featured on the Warner Brothers television network, featured a group of "good guy" writers (Dickinson, Twain, and Hemingway) who must vanquish the "bad guy" writers (Sappho, Basho, and Poe). The bad guys invade the

Library of Congress and begin to destroy it: Sappho cuts all the men out of literature, Basho cuts everything down to the size of a haiku, and Poe makes everything scary. Dickinson's job is to stop Sappho, and she does so dressed in full dominatrix leather, whip in one hand and a very long cigarette holder in the other. Her voice is a good Joan Crawford snarl as she says "Because I could not stop for Death," and Sappho keels over.

38. Austin Warren, "Emily Dickinson," 565.

39. In *A Vice for Voices*, Marietta Messmer ventures the speculation that "Dickinson might initially have started to group her fascicle poems according to the people she intended to share them with; that is, within any one fascicle she might have included poems she had mailed to or considered suitable for a specific correspondent" (190). It is an intriguing suggestion. But isn't it even more likely that the fascicles served as collections of the verse she had circulated, though not necessarily to anyone in particular?

40. Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *Emily Dickinson*, 419. There are, to be precise, thirteen instances of the pronoun "you" in the lines that begin "I cannot live with you—," as against ten instances of "I."

41. Dickinson's dictionary was the 1841 edition of Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, Mass.: George and Charles Merriam).

42. Sharon Cameron, "Dickinson's Fascicles," 157.

43. Mary Jo Salter, "Puns and Accordions," 194. As already noted, Cameron's second book on Dickinson, *Choosing Not Choosing*, takes a polyvalent view of Dickinson's variant practice as thesis, and extends it in suggestive ways for the inter-subjective situation I address here. See in particular Cameron's discussion of the way in which the variants "testify . . . to a suspension of normal either/or disjunctions between self and other, origin and destination, address and attention" (186).

44. Helen McNeil, *Emily Dickinson*, 19. McNeil's reading of Dickinson also argues that Dickinson is "a woman who writes rather than speaks" and her emphasis is informed (as mine is) by Derrida's interest in the "becoming literary of the literal" (*Writing and Difference*, 230). I depart from her only in emphasizing what happens to the literal once it passes on, taking up where she leaves off when she writes that Dickinson's poems "now survive as unaddressed gifts" (181). For a relevant discussion of Dickinson's treatment of her audience as participants in a lyric gift economy, see Margaret Dickie, *Lyric Contingencies*.

45. F 1136; A 357. In the manuscript note that Leyda made for Amherst Special Collections, he suggests that the drawing was sent to J. L. Graves, perhaps because this piece makes so little sense if read as a self-addressed lyric.

46. This schematic version of the function of the Real in Lacanian theory should be referred to Lacan's *Le Séminaire XX: Encore*. A translation of the seminar appears as chapter six of Mitchell and Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality*. For a discussion of the temporality peculiar to the interrelation between the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, see Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 74–92. For an extended (and brilliant) application of Lacanian theory to Dickinson's poetry, see Mary Loeffelholz, *Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*.

47. For an interesting discussion of the relevance of both the moment of death in