

## **UC Santa Cruz**

### **UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations**

#### **Title**

"Bound--a Trouble--": Emily Dickinson and the Archive

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/82w6n9px>

#### **Author**

Beard, Jessica Jean

#### **Publication Date**

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ

**“Bound—a Trouble—”: Emily Dickinson and the Archive**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

**Jessica J. Beard**

March 2014

The Dissertation of Jessica J. Beard is approved:

---

Professor Carla Freccero, co-chair

---

Professor Jody Greene, co-chair

---

Professor Kirsten Silva-Gruesz

---

Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright ©

by

Jessica Beard

2014

## Table of Contents

Table of Figures	iii
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction: Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers: Our Emily Dickinsons	1
1) Emily Dickinson and the Archive: How Are We to Think of There?	11
2) The Space of the Print Archive	86
3) The Poetics of the Archive at Play	131
Conclusion: The Inner Workings of a Mechanical Heart: Hope for the plastic life of the digital archive	180
Works Cited	195

## *Table of Figures*

- 1) Screenshot of Poets.org site
- 2) Dickinson MSS. A 450
- 3) Verso of Dickinson MSS A 450
- 4) Marcel Duchamp's *Box of 1914*
- 5) Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box*
- 6) Dickinson MSS A 255
- 7) Dickinson MSS A 94-1
- 8) Dickinson MSS A 94-2
- 9) Dickinson MSS A 127
- 10) Dickinson MSS A 297
- 11) Dickinson MSS A 298
- 12) Dickinson MSS A 711
- 13) Dickinson MSS A 254
- 14) Dickinson MSS BPL 84a
- 15) Dickinson MSS BPL 84b
- 16) Jay Leyda Notes: Amherst Archive
- 17) from *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*
- 18) Jay Leyda Notes: Lord Letters
- 19) Joseph Cornell's "Towards the Blue Peninsula"

- 20) Letter from Joseph Cornell to Jay Leyda
- 21) Dickinson MSS A 90–10
- 22) Film still from *Centuries of June*
- 23) Film still from *Centuries of June*
- 24) Film still from *Centuries of June*
- 25) Film still from *Centuries of June*
- 26) The Dickinson Homestead
- 27) *The Emily Dickinson Archive*—Harvard
- 28) *The Emily Dickinson Collection*—Amherst
- 29) *The Emily Dickinson Collection*—Amherst

Abstract of the Dissertation

“Bound—a Trouble—”: Emily Dickinson and the Archive

By Jessica J. Beard

This dissertation looks at how archival structures have produced the canonical author Emily Dickinson, who left nearly 5,000 unpublished manuscripts at her death. With very little known about this poet, scholars have had the responsibility of constructing poems, editions, and biographies from an archive of paper fragments and tiny hand made books filled with difficult writing. I trace the early amateur editors’ influences on the poems and poet through to the texts we read today, arguing that our most reliable editions began with early editors’ organization and publication of the unruly manuscripts within the structures of archive and the book. These publications highlight and promote a narrative of Dickinson as homebound, lovelorn, and isolated—characteristics that still shape many critical analyses of the poet.

The first chapter situates my project within post-colonial, post-structuralist, and modernist avant-garde theories of the archive before moving on to an analysis of the manuscripts that reveals their resistance to organization and publication. Chapter two gives a history of Dickinson’s publication and status as an author. I perform a close reading of the poems in print that shows how “understanding” them relies upon ideas about the author’s biography and the erasure of difficult details in the manuscripts. Understanding that any reading of the poet’s work will be mediated by some archival

structure whether digital, codex, or otherwise—the third chapter looks to interdisciplinary and multimedia responses to the work that allow for playful constructions of Dickinson’s fragmented archive.

By analyzing what is effaced by the structures we put around this poet and the work she left behind, this dissertation looks to the more flexible potentials of digital technology as a possible space for Dickinson’s work. Looking beyond the organizational principles of the folder, box, page, and codex, this project hopes for a method of experiencing the most difficult, unorganized and fragmented features of Dickinson’s work.



## *Acknowledgements*

This project would not have been possible without the assistance, support and wisdom of communities I feel lucky to be a part of. I am endlessly grateful for the generosity, patience, and inspiration that the years of working with Carla Freccero and Jody Greene have afforded me. I have likewise been fortunate to always find encouragement and guidance from Kirsten Silva Gruesz. Marta Werner and Martha Nell Smith provided me with mentorship and community by giving me the tremendous opportunity to collaborate on the *Dickinson Electronic Archives*.

I would like to thank Irena Polić and the IHR for summer research support, the Emily Dickinson International Society for funding my first trips to Amherst, and Mike Kelly at Amherst Special Collections for his help and conversations. Collaboration, work sessions, and conference trips with Anne Kingsley have seen this project to its end, and for her friendship I am eternally grateful. The second chapter of this dissertation owes its development to the inspired students of my upper division Emily Dickinson seminar. Lastly, my friends and family have remained overwhelmingly encouraging throughout this process, and I dedicate this dissertation to them.

## *Introduction: Safe In their Alabaster Chambers: Our Emily Dickinsons<sup>1</sup>*

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers  
Untouched by morning  
And untouched by noon -  
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection -  
Rafter of satin,  
and Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze  
In her castle above them -  
Babbles the bee in a stolid Ear,  
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence -  
Ah! What sagacity perished here!  
(1859)

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers  
Untouched by morning -  
And untouched by noon -  
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection -  
Rafter of satin - and Roof of stone -

Grand go the Years - in the Crescent - above them—  
Worlds scoop their Arcs -  
And Firmaments - row -  
Diadems - drop - and Doges - surrender -  
Soundless as dots - on a Disc of snow -  
(1861)

If you perform a Google search for the poem by Emily Dickinson sometimes called by its first line “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” you will most likely pull up two links on the Poets.org website, for poems numbered 124 and 216.<sup>2</sup> Poem number 124 on this site is a roughly identical transcription of the later poem in my epigraph. “Poem 216” contains both poems separated by a strange line of asterisks (see image on the next page). Poets.org, an online presence of the Poetry Foundation and Harriett Monroe’s long-lasting *Poetry Magazine*, presents a cross-section of canonical popular poetry. Its masthead is made up of poets, and its ambitious mission statement purports

---

<sup>1</sup> The introduction title is meant to resonate with Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson*, an important early work on the manuscripts and also a reminder that our knowledge about the poet and her poems allows us to fill in gaps as we see fit, making everyone’s Dickinson, *their* Dickinson. I would argue this is the case for every edition of every poet, and perhaps every close reading of every poet as well.

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss the importance of numbering in the archive and published works later, but for now it is interesting to note that the website gives no reason for these numbers. The poem numbered 124 actually lines up with the Ralph Franklin Variorum numbering, but the 216 designation remains a mystery to me—not only because it cannot be found in a volume of poems, but also because it contains two poems.

to, “alter the perception that poetry is a marginal art, and to make it directly relevant to the American public” (“The Poetry Foundation: History and Mission”). Seeking to preserve the notions that poetry is both art and relevant to the American public, it presents materials with an interest in fostering the public’s engagement with work it might not normally interact with—as work it can understand and relate to nonetheless.

Poet  Go

Poem  Go

Advanced Search >


### Safe in their Alabaster Chambers (216)

by Emily Dickinson  
read by Kay Ryan

00:00 00:38

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Emily Dickinson**



Born in 1830 in Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson lived in almost total physical isolation from the outside world and is now linked with Walt Whitman as founders of a unique American poetic voice...  
[More >](#)

**Want more poems?**  
Subscribe to our Poem-A-Day emails.  
 Enter Email

**FURTHER READING**

■ **Related Prose**

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—  
Untouched by Morning  
And untouched by Noon—  
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection—  
Rafter of satin,  
And Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze  
In her Castle above them—  
Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,  
Pipe the Sweet Birds in gorant cadence—  
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

*Version of 1859*

\*\*\*\*\*

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—  
Untouched by Morning  
And untouched by Noon—  
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection—  
Rafter of Satin—and Roof of Stone!

Grand go the Years—in the Crescent—above them—  
Worlds scoop their Arcs—  
And Firmaments—row—  
Diadems—drop—and Doges—surrender—  
Soundless as dots—on a Disc of Snow—

*Version of 1861*

Figure 1: Screenshot of Poem 216 on Poets.org website.

I begin my dissertation with a Google search because its results reflect the way most readers encounter Dickinson’s work, as strange poems with multiple versions and not much explanation of what they are reading. These results reveal all the constructions that have been built around the Dickinson myth: the story about an

isolated woman of great genius—perhaps on par with Walt Whitman—paired with a photograph of the poet frozen in adolescence.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation looks to the archive as the space that has shaped these constructions of the poems and the poet, not only in the pages of popular Internet searches and trade paperback editions, but within scholarly conversations as well. Embracing theories of the archive that note that its role in preservation leads to a certain amount of destruction, it is not a recuperative project, hoping to reveal the “true” Dickinson. It is interested instead in how archives shape histories, literatures, canons, and other voices from the past. Similar to recent studies that have posed the question of genre in the face of the massive unpublished (within her lifetime) Dickinson archive, this dissertation asks questions about the lines we draw around authors and their work.<sup>4</sup>

I also frame this project with something as common as a Google search because I am interested in questions of access to the archive, not only in Dickinson studies, but elsewhere in humanities research. As my conclusion elaborates, most of this

---

<sup>3</sup> This image of Dickinson is the only confirmed by scholars to be her. It is dated 1846 or 1847 and was therefore taken when she was 16 or 17 years old. The image cannot help but influence our idea of the poet as young, innocent, sheltered, etc. In 2012, scholar Martha Nell Smith unveiled another image of the poet at the C-19 conference at UC Berkeley. She went on to publish the story behind her discovery and the vetting of the authenticity of the image at [www.emilydickinson.org/1859daguerrotype](http://www.emilydickinson.org/1859daguerrotype). The image would reorient our idea of the youthful, isolated poet towards an older woman, sitting with her friend in front of the camera. This discovery has not succeeded in becoming as relevant as the earlier photo, yet, despite Smith’s insistence that it is a legitimate discovery.

<sup>4</sup> This study is indebted to Alexandra Socarides’ recent *Dickinson Unbound* and Virginia Jackson’s important *Dickinson’s Misery* for beginning the unraveling of the Dickinson oeuvre. Jackson questions how the form of the lyric influences our reading of the poems, and asks (although perhaps not forcefully enough) if what we are reading are in fact poems. Socarides shifts our focus in reading the fascicles away from their constructions as books and towards Dickinson’s compositional process. Neither writer tells us what Dickinson was writing, but instead questions our attachment to nomenclature, genre, and ideas about the author. This project is very much in the spirit of theirs, with a focus instead on the construction of the archive, a space many Dickinson scholars do not question in their research.

dissertation was written in a time when the only access to the vast manuscript archive presupposed academic affiliation and a trip to Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> In the last six months two digital archives have been launched at Harvard and Amherst, making much of the work in manuscript available to anyone. Open access manuscript edition alternatives to the Poets.org site, these archives open up conversations about how Dickinson’s work can be understood in manuscript by diverse readers outside the academy. Finally these important, visually stunning documents are available to scholars and readers in different disciplines, with different responses and voices. As my third chapter demonstrates, some of the most imaginative thinking about the manuscripts has been done outside the boundaries of strict humanities scholarship, and these archives should ensure that there is more of it.

As a preserved voice of a 19<sup>th</sup> century American past, Dickinson’s poems have borne a heavy burden. The only canonical woman poet of her century, her compositions have been representative in the canon of “American Exceptionalism” during a period known by Americanist scholars as the “American Renaissance.”<sup>6</sup> Dickinson’s writing, like the aims of Poets.org, has needed to engage and inspire a

---

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to have received a Summer Research Fellowship from UCSC’s Institute for Humanities Research, as well as an Emily Dickinson International Society Graduate Student Fellowship to fund my trips across the country to visit these archives.

<sup>6</sup> *The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Whitman and Emerson* by F.O. Matthiessen does not include Dickinson in its original assessment of this period of American creative blossoming in 1948. The study in fact contains no women writers. Matthiessen mentions her work on only three occasions in his 665-page survey of 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature. As this dissertation discusses in detail in the chapters that follow, the Dickinson materials did not receive scholarly treatment until 1955—and it wasn’t until this occurred that scholars called for her inclusion into the canon. Before this she was very much considered a “popular” poet, a category perhaps as gendered as the fact that she was not included in Matthiessen’s study.

singularly American *and* female genius in order to live up to its role as canonical. Therefore, early editors constructed a poet and poems that were centered on nature and seasons and death and love—emblems of 19<sup>th</sup> century femininity. Later scholars focused on the poet’s love of baking, questioned the gender of her lost loves, and heralded her social isolation. Regardless of how these terms are defined, “female” and “genius” are two constructs that come together to create an isolated woman poet whose only world was her home and her poetry, and whose poetry has been made to fit into the narrative of the house-bound poet.<sup>7</sup>

This project seeks to understand how early scholars and editors produced the construct of the “house-bound poet” and what the effects of those constructs have been on our readings of the poems. As we see in chapter two, the boundaries of the home are something much of the work explores. But, as I argue, often the vision of an isolated lonely Dickinson obscures our view of the windows and doors the poems play with. I highlight these moments in hopes of opening our eyes to readings that see the movements within the house, either through the poems’ conceptual thinking or the material papers’ actual crossing of these boundaries that highlight the works’ interaction with an outside world.

---

<sup>7</sup> Here I am thinking of Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart, whose work (both separately and in collaboration) shifts from a 19<sup>th</sup> century to a 1970’s version of “woman,” but still binds Dickinson in her home and bereft of a lover. Hart and Smith argue in *Open Me Carefully* that the object of Dickinson’s affections was not a man, but her sister in law Sue. While this gives the poems and letters they reproduce an interesting read, and also could give us a queer canonical American poet, if true, their analysis doesn’t do much to unleash the works from other boundaries that stifle them.

Dickinson left no notebooks and published no works herself while she was alive. Therefore, all that is known about her and her work has come from the trunk of manuscripts she left behind. How these items were organized, if at all, is unknown. They have been split up, sorted, and published by handfuls of editors and archivists. Each of these actions has come without much knowledge of the poet and her work, and each one also works to construct some idea of those things. Therefore, we have a cycle of assumptions with nothing at the center. We read the poems to understand Dickinson, but we also see our inherited notions of her in them at the same time. This project wishes to disrupt this cycle of anxiety about the unknown and replace it with an acceptance, perhaps even an aesthetics, of the illegible, the unknowable and the fragmentary.

I began this project stuck in this cycle of anxiety about what I did not know about the Dickinson archive. As I sought to know more about the work known as “scraps,” the manuscript fragments not bound in small hand made books, I became curious about how they had come to be organized in the archive—and if there were any preserved clues as to what their original organization had been. What I wanted to exist, notes or a text by early editors and archivists, was nowhere to be found. What I did discover was just how much certainty scholars had poured into the cracks of the unknowns surrounding the fragments, how they had made their own organizations seem organic, and how much of this information had been repeated in footnotes, introductions and conference papers about the poet. My questions led me to the

archives in Amherst and Harvard, the Bienecke, the Boston Public Library and the Labor Archives at NYU. Lost in the archives of the early editors, biographers and archivists, this dissertation became more about how we have come to think about Dickinson than about reading the poems themselves.

In the midst of this research, I became fascinated by the scholar Jay Leyda's contributions to Dickinson scholarship. My discussion of his biography, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, as well as his important notes on the manuscripts, makes up the beginning of my third chapter, but this research could and should go much further. Another lost story in the Dickinson archives, Leyda's work is that of the true interdisciplinary scholar, one whose diverse interests produced a variety of intellectual networks which allowed him to see past some of the constructs that had been built around Dickinson's work by other scholars. Leyda's work is a reminder that a rich and varied response to the manuscripts makes the most of the incommensurable in Dickinson's archive. Inspiring poets and visual artists to respond to her work, Leyda's scholarship has provided us with views into the archive we didn't have access to until very recently. This dissertation is indebted to his careful and creative thinking about biography, authorship, and the archive.

Split up into three chapters, this dissertation looks at how we have preserved Dickinson's work in three different forms. Chapter one looks at the manuscript archive, chapter two explores the publication histories of the work in print, and chapter three looks at multimedia responses. The archive is broadly considered as a



preservational tool, one whose logics enforce an understanding of the work it holds. Each chapter looks at the forms these different kinds of archives take and therefore imprint upon the work.

Chapter one, “Emily Dickinson and the Archive: How are we to think of there?,” thinks about the Dickinson archive in relation to the idea of preservation. Not quite a lost post-colonial subject-building archive on one hand, but also not a traditional American commonplace book project on the other, the body of work in manuscript is difficult to define. Attempting to describe something that does not exist, this chapter contextualizes the fragmented body of work within women’s memory projects in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as reading it in conversation with Marcel Duchamp’s later avant-garde archive projects, before moving on to read the manuscripts themselves as defiant of normative organization within archival structures. Some of these structures we encounter in the Poets.org site, namely poem numbers, composition dates, and narratives of drafting. This chapter eventually makes the argument that all of these structures have been imposed by early editors in order to create print editions, and carried over by later scholars to structure even our most current texts.

Chapter two, “The Space of the Print Archive,” tells Dickinson’s publication history, with an emphasis on the editorial theories that guided each edition. It traces the construction of the author we meet in the Poets.org page, as it is built by amateur editor friends of the family and then finally by textual scholars in the 1950’s and 60’s.

This chapter argues that the all-too-interested editing by Thomas Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd sought to construct a very marketable Dickinson, and that many of these editorial decisions have not been fully called into question by either Thomas Johnson's 1955 editions or R.W. Franklin's in the 80's and 90's. The chapter concludes with a close reading of the texts in print, with an admission that when we read Dickinson, we willfully ignore features of the text that don't fit our expectations. Whether these features include phrases, verb tenses, page features, indecisive word or poem variants, readers and scholars either look over them to produce legible poem (either in a close reading or in a published poem).

Chapter three, "The Poetics of the Archive at Play," looks to reading practices that allow for the unruly, unfinished and fragmented elements of the Dickinson archive. It traces Jay Leyda's scholarship back through his work with Sergei Eisenstein in experimental film to construct an archival methodology he only obliquely names. Leyda's collage biographies and attention to the materiality in Dickinson's work resist the drafting and lost-love narratives that have given the work an order since the early editions. While Leyda does not produce an edition himself, this chapter looks at the way he inspired book-artist scholars such as Marta Werner and filmmaker/visual artists such as Joseph Cornell to contribute to a conversation. These contributions, playing with or working outside of the codex form, allow for the more difficult features of the texts to be seen, without normalizing them into legibility.

This dissertation ends with a meditation and analysis of the newest scholarly advances in Dickinson studies, the digital archives at Amherst and Harvard. Recognizing their contributions to access and to the manuscripts, I also see the shortcomings in their offerings as results of early conceptions of the author, the edition and the poem. Although I recognize that there will never be a “pure” way to experience Dickinson’s “original” work, this study reveals how a history of methodologies and theories have resulted in the very myths of the author and the original. A scholarly practice that is aware of these modes of thought can actively resist reproducing them, seeking them, and filling in the blanks when they are never found.

Chapter One: Emily Dickinson and the Archive: *How are we to think of there?*

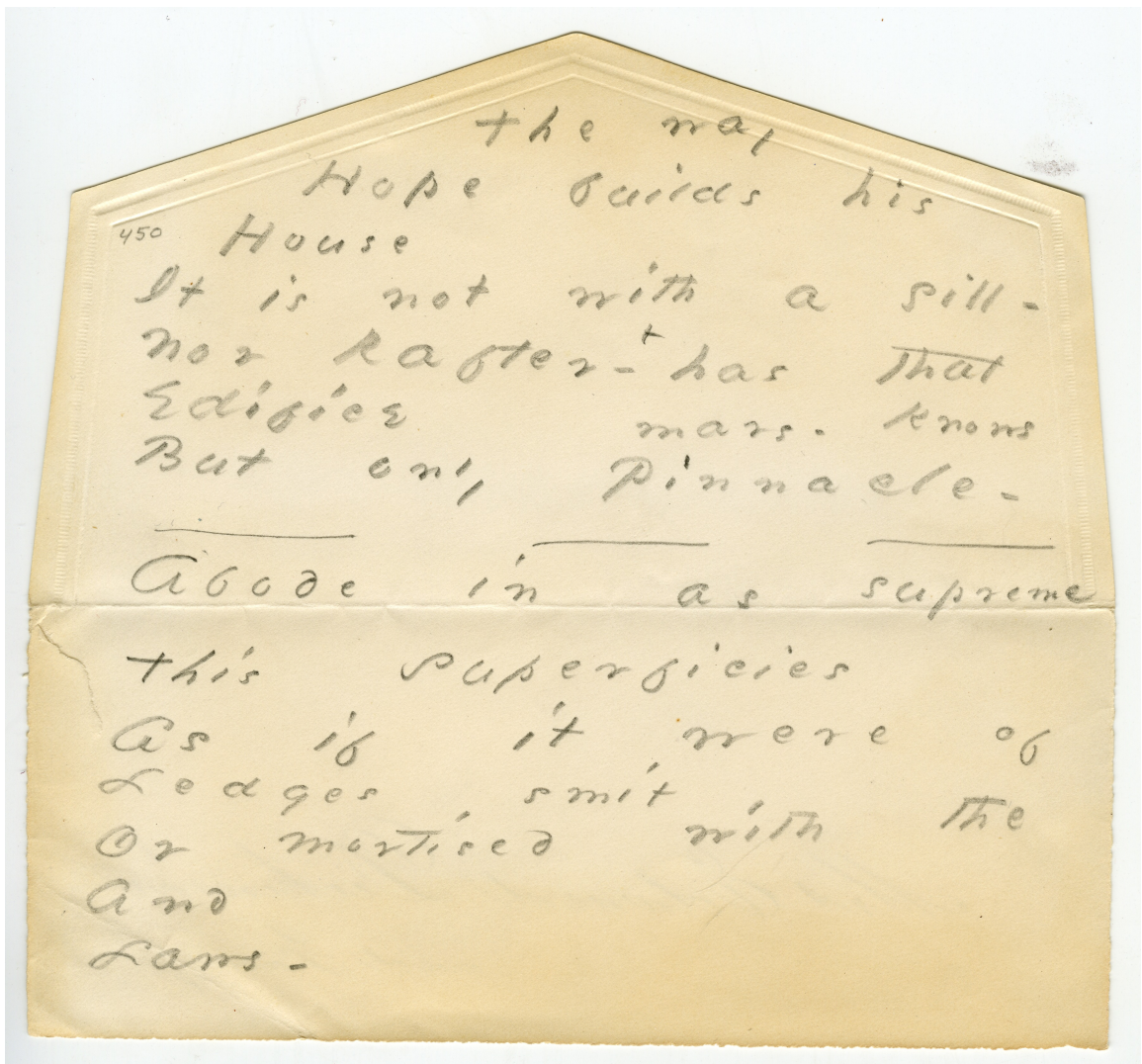


Figure 2: "The Way Hope Builds His House," A 450 Amherst Frost Library Special Collections

"Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word 'archive'—and with the archive of so familiar a word. *Arkhe*, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things commence—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods command, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, in

*this place* from which order is given—nomological principle. *There*, we said, and *in this place*. How are we to think of *there*?” (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1)

“If the archive can serve as no more than a tomb of remnants and traces, where is the place for that which does not survive or which, *by virtue of the archive*, is forgotten?” (Charles Merewether, “Art and the Archive,” 12 emphasis mine.)

Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the imagined moment a woman named Emily Dickinson first put pen or pencil to a scrap or sheet of paper, in a room we can gesture towards, *there*, in a yellow house, still standing, in Amherst, Massachusetts. Let us not begin at the moment she sews sheets of poems together into book-like objects, and saves them in a trunk, nor the moment she stops doing so in favor of writing on small, torn and re-used bits of paper she also saves in a trunk. This dissertation frets about where to begin and has gotten lost again and again in its own beginning, wondering where to begin. “How are we to think of *there*?” it asks itself again and again, redefining ‘there’ with each cycle. It wants to begin *there*: in the archive, but circles through the multiple meanings and workings of it, and gives up. Therefore, this dissertation begins with two unanswerable questions: where and what is the Dickinson archive—and it works through different ways artists and scholars have begun to answer these questions, while also highlighting where our view or sense of it has been obscured.

It is there: the Dickinson house as archive turned museum. There: the trunks and drawers that first held the manuscripts in Dickinson archive. There: the baskets, folders and desktops of early editors, copying the handwritten documents into poems.

There: the folders, boxes, gloved hands and pencils of early archivists at Harvard and Amherst. There: the translations into printed bound books. There: an imagined constellation of connections and ideas in a Joseph Cornell box, or one of his late experimental films devoted to the *feeling* of preservation in the Dickinson archive.

There: these constellations with infinite groupings in an imagined digital archive that moves beyond the study contained on these pages. The Dickinson archive is spatially bound by the special collections libraries at Harvard, Amherst and the Boston Public Library. And it is also bound by how we think archives work, how they are organized and how these two ideas inform what becomes archival.<sup>8</sup> This dissertation is an encouragement to think about archives so as to imagine Dickinson's collecting and preserving activities as themselves artistic interventions into the archive.

*No there there*

This project began with an obsession with Emily Dickinson's manuscripts, documents sometimes known as the book-like "fascicles," the unbound sheets or "sets" and the later "scraps," or torn pieces of paper.<sup>9</sup> Dickinson's manuscripts include these

---

<sup>8</sup> In the preface to *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory* editors Blouin and Rosenberg write, "Archives are thus spatially bounded as places of uncovering and re-covering, as sites of concealment and suppression as well as of the expression, projection, and revelation of social pasts and futures" (viii). I devote the next chapter to investigating how Dickinson's poems (manuscripts that have been edited into poems in print editions) negotiate space in a way that I argue rejects closure and containment. Dickinson's print archive, as it is analyzed in this dissertation, produces poems that conceptually challenge enclosure while also textually and materially making closure impossible. These are features of Dickinson's archive that continually challenge the categories and contexts placed around the work.

<sup>9</sup> Early editors gave the name "fascicle" to the handmade books, and placed the unbound but still thematically or biographically affiliated sheets that were assumed to become hand bound books into

three different kinds of material documents, in addition to letters sent, letters never sent, poems sent in letters, poems written within letters, crickets pinned to sheets of paper including poems, drawings, mixed media collages, recipes and pieces of paper practicing signatures, single letter shapes and other miscellaneous documents.

This study will describe how they make up the archive we've been left with, the subsequent archives we have invented, and suggest how a new archive might better accommodate the Dickinson writing project as a whole. I analyze the space the manuscripts take up and resist when set to print in the second section, and in the third, I describe the expansions that imagining the manuscripts within a playful, or experimental archival setting allow in our thinking. I look to studies that have come before for hints and glimpses of the "original" Dickinson archive. I get lost in imagining the lost and destroyed ordinary organization, the hands that slipped pages into boxes, apron pockets and through the post. I want all of this to be the archive. I want to describe the experience of the Dickinson project *as* archival. But I have gotten stuck, both with the idea of the archive in general, and with the idea of the Dickinson project as a whole: two notions that exist only in the imagination, in theory.

Dickinson's work has been effaced by the archival apparatus that surrounds it. Her family split the work into two different collections at two different places and organized the work it delivered to Harvard and Amherst as if it were being prepared for

---

envelopes called "sets," while the work that remained upon torn and reused paper was called "scraps." As the introduction suggests and the second chapter looks into in greater detail, these early names and organizational strategies were very much driven by an urge to sculpt a biography around the person Emily Dickinson, while at the same time creating a body of work for publication.

publication. The Dickinson archive is already edited, plural, scattered, and incomplete at the moment we look to it for answers. It has been overwritten by normative organizing principles, drafting narratives, and publications. To theorize what Dickinson might be doing in the act of preserving and collecting of her own poems and ephemera, one has to look for the traces of structures that might have existed before the work was organized into folders and boxes or scanned into white backgrounds, alone on a digital screen.

Derrida's *Archive Fever* seems to know the trouble with imagining the archive as it plays with beginning again and again. It is split up into a Note, Exergue, Preamble, Forward, Theses and a Postscript. Derrida moves through beginnings, footnotes, a set of hypotheses to be considered, and another provisional endnote. The sum of all of these parts is that of a very slippery argument, or an argument that knows it cannot fully be constructed, or an argument that takes itself apart, by necessity—like the archive itself. If a philosophical text, or any text really, normally claims to give us knowledge, what this text tells us in the very beginning is that it is unsure about its capacity to do so.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Derrida writes, “I dream now of having the time to submit for your discussion more than one thesis, three at least. This time will never be given to me. Above all, I will never have the right to take your time so as to impose upon you, rapid-fire, these three+n essays. Submitted to the test of your discussion, these theses thus remain for the time being, hypotheses. Incapable of supporting their demonstration, constrained to posit them along the way them along the way in a mode which will appear at times dogmatic, I will recall them in a more critical and formal manner in conclusion” (*Archive Fever*, 5).



Derrida's exploration and excavation of the archive helps us think through the idea that the archive exists in material form, while also leaking through those boundaries. Derrida theorizes this complicated presence as *topo-nomology* and he goes on to describe it as:

the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible. I stress this point for reasons which will, I hope, appear more clearly later. They have to do with this *topo-nomology*, with this archontic dimension of domiciliation, with this archic, in truth patriarchic, function, without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such. To shelter itself, and, sheltered, to conceal itself.  
(*Archive Fever*, 3)

Derrida seems to be trying to understand where archives live and what is important about their location or "domiciliation." The archive is only visible, made real and materialized when "concealed" and protected by the law, by normative thinking, and authority. The archive, as Derrida says in a footnote later on, makes politics out of memory, and in turn, makes memory political.<sup>11</sup> If an archive takes shape, is materialized by the protection of the law, of logos—it can therefore also be thought of as being shaped by those very forces. Archives are shaped by authority, law and, as Derrida (or his frequent interlocutor and collaborator Helene Cixous) may put it, the rule of patriarchy and a certain kind of logic. While the archive is shaped by these forces and

---

<sup>11</sup> Derrida writes in footnote 1, "Of course, the question of a politics of the archive is our permanent orientation here, even if the time of a lecture does not permit us to treat this directly and with examples. This question will never be determined as one political question among others. It runs through the whole of the field and in truth determines politics from top to bottom as *res publica* (public affairs). There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation (*Archive Fever*, 4).

housed by institutions and protected by their laws and logics, materials also exist that do not fit the confines of these structures. Without the structures to read, understand and house these materials, they are rendered illegible, invisible, lost, forgotten and silenced.

Derrida's thinking here about the archive makes me wonder what actually happens to work that does not fit into these prescribed forms. It makes me think about the Dickinson archive and the ways it resists our past and current modes of organization and enclosure. It makes me think of the mythical original Dickinson archive and how its non-sensical organization defied 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic traditions like the commonplace book, the autograph book, and the journal while at the same time totally sidestepping normative traditions in publishing. The archive is filled with countless documents that sometimes look like poems, sometimes sewn into books that seem like commonplace books and aren't published books. While the tendency in Dickinson studies has been to force this work into something it seems like or what it seeks to be, I would like to free these documents from our desire to stuff them into these categories in which they do not entirely fit.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> I am interested in how an artist preserving their own work in a manner divergent from normal archival practices (sorting and ordering drafts according to their affiliation with an eventual poem, dating objects and sorting them chronologically, leaving a journal, writing statements of poetics, saving letters, etc.) makes an impact on the official site of the repository. How does the language of recuperation still have faith in the space of the archive to hold all that we want to know? Many conversations with Anne Kingsley at Northeastern University about the spiritual practices silenced from the official Black Atlantic archives have informed my thinking here about not only what gets lost or left out of an archive, but that the space of the archive only allows for certain kinds of preservation.

Removing these forms from around these texts often renders them illegible as poems or pieces of canonical literature. But it is exactly the forms we put around this letter, that poem, and this draft that make them legible as works of canonical literature. Reading against these boundaries means reading toward a kind of illegibility, perhaps politicizing what it means to be unreadable and unread. Working backwards from canonical woman poet-status to illegible artist may seem counter to the world of “recovery” or literary canonization, and it is. My desire to read the Dickinson corpus as archival highlights the way in which the work within it plays with an institutional activity such as preservation and protection of an artistic or historic record. As an archive, Dickinson’s body of work is always waiting to be organized, edited and published, but it never really is—remains in possibility, always becoming, striving.

Much has been written on the subject of Dickinson’s writing and how it did and did not fit into 19<sup>th</sup> century thinking, canons, publication practices and poetics. Scholars such as Domnhall Mitchell and Christianne Miller have sought to normalize her manuscripts in light of 19<sup>th</sup> century standards, while others like Susan Howe and Martha Nell Smith have sought to fit her into contemporary radical notions of sexuality and textuality.<sup>13</sup> We can think of her work in relation to the tradition of

---

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Franklin’s important facsimile edition prompted research and responses from the scholars who argued the material features were both meaningful and meaningless. Domnhall Mitchell’s *Measures of Possibility* argues that the material features of Dickinson’s manuscripts, namely her handwriting and line breaks are too arbitrary to take seriously. His book also makes the point that it is our modernist tendencies as scholars to read features outside of their 19<sup>th</sup> century contexts as meaningful. Mitchell’s well-researched (after many months in the Amherst library archive) argument is based on the fact that these features (like the lovely curves of the sea-shaped S’s one encounters) are not consistently meaningful across her texts. While I disagree with his eventual surmise that the features are unimportant to readers, I do take Mitchell’s thorough archival scholarship to mean that perhaps the meaning shifts

commonplace books, autograph books and journals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We can imagine her saving and re-use of paper as related to the practice of saving fabric scraps, and look ahead to the obsession with dailiness of modernist art and poetry. We can see a striving past male-dominated relationships in the fact that the largest preserved collection of her letters are those she wrote to Susan Dickinson. This dissertation will focus on the Dickinson Archive, made up of homemade books, unbound but organized and folded “sets” of poems and scraps of re-used paper, crickets, flowers, stamps and drawings—all engaging with a practice of preservation that is fascinated with accumulation, process, the little things that make up a long life.

When we think of Dickinson’s papers, we think of them as they have been preserved by archivists and editors, as Papers with a capital P—something that should surely be preserved and therefore thoroughly mined and understood. But why were Dickinson’s papers ever preserved? She was not a canonical author when she died. In fact she has only been edited into such an author. Dickinson’s papers, for all intents and purposes, should have been destroyed upon her death, or well before it.<sup>14</sup> When we seek to understand what the papers are, how they work together and why they are

---

across the different works. Christanne Miller’s more recent book, *Reading in Time* places Dickinson’s innovations within 19<sup>th</sup> century reading and writing practices, encouraging the reader to look at her innovations with the lyric form as situated in popular writing, textbooks and pamphlets. Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson* and later essays seek to place the visual elements and lyrical experimentation of Dickinson’s work into a genealogical tracing that looks backward to the antinomian tradition in early American (especially women’s) history, and forward to the experiments of Howe’s own poetic practice. Martha Nell Smith’s *Rowing in Eden* and the later co-authored *Open Me Carefully* are detailed inquiries into Dickinson’s relationship with her sister-in-law, Susan. Smith reads the letters between the two women as reflective of a love affair that replaces the many male lovers earlier scholars have sought to place in Dickinson’s biography.

<sup>14</sup> It is often mentioned that Dickinson wanted her papers destroyed at her death, but that her maid Maggie Maher saved the work in her trunk. This story will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Two.

preserved we bring a similar frame of mind to the table. Of course they were preserved, Dickinson was drafting, we can see a logic to their organization (Sharon Cameron) and preservation (Franklin's variorum).<sup>15</sup>

The Dickinson Archive is, however, organized into folders and boxes mostly housed at the Amherst and Harvard libraries in Massachusetts. It has been closely read, re-read, organized and recovered. It has been read and revised by scholars looking to normalize her handwriting, line-breaks and spelling. It has been re-read and un-done by feminist scholars looking to revolutionize her proto-avant garde literary gifts. Both revisionist feminist and normalizing traditional scholars seek to make Dickinson legible—to place her within a logic system that makes her work and words make sense to a large group of people, therefore to a form and context we can understand. They do not want to begin with the assumption that what they are working with are not lyric poems, canonical poems, proto-modernist poems, civil war poems or love poems in manuscript. Their desire to produce a collection of work that reflects the expectations of a reader, whether formally, conceptually, linguistically, or orthographically drives these scholars to alter the poems, their contexts and significance. This logic system begins with the archive, a space Charles Merewether describes as “the foundation from which history is written” (“Art and Archive,” 10).

---

<sup>15</sup> This chapter will go into greater detail describing the projects of Franklin and Cameron below, but for now what is important to emphasize is Franklin's huge efforts to produce an ordered variorum of all of Dickinson's works, as well as his monumental facsimile edition of the manuscript books. Sharon Cameron wrote one of the first book-length studies of the manuscript books, which looked for meaning in the order Franklin assembled.

While much work has been done on colonial archives as systems of political power, little work has been done to think about how the shape of the archive has altered Dickinson's work. I turn now to post-colonial studies' interest in archives as producers of knowledge and history rather than neutral holding sites in order to place the Dickinson archive within conversations about queer archives, anti-colonialist archives and other collections of historical materials that resist normative organization and enclosures.<sup>16</sup>

*Informed and Enforced Logics: the form of the Archive as force*

Anjali Arondekar's "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive" begins with a critique of positivist notions of discovery and recuperation in the colonial Indian archives. The epigraph by from Gayatri Spivak which speaks both to our hopes of an encounter with a lost past within the archive and the nothing we so often meet there. Spivak writes, "(t)here were no papers, the ostensible reason for my visit, and of course, no trace of the Rani. Again, a reaching and an un-grasping" (quoted in Arondekar, 10). Spivak's trip to the archive results in a nothing, a not there, a

---

<sup>16</sup> Ann Stoler's essay "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance" asks how the form of an archive informs its contents and the reading strategies we bring to them in order to understand them. Stoler's essay reminds us that we must read documents in the archive within their institutional structure in order to understand how they might fit into an accepted logic or narrative and also think "against the archival grain" for alternative readings and recuperations. Stoler's essay reminds us that the structure of the archive cannot be dismissed outright, as it tells us much about the kind of understanding a culture hopes to have of the contents of the archive. Extending these notions to the Dickinson archive, it reminds us that the archive itself can tell us how previous scholars wanted to understand Dickinson's work, an analysis this dissertation will undertake with both the print and manuscript archives of Dickinson material.

disappointment. What she sought inside the walls of the official repository of history was not there. What happens when the past you seek leaves you empty-handed?

Arondekar cautions against our impulses to assume that our histories can always be found here, a thread I would like to follow in my study of the Dickinson archive. She reminds us that while re-reading and re-visioning projects have been successful, we still cling too mightily to the official capacity of the archive to answer our questions about the past.<sup>17</sup> For Arondekar, and for this study too, the archive's very capacity to produce an official memory does violence to that which does not fit nicely into the archive builder's version of what this might be.<sup>18</sup> We might be able to add to this what we think we might find, but our efforts will always be geared towards adding to the materials housed within the structure of an official archive, one that is built with a certain vision of a past in mind.

---

<sup>17</sup> Arondekar cites the example of Queer Theory's intervention into the archive to produce competing archives while also calling attention to the limitations of the archives within their studies. She writes, "(l)ike other fields of inquiry, sexuality studies studies has turned to the colonial archive for legitimacy. Queer texts, topics and themes have been discovered in the archive and examined exuberantly. The process of 'queering' pasts has been realized through corrective reformulations of 'suppressed' or misread colonial materials. These reformulations have intervened decisively in colonial historiography, not only decentering the idea of a *coherent* and desirable imperial archive but also forcing us to rethink colonial methodologies. Implicit in this rethinking, however, is the assumption that the archive, in all its multiple articulations, is still *the* source of knowledge about the colonial past. The inclusion of oral histories, ethnographic data, popular culture, and performances may have fractured traditional definitions of the archive (and for the better) but the telos of knowledge production is still deemed approachable through what one finds, if only one can think of more capacious ways to look" (*Trace*, 11).

<sup>18</sup> The manuscript that begins this chapter serves as an excellent example of what can get left out of the archive. A 450, printed in *both* Franklin's and Johnson's variorums, as poem 1512 and 1481 respectively, is not described in its material state in either. It seems important to note that the poem about a house is written in the shape of a house, but neither scholar retains this feature when he is giving the history of the text. If you read the material features of these manuscripts as adding meaning to the semantic understandings of the work, then the erasure of these elements in the variorum does not seem to do justice to the text.

Arondekar troubles our relationship with the past further, writing that “even though scholars have foregrounded the analytical limits of the archive, they continue to privilege the reading practices of recovery over all others” (*Trace*, 12). So, while we might be aware that the guarded repository might have differing organizational strategies (ie, something might be filed away that we just need to find, decipher, or decode) than what we might encourage, all we need to do is re-think, re-vise, and re-visit that archive in order to correct that analysis or logic. In the case of Dickinson, many scholars have made a decisive turn towards the archive in an attempt to recover her work from the printed editions most commonly used. But most have trusted the organizational strategies of early archivists, despite their tendency to print poems as letters (or vice-versa) and their stories about dumping baskets of manuscript materials on the living room floor to transcribe by firelight. These stories, in fact, lead us to the archive with hopes that these early organizers just put things in the wrong spot, perhaps misunderstanding what they were looking at.<sup>19</sup>

Andorekar’s essay, with its focus on official colonial archives, reminds us that the form of the archive imposes limits upon what is allowed into official memory and preservation. It depends who writes, if they can write, what language they are writing in and what they write about. The archive is built with an emphasis on writing, writing that can be categorized into folders and boxes, catalogued according to date, transcribed for publication or analysis and sealed away until the materials are needed

---

<sup>19</sup> Chapter two will attend closely to the complicated role early amateur archivists had and continue to have in the organization and publication history of the manuscripts.



for supplementary use by researchers. The Dickinson archive challenges the notion that all materials fit into formal categories and should remain within them. Arondekar writes, “(w)ithin such a policed state of knowledge, texts that fall outside the purview of official archives are read as flimsy evidence and historically specious—largely the conjectures of those engaged in too much cultural thinking,” reminding us that the authority of the archive not only determines what is curated for archival inclusion, but also makes judgements about what is kept outside (*Trace*, 14).

Arondekar brings her questions about the archive into conversation with feminist post-colonialist Antoinette Burton whose *Dwelling in the Archive* re-imagines what counts as archival and therefore, official, memory. Arondekar situates Burton within her own argument, continuing her thoughts about texts left outside the archive, and writing that “(i)t is , Burton points out, no coincidence that such texts are usually gendered (as in the case of the three female colonial subjects she speaks of) and moored (or dwelling, to use her metaphor) **in archives of their own making**” (*Trace* 15, emphasis mine). Burton’s historical materials come from literal house-made archives, unofficial repositories of unofficial information. I would like to imagine Dickinson doing the same thing as she preserved her own perpetually unofficial texts.

Burton’s text asks questions that motivate my own study of the Dickinson archive. Burton’s archival “discovery” takes place, much like early accounts of the manuscript scraps and fascicles, in a living room, with what are considered to be

preserved family heirlooms.<sup>20</sup> These materials cause Burton to ask, “(c)an private memories of home serve as evidence of political history? What do we make of histories that domestic interiors, once concrete and now perhaps crumbling or even disappeared, have the capacity to yield?” (*Dwelling*, 4). Burton’s questions about what constitutes an archive and how the name of the structure that holds one determines the significance of the materials inside echo my own curiosities surrounding the Dickinson materials.

I should take a moment here to notice the obvious differences between the kinds of archives being discussed. Colonial Indian archives have in their questioning and rearrangement much at stake in terms of political personhood, basic rights, and what counts as official history. Arondekar and Burton are looking at materials that expand these histories, question what an official history is, account for nationalist and imperialist projects, and try to account for what might be left out (for Arondekar this is a queer history and for Burton a domestic female homemade archive).<sup>21</sup> Dickinson, as a white upper class New England woman, does not have personhood at stake in her inclusion in archives or national history in the same way colonized Indian subjects might. However, the idea of what an American female poet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could be has been constructed along with the work we read. So, while the studies whose focus

---

<sup>20</sup> Burton writes of her moment of discovery, “(c)learly what I had in front of me was rare and remarkable evidence—not just of Bonnerjee family history but of the domestic contexts of late Victorian Indian nationalism, at least in its Congress form. Yet, it was hardly housed in a conventional archival site, and (like many artifacts of colonialism) it had traveled a long way from “home” (*Dwelling*, 4).

<sup>21</sup> Between Aife Murray’s research on the Dickinson home discussed at length in the next chapter and Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Hart’s queering of Dickinson’s relationship with her sister in law Sue in *Rowing and Eden* and *Open Me Carefully* these recovery projects are also alive in the Dickinson archive.

on archival architecture I gesture towards in this study might have more at stake in their political projects, the work of re-imagining the Dickinson archive is not entirely un-political. The standing her work has been given within the American canon and the way most high school and undergraduate courses treat her work do not cast her in the light this project wishes to. A stable archive with clean, understandable printed poems reveals nothing about the messy archive Dickinson actually left us.<sup>22</sup> Arondekar and Burton's studies affirm that the enclosure imposed upon a set of materials changes the meaning of those materials, changes what can be housed within that enclosure and how we think about them.

Burton's study looks to three domestic documents of colonial India. She argues that these "private memories of home... claim a place in history at the intersection of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the national and the postcolonial" (*Dwelling*, 4). For Burton, these "family histories" or "domestic accounts" move beyond the walls of the home, but also use the walls of the home to frame much that happens beyond them. As we will see in the next chapter, much of Dickinson's writing took place within the walls of the home that would be the original archival location of her manuscripts. Many of the poems that were produced within the home used the structure of the house (walls, windows, doors, closets) as context for the substance of the poems. Burton's reading of these source materials as historical documents that "used domestic space as an archival source from which to construct

---

their own histories” can be mapped onto the Dickinson archive, and perhaps the personal can then become poetic, the private can become artistic and the national canon of American female poets can be troubled by a playful experimentalist rather than flattened out by a lonely recluse seeking love (*Dwelling*, 5). If Burton is making an additive intervention into a male-dominated national archive, this study seeks similarly to use the homemade archive to complicate the body of work that has come to represent Emily Dickinson and therefore complicate our image of what the female American canonical poet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or any century, can be.<sup>23</sup> What happens when we shift our focus from the historical person of Emily Dickinson as the housebound poet, to the work in manuscript as house-made and house-preserved? It allows us to attend to the materiality of the literary artifacts and the way they circulated inside the home and to other homes in letters.

Burton’s move to look at documents that might not have normally been included in the archive emphasizes the trouble one encounters when going to the archive for information (or in Dickinson’s case, poetry) that does not “belong” there. Burton’s wishes to extend the concept of the archive to include these house-made and house centered documents of colonial India resists the notion of inclusion, in favor of facing “the ultimate fragmentation and ghostliness of all archives: the final unknowability of home and history in their totalities” (*Dwelling*, 144). Burton’s history

---

<sup>23</sup> Again, I turn to the important feminist work of Susan Howe, Martha Nell Smith, Ellen Hart and Marta Werner as those who have done so much work already to re-imagine Dickinson through her poetic and epistolary experimentations. This study would not be possible without their initial unraveling of the Dickinson archive and resulting persona.

by definition cannot know everything about women in colonial India, just as we will never know everything about Dickinson. But, following Burton, if we work to include stories that haven't taken the normative forms of the archive, but instead take the forms better known to the creators of those stories, perhaps we can see more of the history we wish to construct.

### *Homesick in the Archive*

“Marked by nostalgia, an archive presents a kind of homesickness, a pain or longing to return home or to some lost past, where one remembers a sense of wholeness and belonging” (Susan Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters*, 9)

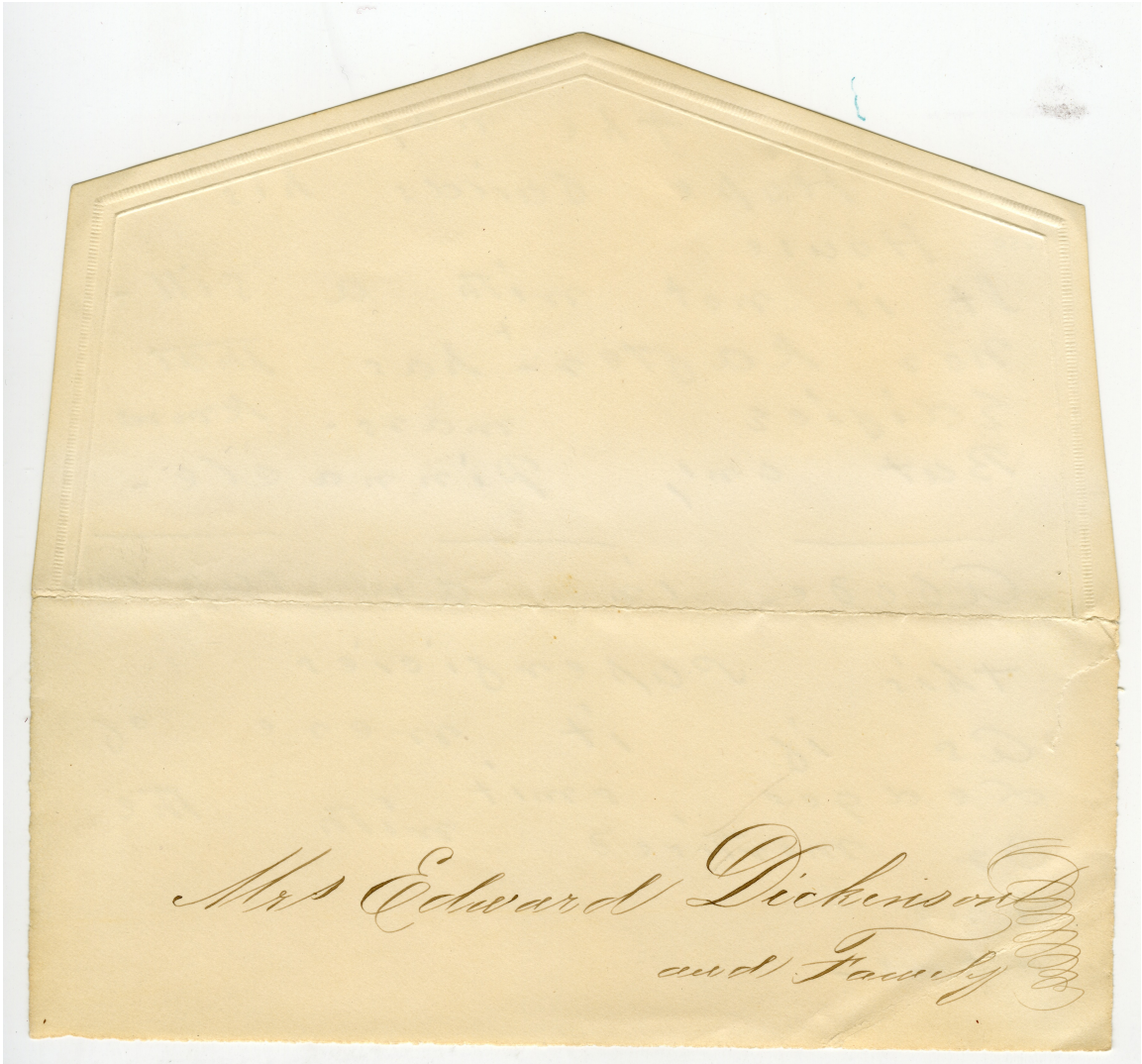


Figure 3: Verso of A 450 “The Way Hope Builds His House” Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

Burton and Arondekar remind us that the archive has a shape that results in walls to keep materials inside and outside, based on standards centered on identity,

nationality, gender and race. Who writes has an effect upon where what is written is stored. Cultural memory is affected by the selection of certain voices for preservation in official spaces. The archive's shape is its limitation. The Dickinson poem about a house that starts this chapter is written on a piece of envelope that looks like a house and has on its verso a telling story of the inhabitants of the house where it was written and stored. The Dickinson homestead, once home and archive to the manuscripts, was owned by Mr. Edward Dickinson, Emily's father. The envelope "house" bears his name as owner of the "and family" that follows. The poem seems to yearn for a notion of home that is free of the constraints money, property and other materials placed upon the very real limitations the Dickinson house prescribed.

In typical Dickinson fashion, this poem sets up a tension between the material world of sills and rafters and the conceptual world of pinnacle, the supreme, and the "Law." Penned upon an envelope that looks like a house and addressed to the master of the house, himself versed in the more common human law, this poem becomes even more fraught with tension. As we will see with the poems below, this scrap has been published outside of its envelope home and with many other curious qualities effaced, including the floating words "mars knows" in the fifth line, the indecisive "and/or" at the end of the poem and the three long dashes separating the two stanzas (and also perhaps the upper and lower floors of the home). What kind of home does hope seek? What kind of homesickness does this poem enact when it is silenced in the archive?

Susan Stabile writes, in *Memory's Daughters*, a study of 18<sup>th</sup> century material forms of memory, that, "(a)s polar opposites, men and women represented the two spheres of architecture: exterior and interior, public and private" (*Daughters* 26). *Memory's Daughters* explores the gendered spaces of the home as they are reflected in the archival creations of 18<sup>th</sup> century domestic archives such as commonplace books, scrapbooks, dressing tables and miniatures. The next chapter looks via the poems to places of the home that are explored, traversed and conceptually explored in Dickinson's writing. That the home spaces were also utilized as archival spaces in Dickinson's writing, and that this tendency corresponds with women's writing in 18<sup>th</sup> century America as well as colonial India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leads one to think that Dickinson, colonial Indian women, and 18<sup>th</sup> century women were perhaps making more than memory books to entertain. A woman who cannot vote or hold property, a woman who "will not cross my father's ground to any house or town" might interact with the official law-formed archive in a way that resists its official capacities.<sup>24</sup> What if we see these projects as playing with archival conventions and avoiding elements of organization in the face of so much accumulation and preservation? If we cannot see the original trunk and desk-bound state of the Dickinson archive anymore, perhaps we can think through the conventions it pushed up against and resisted as it continues to do so today.

---

<sup>24</sup> Dickinson L330



Stabile's study of women's domestic scenes of 18<sup>th</sup> century memory preservation is rooted in the understanding that women lacked access to certain institutional practices, such as the archive. Because women did not own the houses they were bound to, one wonders whether the accumulation of papers in an archive *one could* own might reflect a push back against an institutional norm these women found stifling.<sup>25</sup> Stabile's study shows how women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated ownership over their own materials by binding them (papers in commonplace books), producing structures (shellwork houses), curating and preserving them (souvenirs in dressing tables). These practices show women not only owning things, but building, sorting and creating with them. Dickinson's resistance to the cultural norms enforced by 19<sup>th</sup> century gender roles provided her with few options. If she chose not to marry, she would be choosing to stay in her father's house. Should she choose not to publish, her works would stay similarly enclosed.<sup>26</sup>

Stabile writes of commonplace books, the bound manuscripts that had circulated initially as educational tools in antiquity, that "commonplacing was an invaluable method of reading and storing information in the early United States," encouraging the curation and presentation of a "universality of ideas and correctness of

---

<sup>25</sup> Stabile writes, "the colonial marriage market trafficked women as moveable commodities, upholding Pennsylvania coverture laws that prohibited a wife from buying, selling, or managing property (even inherited property) without her husband's permission" (*Daughters* 53)

<sup>26</sup> Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart make the case that Dickinson found solutions to both problems in her relationship with her sister in law Susan Gilbert Dickinson who lived across from the Dickinson Homestead in Amherst. Their edition of letters, *Open Me Carefully*, focuses upon the ample (Dickinson wrote to Sue more than any other person) correspondence between the two that not only document what could be a romantic partnership, but also a collaborative one.

taste” (*Daughters*, 12). If commonplace books in the 18<sup>th</sup> century encouraged “new modes of learning based on accumulation, order and classification into a feminine art of collecting,” then Dickinson’s 19<sup>th</sup> century practices can be seen as injecting a sense of disorder into modes of learning and feminine collecting—and, I argue, archiving. Stabile writes that the archive is “the modern adaptation of a memory palace, the archive, as a physical place, is a system of artificial memory” (*Daughters* 9).

Commonplace books, as a “there” of a certain kind of archive, for Stabile, produce a place of ordered learning for women of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as a place where memories are collected. Echoing Burton’s inquiry into unofficial collections of women’s cultural memory that find themselves collected in and around the home, Stabile’s book accounts for women’s 18<sup>th</sup> century tendency to document the daily life of household life. She writes that these women “copied and commented on passages from their favorite books, they composed original poetry, and they preserved one another’s verse” (*Daughters* 13). Further, the practice of commonplacing put the materials into circulation in their unfinished and unprinted states, giving them a sense of publication similar to Dickinson’s work sent in letters in unfinished and sometimes actively workshopped states.<sup>27</sup> Stabile writes, “(c)ontrary to the consensus building constituted by print culture’s creation of public memory, the manuscript commonplace book was neither “fixed” nor corrected. It was an archive” (*Daughters* 13).

---

<sup>27</sup> The poem discussed in the introduction, commonly known as “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” is one such example of a workshopped poem. Dickinson’s correspondences with Susan Dickinson and Thomas Higginson are both examples of the poet working on poems in draft form with feedback from her correspondents.

Stabile's assertion that these texts in flux were "archives" mirrors my argument that Dickinson's work is archival. As "repository(ies) for documents and relics from the past" Dickinson's work, like the manuscript commonplace books (but, as we will see, in many ways unlike them, too) is itself "contrary to the consensus building constituted by print culture's creation of public memory" (*Daughters* 8). For Stabile, the world of print culture produces a cultural memory and history that is cemented in a certain interpretation. Much like the difference between Dickinson's work in print and Dickinson's work in manuscript, scrap and letter, Stabile identifies a cultural history that is official and unchanging in its "fixed and reverential in its relationship to the past" (*Daughters* 3). Dickinson in print is similarly fixed and reverential of a certain idea of what Dickinson of the past might have been. As Stabile reminds us, echoing the need for textual editors to favor one version of a poem, or to create one from a group of affiliated scraps, "the construction of 'national memory' demands consensus" (*Daughters* 3).

As a canonical American author, the idea of Emily Dickinson as a poet is part of the construction of the consensus seeking national memory. Her archive has been shaped by the editing and organizing habits of those hoping to shape her poems into a narrative of American literary history. Dickinson's difficult archive has been edited out in her printed texts, resulting in clean poems and a poet whose life and work makes narrative sense. While Dickinson's poems in print still retain a fair amount of semantic difficulty, their complicated states as literary works in manuscript remain

unfinished, or *archival*. As Stabile writes, “in constructing public memory, national cultures have traditionally established ‘imagined communities,’ or narrative constructions which can be reinvented over and over” (*Daughters* 3). In their unfinished states these poems challenge the “imagined community” of American literature. Choices have been made for us as readers, but as scholars and thinkers (and, with the spread of digitized materials, more readers as well as the scholars) we’ve had a certain amount of interpretive work done for us when we are face to face with the poems printed in a book.

As Thomas Humphrey writes about the women compiling commonplace books in *Memory’s Daughters*, “the writers, however, knew that the process of compiling and of writing their commonplace books would always be incomplete. They hoped that their histories would constantly be added to, changed, and indexed by future generations” (“Making Memories in Early America,” 47). This element of chance collaboration, perpetual incompleteness and play with the static nature of an official archive is one I am trying to describe in the Dickinson materials. In the next section, I turn to the archive of Marcel Duchamp, whose birth just a year after Dickinson’s death places him on the other side of the history of radical archives I am tracing around her materials, linking the work of 18<sup>th</sup> century domestic archives, Dickinson’s work and the more aesthetically self-aware archives of Duchamp.

*The Archive At Play*

Sven Spieker's book on conceptual art's interactions with the Archive introduces the idea of the "archive at play" in his concluding chapter. Spieker writes, "The archive at play does not pledge allegiance to the compensatory rationality on which archives are habitually founded, and it may even become, in Irit Rogoff's words, 'a construction site for fantasmatic fictions'" (174). I would like to think about how our idea of Emily Dickinson has been shaped by the structure of the archive, and how the work within it strains against the forces that attempt to contain it. Dickinson's archive at play eludes the "compensatory rationality" of genre distinctions, biographical narratives, and easy reading strategies, but only if we let it.

Dickinson's archive at play is filled with scraps of paper and writing that is outside of normative literary classifications. They flutter and flutter around genre, sometimes seeming like a poem, sometimes taking the epistolary address of a letter as their form. I like to imagine these works of literary art suspended from a complicated Calder mobile, spinning and drifting in the drafts and breezes of any given context or time, twirling into different associations with other pieces in her archive.<sup>28</sup> Dickinson's early editor and literary interlocutor, Thomas Higginson, described a letter he received from her as written in a "handwriting so peculiar that it seemed as if the writer might have taken her first lessons by studying the famous fossil bird-tracks in the museum of

---

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that Calder's playful sculptures were named "mobiles" by Marcel Duchamp punning the French for mobile and motive. Calvin Tomkins' *Duchamp: A Biography* chronicles Duchamp's role in naming Calder's works on page 294.

that college town (Amherst, Massachusetts)” (“Emily Dickinson’s Letters” *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1891).

The letters between Higginson and Dickinson printed in *The Atlantic* in 1891 reveal a playful correspondence that sometimes discusses Dickinson’s lack of adherence to notions of organization and structure. The tone of the correspondence and the selection of the letters are Higginson’s construction, who seems to be looking to posthumously characterize Dickinson (something he will continue to do). The manuscripts enact a willful refusal of rules and boundaries. Higginson might think the poet merely has difficulty with spelling, rhyme and capitalization, but delving into the manuscripts reveals the organization normative literary critics, textual editors and readers have difficulty with today.

In a letter from Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, we find the line “(m)en do not call the surgeon to commend the bone, but to set it, sir, and fracture within is more critical” (Higginson, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1891). Dickinson’s reference to her “broken” poems makes them almost seem unfixable—their flaws reaching down to the “critical” spaces “within.” Dickinson writes in a previous letter to Higginson, utilizing the surgery metaphor once again, “(t)hank you for the surgery; it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others, as you ask, though they might not differ. While my thought is undressed, I can make the distinction; but when I put them in the

gown, they look alike and numb,” again making it seem as though the “broken” or flawed attributes of the poems might be more natural, naked, “undressed.”<sup>29</sup>

Higginson recounts, “(i)t would seem that at first I tried a little—a very little—to lead her in the direction of rules and traditions; but I fear it was only perfunctory, and that she interested me more in her—so to speak—unregenerate condition” (*Atlantic*). Higginson’s attempts to correct Dickinson’s “unregenerate” writerly tendencies does not end here, as he seems to say it does.<sup>30</sup> But Dickinson’s response to his attempts reveals that she seems to know what she is doing, and that she might not need “fixing” in the way Higginson thinks she does—and that there might be a more playful tone evoked by the letter.

Dickinson writes of her tussle with rules and traditions,

Dear friend—  
Are these more orderly? I thank you for the Truth—  
I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to  
organize—my little Force explodes—and leaves me bare and charred—  
I think you called me "Wayward." Will you help me improve?  
I suppose the pride that stops the Breath, in the Core of Woods, is not  
of Ourselves.  
You say I confess the little mistake, and omit the large—Because I can  
see Orthography—but the ignorance out of sight—is my preceptor's  
charge—  
(*Collected Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 225)

---

<sup>29</sup> This is of course to overlook the importance of the word “gown” here, which in Webster’s 1828 dictionary refers to a woman’s garment, as well as the robes of judges, students, lawyers or magistrates. It seems that Dickinson’s work seems to express discomfort with any sort of formal generic boundaries—in fact citing plainly that these coverings stifle and impede creativity.

<sup>30</sup> Higginson’s corrections to Dickinson’s poems can be seen throughout the first edition of her work, where among other changes, he affixes titles and themes to Dickinson’s amorphous poems. Even these letters, as printed by Higginson in *The Atlantic Monthly* contain corrections of Dickinson’s capitalization and punctuation—an interesting moment of play contained. The letters as reproduced in this section are from the Thomas Johnson edition of *Collected Letters*.

This passage is an excellent example of Dickinson's writing establishing a willfully irreverent relationship to rules and her work, while also playfully steering Higginson's attention away from such criticisms. The passage conveys the knowledge that her writing is not "organized" and speaks to what happens when she tries to force such a thing upon it. Dickinson's explanation here, that her "little Force explodes—and leaves (her) bare and charred—" seems as close to a statement of poetics as we can imagine in the world of Dickinson studies. It should be noted that the enclosure does not result in a wilting, a shrinking or a holding back, but an explosion so severe that the writer herself is left with her own outer boundaries imposed upon—bare. Further supporting her earlier claim that the covering of the "gown" makes her work "alike and dumb" these statements play with Higginson's authority to cover over her work with his edits. If written more directly, such a statement sounds forcefully anti-authoritarian and violently resistant.<sup>31</sup>

In his essay, "Beyond the Cheated Eye: Dickinson's Lyric Sociality," Ryan Cull identifies Dickinson's play with Higginson in her response to his discomfort for her lack of adherence to rules. Cull identifies the same passage I cite above, and, while he

---

<sup>31</sup> This explosive nature echoes the potential of the gun in the famous poem that begins "My Life—had stood—a loaded Gun—" which sketches out the power dynamics between the gun and its owner. The gun stood "in corners—till a Day/The Owner passed—identified—/And carried Me away," giving agency to the owner for its initial activity. But at the end of the poem, the gun reflects on the nuanced nature of this destructive agency, stating "Though I than He—may longer live/He longer must—than I—/For I have but the power to kill,/Without—the power to die—" (Franklin 764). It should be noted again that the images used to discuss these inquiries into power are quite violent and direct. That the Dickinson literary persona is not more in-line with these kinds of images is a testament to how powerful the initial editors' (Higginson included) efforts of normalizing the Dickinson archive.



seems to ignore the violent passage involving explosion and charring, he does read Dickinson's urging Higginson to pay attention to more than the unorganized features of her work. After quoting the "my little force explodes" passage, Cull points to the playful lines that follow, writing, "(b)ut after this moment of apparent deference, she then more assertively attempts (in rhyme no less) to clarify the advice that she really seeks," before moving to quote the next section of the letter (43). Cull continues,

Such a comment, expressing her self-awareness about superficial eccentricities in her work (including her occasionally unusual, perhaps seemingly 'uncontrolled' orthography), belies the contention made by some scholars that Dickinson went to Higginson in the hope of overcoming a "technical...disorderliness."

Connecting the dynamics enacted in these letters to Spieker's idea of the archive at play highlights what I mean when I make connections between Dickinson's archive and Marcel Duchamp's. As Spieker says, this kind of play disregards the normative rationality that archives are built upon, eschewing rules in favor of blurring the lines between what is and what could be. The letter relays a writing process which plays with boundaries and authority in a manner similar to the way the manuscripts dance in and out of the ruling logic of the archive: sometimes fluttering in and out of genre distinctions and other times exploding with pinned insects and illegibility.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted here that the Higginson correspondence includes a set of dried flowers that Dickinson sent for Higginson's wife. They can be viewed at the Boston Public Library website. It is interesting to see how the BPL curates these pieces of literary material. The piece with the flowers sits in the same gridded line as the rest of the letters and we are given no context for their existence. We see the flickr page like a collage of all the letters in their collection, a survey of Dickinson's communicative possibilities. While the flickr page is a difficult archive to maneuver in terms of its searchability, I do like the fact that the materials are not called "letters," "poems," or anything else really.

In order to further contextualize Dickinson's experimentation with archival forms, I turn now to the work of Marcel Duchamp, whose departure from the genre of painting occasioned a playfully obsessive turn to the archive. Duchamp's artistic experiments with the notion of archival preservation plays with the idea of the archive while allowing chance organization of materials in a manner resonant with what we see in Dickinson's manuscript oeuvre.

***"a state of incompleteness"***

"In my view Duchamp is squarely opposed to the 19<sup>th</sup> century effort to create a transparent archive of Life" (Alan Spieker, *The Big Archive*, 205 n35)

"For the 'Box' of 1913-1914, it's different. I didn't have the idea of a box as much as notes. I thought I could collect, in an album, like the Saint-Etienne catalogue, some calculations, some reflexions, without relating them.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes they're on torn pieces of paper...I wanted the album to go with the 'Glass' and to be consulted when seeing the 'Glass' because, as I see it, it must not be 'looked at' in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book, and see the two together." (Marcel Duchamp "A Window Into Something Else," 42-3)

Spieker's reading of the Duchamp readymade in *The Big Archive* situates it in opposition to an archive that records or transmits a specific historical moment, cataloged to produce an ordered version of the past. He cites Duchamp's comments on his 3 *Standard Stoppages*, that they were "a bit of chance in a can" as an example of Duchamp's creation of an artwork that suggests that the archive is filled with just that—

---

I continue the conversation on digital Dickinson in the conclusion of this project, where I take a look at the two newly launched archives at Harvard and Amherst.

<sup>33</sup> Duchamp's reference to the "Saint-Etienne catalogue" is, uncannily, another explosion of form—the Saint-Etienne catalogue being a French gun catalogue.

chance bits of historical particulars.<sup>34</sup> Duchamp's preservation, reproduction, dissemination and publication of the numerous notes surrounding this work resonates with Dickinson's own practices. By creating a comparative constellation that includes the 19<sup>th</sup> century commonplace book as well as avant-garde interactions with the archive, perhaps we can see an almost "there" of the Dickinson archive.

Enacting a relationship similar to the one between Dickinson's manuscripts and her printed material, these elements of Duchamp's oeuvre may begin to help us imagine a space for the Dickinson archive. Just as the canonical western archive often does not fit the shape of feminist, queer and postcolonial materials—it cannot contain the work of Duchamp. His published notes and boxes seem to be pushing the boundaries of the archive and questioning exactly what belongs within its walls and who gets to put it there. Both Dickinson and Duchamp produce and reproduce their working notes, save them, and then send them on to others. These notes question the singularity of the archival product as well as the centrality of the finished product. For both Dickinson and Duchamp, the preserved notes or drafts are actually much less rare than the finished products they are supposed to support—which may never actually exist at all. In the case of Dickinson, some poems exist outside of the archive only once

---

<sup>34</sup> Duchamp writes in 1964 of *3 Standard Stoppages* that "this experiment was made in 1913 to *imprison* and *preserve* forms obtained through chance, through my chance. At the same time, the unit of length, one meter, was changed from a straight line to a curved line without actually losing its identity [as] the meter, and yet casting a pataphysical doubt on the concept of a straight edge as being the shortest route from one point to another" (Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp*, exhibition catalogue, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973, pp.273-4, emphasis mine.) The artwork consisted of letting 3 one-meter long strings drop to canvas and gluing them where they fell, containing their chance shaped formations upon the surface of the canvas.

in their printed form having been cobbled together using pieces from the archive that take multiple forms. Duchamp's *Large Glass* existed in a "state of incompleteness" for many years before it was eventually shattered. A reproduction was created using the notes as they were preserved and distributed.

Duchamp began making sets of facsimile notes and thoughts towards "the *Large Glass*" in 1914. Two sets of these notes were produced, placed in boxes and distributed to friends. Duchamp speaks of the boxes as "catalogues" of the *Large Glass*, which is itself a difficult piece to understand. As we can see in the photograph below, the notes are comprised of a series of smaller pieces of writing or images that have been affixed to larger pages.



Figure 4: Marcel Duchamp *The Box of 1914*. 1914 Photographic facsimiles of 16 manuscript notes and the drawing *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun*, 1914, mounted on matboards, each c.24 x 18cm, contained in a commercial photographic supply box. Edition of 5. Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection © Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London (photo courtesy of: <http://www.tate.org.uk>)

The typotranslation of the last publication of the last of these notes called *The White Box* begins with a note, asking the question, “can works be made which are not ‘of art.’?”— (Duchamp, Hamilton, Bonk, in *the infinitive: a typotranslation of Marcel Duchamp’s White Box*, 1). Duchamp seems uncomfortable with the generic boundaries surrounding his livelihood. If Dickinson feels “shut up” in prose, Duchamp seems to want to think his way around the prescriptive walls of visual art. His last painting was finished in 1918, a commissioned piece whose title, *Tum*’ is short for the French saying “you bore me.” Duchamp, bored with painting—wishes in the notes in *The White Box*—for works that are not “of art.”

The *Box of 1914* contains several sets of photographic copies of 16 handwritten notes. Duchamp hand-crafted each copy with handmade photographic transfer prints. Each print was trimmed to the exact size of the “original” and then mounted on boards. The boards were then housed in boxes used originally to house the glass used in the photo transfer process. The reproduced *Box of 1914* was sent to friends through the mail and the originals presented to Duchamp’s primary enthusiast, Walter Arensberg. This small, personal edition was only the beginning of Duchamp’s apparent interest in his own archive.



Figure 5: Duchamp's *Green Box*. From New York Metropolitan Museum of Art "Timeline of Art History" page.

Twenty years later, Duchamp began work on *The Green Box*. This collection was to be a larger scale publication, limited to three hundred copies. It had as its organizing principle the notes affiliated with the Large Glass as well as shorter notes that seemed to him conceptually related to the Glass but pertaining mostly to his concept of the

readymade. Duchamp produced facsimile copies of his notes with a 19<sup>th</sup> century technique, the collotype. Two years later, he produced a box that contained a “portable museum” of his work. More notes on the Large Glass were included. Thirty years later Duchamp began working in collaboration with various galleries on the final *White Box* which contained facsimiles of facsimiles of all notes which pertained to the Large Glass. This was published in an edition of 150 boxes, as Duchamp still continued to produce seemingly deliberate unbound and scattered public notes surrounding its conceptual ideas.

Similar to the relationship between Dickinson’s manuscripts and her printed work, Duchamp’s notes and drawings around the large glass have been seen as a “literary adjunct” or “companion piece” to the still largely unintelligible artwork. We do not need to “see” these prior thoughts and the crucial (to the artist/writer who produced them) visual attributes that accompany them. Dickinson’s reputation as a “poet of the workshop” assumes that some work is in draft form and some is finished. I have always wondered how one can know this about a poet who chooses multiple words for one line, and who writes multiple related poems that on different kinds of surfaces. Might we see Dickinson’s work as an artistic process comfortable with the “state of incompleteness”?

Art critic Susi Bloch argues that in the case of Duchamp, “it is the Large Glass which could be seen as a supplement to the *Green Box*, the incomplete realization of a ruminating idea that could never satisfactorily articulate itself in purely visual terms”

(“Marcel Duchamp’s Green Box”, 27). I am curious how such a reversal of “notes” to “final product” could be useful in thinking about an edition of Dickinson’s work. How could a scholarly or artistic or hybrid approach that “unpacks” a printed poem by using its collected affiliates do justice to an aesthetic that seems deeply invested in archiving its own conceptual process? How could we see printed Dickinson poems as similar to the oft-awed at “Large Glass”: a ruminating idea that could never satisfactorily articulate itself in purely PRINTED terms? How could seeing Dickinson’s reproduction and circulation of drafts and notes allow us to arrive, as critics and editors, at a similar place as Bloch, who calls for a reversal of the supplemental role of the notes and drafts?

***Her Gallant Note(s): reading the Archive’s Constellations***

The poem that has been numbered 1383 by Ralph Franklin (1395 by Thomas Johnson) highlights what happens when we think through the reversal of the supplemental/primary text roles. It is published as a single literary object from a source text that was sent to Thomas Higginson. There are affiliated scraps and fragments that are listed and printed in the variorum edition of the poems, but the exact reason for the grouping or the ordering of the grouping is always reliant upon a forced narrative of drafting, which is only one way to describe the relationship between these objects. The Dickinson archive and its archivists can’t seem to decide exactly what the relationship that brings these works together might be, but they bring them together



and suggest that they might be pieces of a process. Perhaps the purpose of a variorum edition of Dickinson's work is not just a matter of giving the reader a composition history of the scraps that suggests a revision process resulting in a final poem. Perhaps the manuscripts suggest multiple aesthetic and poetic relationships that can be part of the reader's playful interpretation of the work. Part of understanding the literary text can be an avowal of its multiplicities, its complications and contradictions, as well as its material features that reflect the archive's constellative relationships.

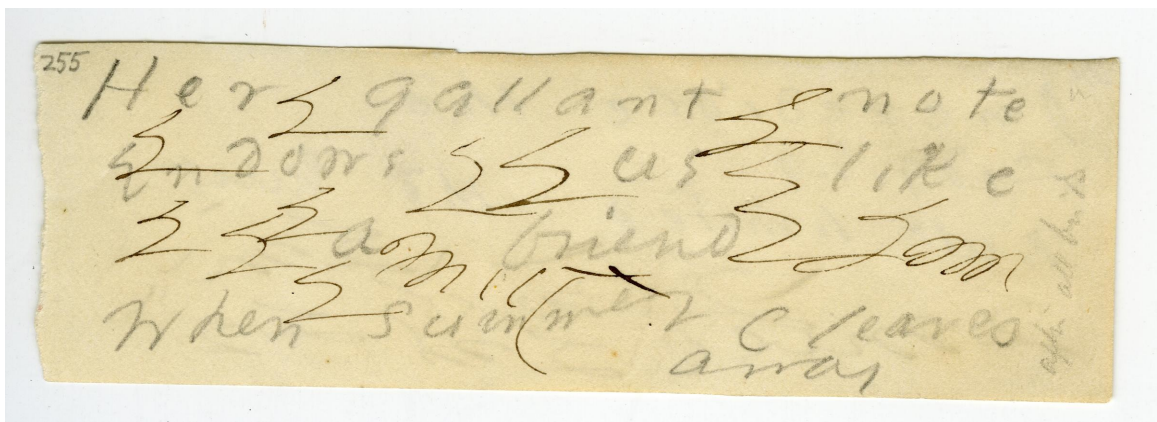


Figure 6: A 255: Amherst College Archives and Special Collections. “Her gallant note Endows us like a friend when summer cleaves away” with practice script of E’s or perhaps W’s and an editor’s hand affiliating the scrap with “after all birds.”

On my computer, I have a few groupings of poems that I received from Amherst College on a research visit in December of 2010 when I moved beyond a fascination with the manuscripts themselves. I wanted to know why they existed in the state they did, how they had been organized, and by whom. “Poems” like F1383 had ceased to become poems at all to me, and instead they seemed like brilliant semantic

explosions, experiments with language and resistances to poetic form, writing processes and the idea of finished published works. They seemed to work against the idea of the completed poem. If the Dickinson archive exists to tell us how the poet worked, it does so by assuming a hierarchy and order among the scattered works. When the reader encounters a poem in its printed form, she cannot rely upon a single archival authority to aid her in her questions about the poem. She might not even know that the poem is cobbled together from scraps, or that it is ghosted by variants, or that the format has been constructed by editors. When she turns to the authority of the variorum edition, she can learn that affiliated scraps are left out, and that the “affiliation” represents a drafting narrative theorized by the editor.

When we look in the archive at Amherst especially, we see a variety of manuscript poems that have been edited together to produce a single poem. We see scraps of paper that have been preserved, saved by Dickinson initially and then pieced together by later editors, as well as scraps harvested from letters sent through the post or across the yard to Susan Dickinson. I like to think of these as loosely affiliated scraps, but as a Dickinson scholar who encountered the work in print first, I have to think of them as a grouping based upon a composition history. In this project, I am trying to unthink their progress from fragment to full poem. I am trying to think differently about their relationships and perhaps to look to the manuscripts themselves to see what kinds of relationships they suggest themselves. Nevertheless, I have them in a folder on my desktop under the Franklin number 1383, 1453, etc. Did Dickinson

place them in an affiliated pile in her drawer or trunk? Posthumous organization brings them together in the Amherst archive's finding aid which guides the researcher through the collection—organized under a poem number that has been printed as a letter first in 1894, then as poems since. Complicating notions of genre since its initial translations into print, this “poem” is no poem, really. It sits in a folder in “this little mac,” transformed into digital files, named and numbered by archivists, scanned in by gloved hands, burned onto a CDR (Derrida, “The Word Processor” 20). It exists in multiple forms, and, when we think of it as a singular poem, we are reminded of its state of incompleteness when we are confronted with its shattered fragments.

F1383, as I am referring to it here, is a grouping of manuscripts named and numbered by the editor Ralph Franklin. Franklin's 3-volume *Variorum* edition lists the “variant” forms of each poem and sometimes gives a complete list of affiliated scraps and fragments. Since much of Dickinson's work exists in fragmented form, and was initially edited by family members trying to produce a polished collection of Dickinson materials, the first print editions feature work that has been heavily edited. Clues about how the work existed in its unorganized form are dropped in the introductions of many of these editions, but the theory behind the subsequent organization and publication of the manuscripts and just how they became neat poems is never revealed. So, the reader knows that the poems are assembled from fragments, but they aren't quite sure how much they've been reconstructed or altered to exist in their printed forms.

Franklin's variorum creates a composition history and revision narrative in each entry designated for each poem that has been constructed from Dickinson's manuscripts. It lists the poem by the number Franklin has assigned, followed by what has been designated as the first line of the poem. The text then lists the manuscript copies of the poems along with all of the affiliated variants. Franklin prints the poems in stanza form, making line breaks where he sees fit, but also letting the reader know where the lines break in the original (he calls these divisions) at the bottom of each manuscript's transcription. He tells the story of the poem in a narrative he has constructed based mainly on dating the poems according to handwriting styles. Franklin's prose takes a strangely authoritative biographical tone, saying things like, "(a)bout 1877 ED reworked the second stanza before making another fair copy of the whole" about scraps of paper that clearly have a relationship, but one that cannot be exactly deciphered by what has been written upon them without perhaps taking the entire work into consideration (Franklin, *Variorum*, 1204). In my view, this undertaking would be interested in paper shape, handwriting, as well as other text inscribed upon the material—printed or otherwise. That Dickinson once wrote a poem about a house upon a piece of "scrap" in the same shape as a house seems to be something to notice more acutely than the variorum suggests (F 1512).

Poem 1383, “After all birds have been investigated,” is printed in the Franklin Reading Edition in this form, and can be thought to be most commonly affiliated with this version.<sup>35</sup>

After all Birds have been investigated and laid aside  
Nature imparts the little Blue Bird – assured  
Her conscientious Voice will soar unmoved  
Above ostensible Vicissitude

First at the March – competing with the Wind –  
Her panting note exalts us – like a friend –  
Last to adhere when Summer cleaves away  
Elegy of Integrity –  
(*The Poems of Emily Dickinson Reading Edition*, 530)

The Reading Edition also provides approximate dates at the bottom of the page, giving the reader a chronological narrative through the poems. This encapsulation does not account for the multiple birthdates a poem might contain. In the case of the poem we’ve come to know as 1383, the year 1875 is printed on the bottom of page 530. But, a look to the Variorum tells us that the version that Franklin prints as the finished poem is actually dated 1877. While the dating of these poems is inexact and surmises

---

<sup>35</sup> Ralph Franklin’s *Reading Edition* is the most recent print edition of the poems. It is meant to replace the now-canonical Johnson single-volume edition. Both editors produced three-volume variorums before narrowing their editorial scope further into a mass-market “reader.” These versions limit the scope and scale of the Dickinson materials, preferring to count the construct of the “poem” over the material existence of the manuscripts. Scholar Vivian Pollack rejoices the Franklin edition in a review, stating that, “the visual effect of the three-volume Franklin Variorum is somewhat overwhelming. The illusion of the poet’s presence is lost beneath the extensive apparatus” (*American Literature*, v. 72, 2000). It seems strange that this scholar should critique the very visual apparatus of the Variorum for effacing the work while expressing her pleasure in the new text which produces works of literary art not found among the manuscripts themselves.

about correlations between poems and specific years seems dubious, this text seems to need to anchor these poems into one time and place in order to tell a story about how the text was produced.<sup>36</sup> A look at the Variorum shows a series of writings that Franklin dates from 1875 to 1877, with the final manuscript from 1877 sent to Thomas Higginson deemed the final copy. This comparison of the popular printed version with the more esoteric scholarly variorum (still printed) shows us some initial symptoms of the Dickinson archive resisting normative practices. I will address the differences between the print editions with more detail in the next chapter.

### *The Franklin Variorum Account of poem 1383*

As an account of the archival materials scattered across multiple repositories and printed in multiple forms in multiple publications, the variorum version of this poem reveals the trouble in the Dickinson archive. Variorum editions are often produced to give the reader an account of what might be found in the archive, print or otherwise.<sup>37</sup> They are therefore always organized and curated with the editor's aims and the archives' architecture intact. The purpose of this particular variorum is, as described in Franklin's introduction, to "take license to make public what Dickinson herself never did, honoring the interests of history over her reticence" (*Variorum*, 27).

Sitting closely with this moment, we realize that notions of the law, privacy of the home

---

<sup>36</sup> That the bottom of the page houses the year the poem was written also causes the reader to associate it with that other ruler of narrative, the act of turning pages to progress through a book.

<sup>37</sup> D.C. Greetham defines the Variorum Edition in *Textual Scholarship*, using the 1980 MLA Variorum Edition of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* as a text that "can therefore present a cultural and critical history of the transmission and reception of a text, but it usually does not try to create a new text

and the boundaries of the archive are important to what Franklin feels he can do with the Dickinson materials. That Franklin names the trouble with Dickinson “reticence,” or a kind of silent withholding, seems to me to miss the point of the excessive nature of the archive.<sup>38</sup> The “as many as 5,000 manuscripts” that Franklin tells us are affiliated with the nearly 1,800 poems hardly seem like silence to me and the sheer bulk of material output has clearly not been withheld. For Franklin, perhaps Dickinson’s work only seems silent because it doesn’t fit into the traditional practice of a textual editor and miserly with her materials because her gesture of release is not directly moving towards publication. Since there are no documents that give any scholar any instructions about what to do with these materials, there is no one way to read them, edit them or publish them. The structure of the archive requires a certain kind of legibility and purpose in order to remain upright. The Dickinson materials do not fit into this structure and are therefore given “license” to be made public in the ways the editors see fit. Documents that do not adhere to the notion of organization put forth by the editors (in the case of Dickinson this notion is that of publication, or, moving a document towards publication) are misunderstood, silenced, illegible, erased. Franklin clearly has a tremendous knowledge, respect, and understanding of the Dickinson materials, and I do not mean to take him to task or disregard his lifetime of work. I am

---

<sup>38</sup> Franklin’s very interested approach to the materials here reminds us that the work of a textual editor is hardly ever scientific or disinterested labor. Franklin’s judgments about the person he assumes Dickinson to be, a person whose desires and character traits have been invented as much as her poems, can be seen here right alongside his justifications and theorizing about the edition he produced. The character of the “poet” drives these editions, and they have since Dickinson was set to print in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

suggesting, however, that the structures we are used to thinking through as literary scholars, textual editors, and general readers are informed by the archive and limit how we think about what we read. In this case, the archive is preserving the work of a canonical American author that has been edited to fit such a title. The differences between the manuscripts and the Variorum remind us that the work that sits in folders and boxes does not match the work that has been published as poetry by Emily Dickinson. As we will see, the work in manuscript disrupts the archive that preserves it, the editing process that translates it and the idea of the author that directs most organization and publication efforts.

Franklin's further justification of the silencing of the sprawling, and multiple Dickinson archive moving across different surfaces of paper can be found in his "assumption that a literary work is separable from its artifact" (27). For Franklin, and editors and scholars before him, the words on the page constitute the "literary work" and the page constitutes the "artifact." Lost in this assumption are the changes made to the words as they move to different pages, as well as the shapes and kinds of pages they are written upon, not to mention the kinds of things that might be attached to the pages or what might be on the other side of the page. For Franklin, poems are related because they are drafts just waiting for a sense of completion and perfection. As we look at the manuscripts that make up the variorum and compare them to the makeup of the variorum itself we will see that there are possibilities for numerous relationships



between the works when the structure of the archive is playful, in flux.<sup>39</sup> If the structure of the archive does not enforce a relationship upon the MSS that suggests a drafting narrative, then what kinds of relationships can be explored, expressed, and read?

Franklin begins his documenting of the poems with a manuscript derived from what he calls a Set: a grouping of poems that have not been bound together by Dickinson, but with certain indications that point towards a grouping.<sup>40</sup> The manuscript A 94-1/2 can be found in Set 14, which was constructed by Franklin by taking apart a group that Mabel Loomis Todd put together in an envelope numbered 94.<sup>41</sup> A 94 1/2 (still retaining the ghost of Todd's numbering) is listed as the first

---

<sup>39</sup> D.F. McKenzie writes, "But what constitutes a text is not the presence of linguistic elements, but the act of construction," emphasizing that the text within the artifact makes meaning in tandem. McKenzie's book is important for its argument that how we receive the information (the materiality of the work) effects how we make meaning of the text. For McKenzie, Franklin's divisions are false, or, perhaps overlook the way in which the structure of the text makes different kinds of meaning. McKenzie's work seems particularly relevant to Dickinson studies because of the way it discusses authorial intention and the trend and tradition in textual studies to attend to the "final intention" of the author while making editorial decisions. While McKenzie's work might in theory support Franklin's cobbled poems in the way that they might reflect a socially constructed "copy-text," it also reveals that Dickinson's work is not easily resolved by the authorial intention versus copy-text debate that seems to still plague textual studies, as long as the variously derived copy text is still composed in printed letters and taken from the space of the material object (*Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 43).

<sup>40</sup> Franklin writes about the "Sets" in the *Manuscript Books* that, "(n)o internal sequence belonging to the poet has been established for the unbound sheets in Sets 1-15. Transcript patterns indicate that Mabel Todd assembled her editorial groups after transcribing the sheets and that the manuscripts were disordered when she copied them. Since the sheets were not bound, puncture patterns and stress effects do not exist to provide evidence. Indeed, the lack of binding itself suggests that Emily Dickinson did not intend a specific arrangement. Yet, as with the fascicles, there is a uniformity of paper through the 1860s that shows her working with large batches of stationary and a few stains and pin impressions link sheets when they are gathered into sets by paper and date" (Franklin, xiv). Franklin writes more directly about the arbitrary arrangement of the sets, and even speaks to a case of mutilation and destruction by an outside force earlier in his career, in *The Editing of Emily Dickinson: A Reconsideration*. See pages 76-79 for a discussion of the mutilated packet and 67-82 for a description of the unbound Amherst manuscripts, both examples of the unstable Dickinson archive that is covered up by the print versions of the poems.

<sup>41</sup> The next chapter will include an in-depth description of the organizational methods of the main editors of Dickinson's work: Mabel Loomis Todd in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Thomas Johnson and R.W. Franklin in the 20<sup>th</sup>. It is difficult to know where a discussion of this work should go, and I should note that this is part of the circuitous research and analysis of the Dickinson scholar. Since this chapter is

94-1  
X ✓ Dupl  
After all  
Birds have  
been investigated  
and laid aside  
Nature imparts  
The little  
Blue Bird -  
Assured  
Her conscientious  
Voice  
Will soar  
Unmolested  
Above ostensible  
Vicissitude.  
First at the  
March  
Competing with  
The Wind.

Figure 7: A 94-1. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

---

concerned with the manuscripts in the Dickinson archive, it seems important that there be some discussion of the early organizers and editors. But, since the argument of this chapter is that the editors were organizing and editing the work such that it fit into a certain narrative, I am also trying to look at the work differently than they did. Therefore, I am placing an emphasis on their work when I turn to the Dickinson materials in print. I will tell the story of the early organization and publication of the materials there, where the emphasis is how we read the work in print, and how we receive a certain body of work as it is presented in that state. But, for now, the reader should follow me, in uncertainty, as more knowledge of the editor's decisions only makes one more wary of the state of the Dickinson archive.

94-2

Her zealous  
note  
delights it to  
ascend.  
Last at the  
scene  
When Summer  
smoothes away  
fortitude -  
glanked with  
melody.

---

The Mind  
lives on the  
Heart  
Like any  
parasite.  
If that is  
full of meat  
the Mind is  
sat.

But if the  
Heart emit  
famine the  
Wit  
the Aliment  
of it  
So Absolute.

---

Figure 8: A 94-2. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

(according to date of composition) iteration of the poem “after all the birds have been investigated” in Franklin’s variorum. He prints the work in its entirety from the manuscript copy, giving the poem different line breaks (in fact seemingly perfecting the line breaks Dickinson did make).

A look to the manuscripts shows that the poem has been written on a folded sheet of lined stationary, much like the paper that makes up the hand-bound books or fascicles. The handwriting is full, almost billowing across the page with airy A’s and W’s. This handwriting is most commonly thought to be from the period Dickinson wrote and bound the poems into fascicles, sometimes thought to be her most prolific writing period. But this timeline is usually the only sense that is made from the handwriting. The multiple iterations of this “poem” that the handwriting shifts from the airy pillowed two-words-to-a-line script to one that is more like print with gaping spaces between small, still beautifully formed letters. While the dating of Dickinson’s handwriting may be of interest and great use to scholars (albeit at times problematic) it often seems to take over the conversation and overshadows the fascinating innovations in letter formation and use of page space.<sup>42</sup> We know that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century such letter formations were indeed uncommon, but as textual scholars and literary critics we have tended to agree with Franklin’s surmise about the literary artifact being separate from its material conditions. The archive’s preservation only attends to this element of

---

<sup>42</sup> Although every scholar seems to have their own opinions on the dating of the handwriting, they all agree that there are distinct styles. Theodora Ward, Marta Werner and Susan Howe have interesting, divergent arguments about how we can think about these differences in some kind of narrative, either related to Dickinson’s vision, her aesthetics, or the kinds of surfaces she is writing on.

the handwriting, and only attends to the handwriting element of the manuscript. All other aspects of the materials are lost in the variorum edition of the poems, and thus in the many moving parts of the archive.

A 94 1-2 also contains another poem. Franklin doesn't make much of the organic connection between these pieces of literature. Instead, he groups the poem with works he deems to be drafts of one single poem. Scholars such as Sharon Cameron have made much of the groupings Dickinson can be seen making in the fascicles, and her arguments make meaning of themes, images and poetic strategies as they unfold across texts.<sup>43</sup> While it would not be expected that the genre of the variorum would necessarily speak to the thematic connections across texts, it is again the concern of this project in some kinds of work this is the only relationship that seems relevant.

The variorum assumes that the material aspects of the literary artifact do not affect its meaning or significance. For Franklin then, when we move onto the next manuscript listed under the heading of poem 1383 it is easy to ignore the material features in favor of this logical link between the texts. He writes, "(a)bout 1877 ED

---

<sup>43</sup> Sharon Cameron's important text *Choosing Not Choosing* (2000) was the first to be written about the Franklin Manuscript Book edition that was published in 1981. Cameron's work to establish meaningful connections between works that were grouped together by Dickinson in her sewn together fascicles is important, as it is the first of its kind to look to what kinds of relationships poems might have between them. As a work that resists the poem as the unit of meaning in Dickinson studies, it is unparalleled. It does, however, cease its material investigations of the fascicles at the level of their gathering and places thematic boundaries around each one, which can sometimes seem forced. These thematic groupings are at times as limiting as the early editions, which, while not attending to groupings of poems in fascicles are still putting groups of poems into categories similar to Cameron's "death, choice, vision" thematic relationships. Cameron also relies very heavily upon the groupings of the poems, which have been taken apart and put together by editors since we have record of their study.

reworked the second stanza before making another fair copy of the whole" (*Variorum*, 1204). He then lets us know that there are what he calls "four intermediate manuscripts" where this second stanza is undergoing revision with the first listed as A 127.

127

First at the  
march  
compelling  
with the  
wind  
Her joyful  
cordial note  
exalts us  
like a  
friend to  
adhere  
when  
plummes  
surrender  
array  
fortitude  
stanches with  
melody

seems  
seems

Figure 9: A 127 Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

When we look at A 127, we don't at first glance see much resembling the neatly formed work we encounter in 94 1-2. The variorum gives the reader/researcher the idea that these texts are clearly related by a narrative of revision. What we see when we encounter this scrap of paper in facsimile is a thematic connection between similar ideas as they work themselves out across different shapes and spaces of the page. What these pieces of paper *do* provide us is multiple handwriting styles and a play with sibilance as the phrase "summers swerve" echoes in actual different directions across the page. This repeated 's' sound, which is different from the stanza in 94 1-2, is repeated twice on this scrap, so there are multiple, multiple summers. The fact that the "summers swerve" phrases seem to swerve themselves around the page gives the page itself some movement. This dynamic echo, a property of the poem that makes meaning both sonically and spatially is lost on the reader of the variorum. Since these elements don't make it to the final version, general readers and scholars miss out on the features of the writing that transcend the meaning of the printed poem.

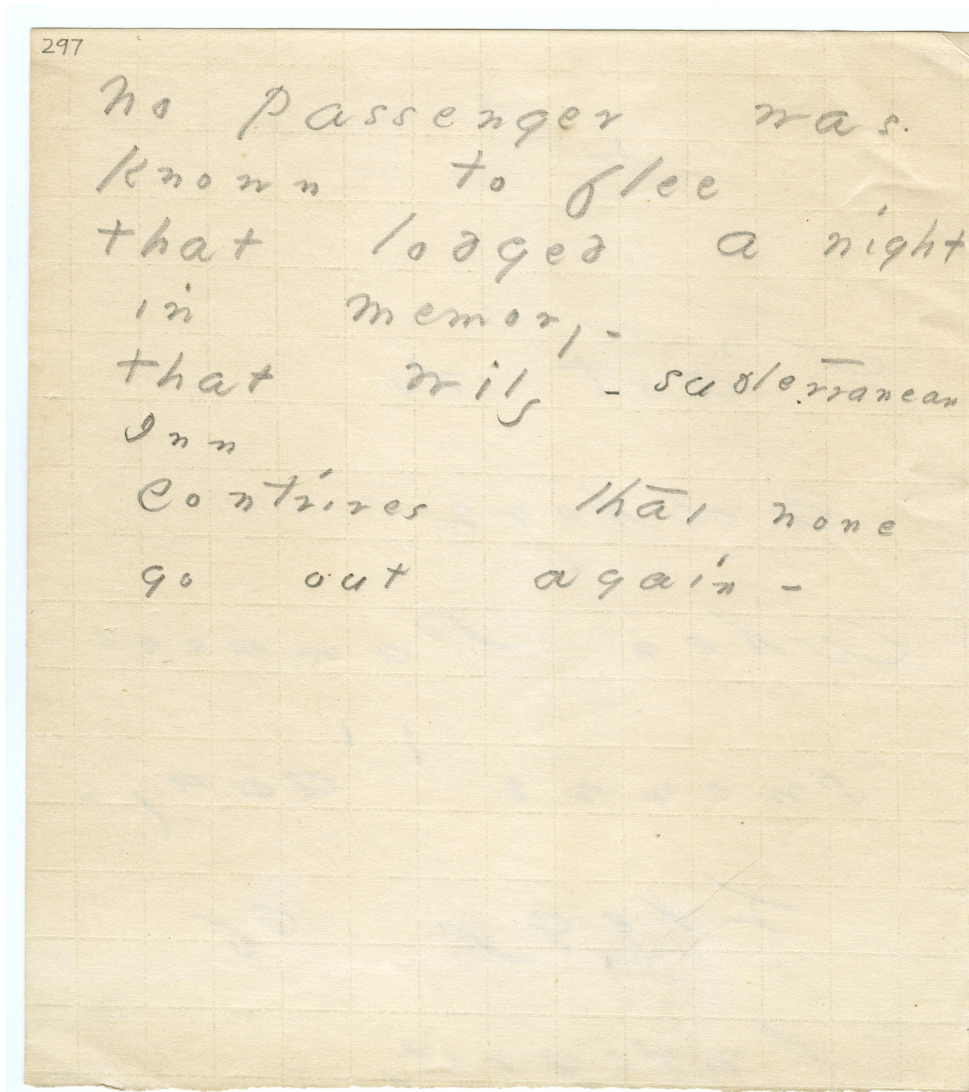


Figure 10: A 297 Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

When the Franklin variorum moves on to the next manuscripts it tells us that they have “identical texts,” but that A 297/298 contains another poem on its page (something he does not mention about A 94 1/2 strangely) (*Variorum* 1205).<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> The poem on the accompanying page is “No passenger was known to flee” also seems to be a meditation on permanence, and specifically the preservation of memory. The lines read “No passenger



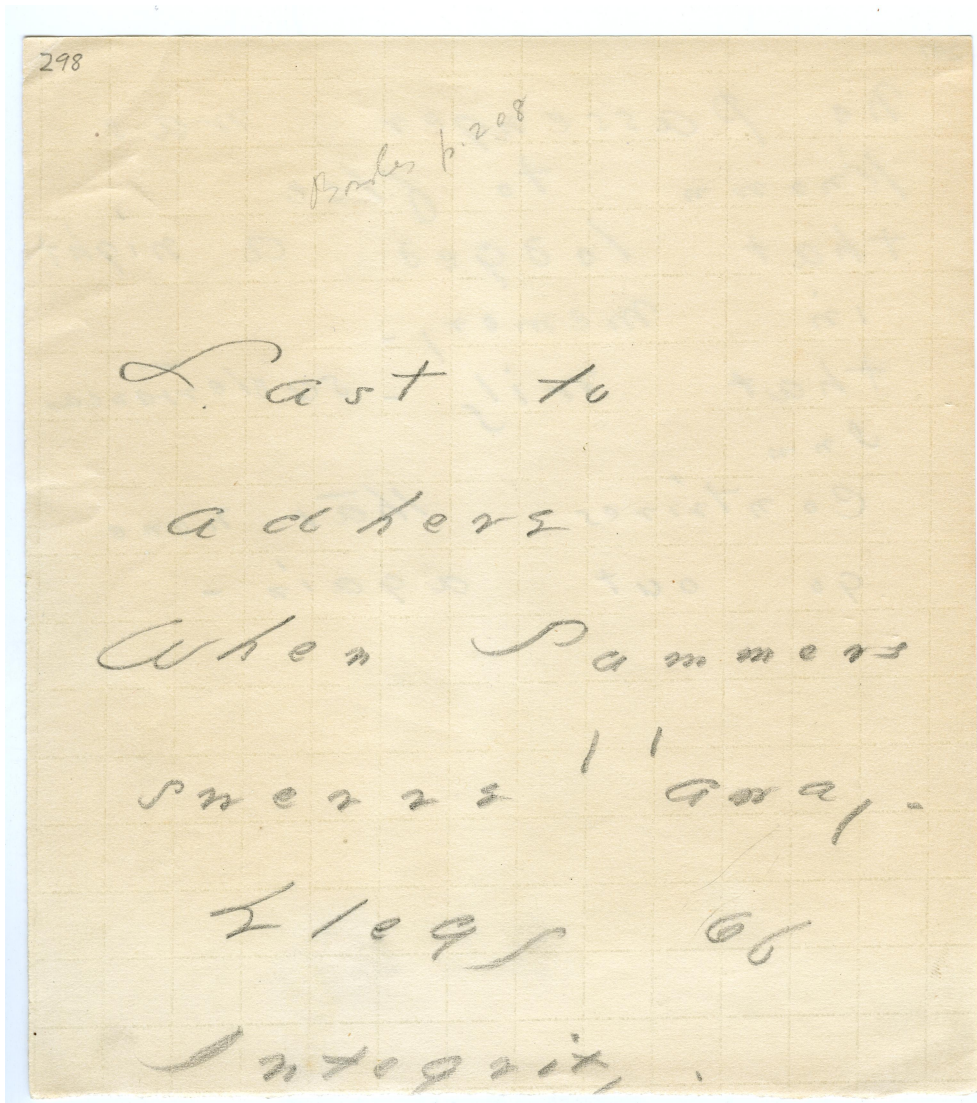


Figure 11: A 298. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

---

was known to flee/that lodged a night in memory -/ that wily - subterranean Inn/ Contrives that none go out again -". That memory is a "wily subterranean Inn" a temporary housing for a "passenger"—one who is themselves named for their passive movement from here to there complicates the initial idea that one could not escape memory. This notion is echoed in Dickinson's own preservation strategies and also in the archive we have inherited. These manuscripts are themselves "passengers" that find themselves provisionally preserved in the "Inn" that is the archive. They are preserved in folders and boxes, occasionally printed in a variorum, but lost in the grand scheme of preservation when they are seen merely as a means to a drafting end.

Here the handwriting has changed completely, and Franklin doesn't give an approximate date for its composition. It seems that he is following the changes as they play out in the "summers swerve" phrasing, as well as the ending line, which changes in these fragments. The handwriting in these fragments is more like print, with letters lacking ligatures linking them together. Each one stands with uniform space around it on the line. The capital 'S' is almost sideways. With the exception of the neighboring poem in A 297/298, the spacing on the two manuscripts is very similar, with words standing in the same spaces on each line. What kinds of experiments with page space, page shape, chirographic styling or other aesthetic features could Dickinson be trying out in these sheets filled with beautiful letters exploring a lack of permanence? Again, it seems that one could make much of these twinned manuscripts if they were not in search of the final version. Like the bluebird Dickinson dedicates her poem to capturing, the words on the page are fleeting in their communication, but dynamic, changing, and eluding enclosure.

711

Letter 208

Last to

adhere

When Sammers

snore away.

1895 of

Integrity.

Figure 12: A 711. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

The structures that the textual editor adheres to are structures of the archive. Preserving official documents means preserving documents on their way to an approved and printed state, or at least providing a relationship between the document and the approved, printed state. Fleeting, contingent, and aesthetic properties of the text don't seem worthy of preservation when the end result is a single poem or the answer to a biographical puzzle. Therefore when Franklin tells us in the variorum that A 711 was "long associated with letters of which it was not a part," we can see another motivation of the archival work around the Dickinson materials.<sup>45</sup> The crooked history of this scrap serves as another reminder of how the archive can work to preserve a certain kind of history. In this case (and in many cases in the Dickinson oeuvre) the

---

<sup>45</sup> As discussed in the introduction, Dickinson the author is the result of a socially constructed archive and a socially constructed biography. In the case of this manuscript, it was found among the letters of Samuel Bowles and edited together with other scraps to become a single message. Franklin tells us this early mistaken editing began in the 1894 edition of *Letters*. Dickinson's connection to Samuel Bowles has resulted in multiple mis-edited manuscript combinations that have attempted to make the case for her unrequited love for him. Since Dickinson did not marry and did not leave behind a journal documenting her reasons for not doing so, many scholars have taken it upon themselves to scour the archive for a narrative that reflects her romantic life. In doing so, early scholars solidified many manuscript scraps into letters that *seem* like they might be addressing a loved one. This is another way that the archive, while trying to preserve Emily Dickinson, instead creates her and locks this notion of her persona, her work, into one version. The most famous account of this kind of archival intervention into biography (and perhaps we can see it going the other way, too) is in the case of the supposed "Lord Letters." Scholars like Marta Werner have gone to great lengths to show us how constructed the letters truly are when translated into print (words and phrases literally pasted together, signature and address appended to words that originally appear on a scrap of paper), but the works are still commonly used to refer to a desiring Dickinson, constructed from the letters. As the introduction points out, Dickinson's assumed biography has driven the construction of the archive, which is then further used to cement notions about the constructed author figure. In a cycle of misinformation, these scraps and rumors swirl, until we think we know something about a historical personage who left us very little biographical detail from which to surmise.

archive is looking to preserve a narrative that fits with a standard biography, one that Dickinson did not leave us with.

Franklin lists A 254/255 as the next relative linked to the eventual production of “After all birds.” This tiny scrap contains bits of related poetry, practice signatures, as well as what Franklin deems “two unrelated lines of poetry” (Franklin, 1205). A look at these manuscripts shows multiple layers of writing in different hands, implements and modes. These manuscripts reveal a property of the Dickinson archive that cannot be articulated necessarily by mere print description in the variorum. They don’t seem to be manuscripts in a traditional way, and of all the manuscripts we’ve looked at so far, they stand in the way of the process of textual editing that calls for the formation of a stable copy text. They seem more related to the fragments of Sappho’s poems painted on shards of clay pots, or Shelley’s notebooks recovered from shipwreck. While the case of Sappho points to an even more unstable archive and Shelley’s towards one made more solid by published works, the Dickinson archive shares the uncertainty of the textual editor, and the constraint of normative publishing technology with these two damaged textual bodies.

Franklin’s variorum next lists the scrap known as A 254/55 with the observation that, “ED turned next to three lines, (3,4, and 6 of stanza 2), writing them in a new form in pencil on a small fragment of stationary” (*Variorum*, 1205). This description does not reflect the actual manuscript, which hardly seems like a deliberate “turn” to any real “lines.” Franklin’s description makes us imagine a diligent writer, at

her desk, rewriting a poem in full. We think that she has a drafting process; in fact we imagine that she has a draft *in process*. What this scrap reflects tells a different story and in fact does not fit into a revision story at all. The scrap is written in both pencil and pen, and has script on either side. Franklin does tell us that the “small fragment of stationary...contains practice signatures in ink and two unrelated lines of poetry in pencil,” which to some careful readers might cast some suspicion upon the narrative he asserts at the beginning of the entry (*Variorum*, 1205).

As a text that acts in some ways as an organizer of the archive and an aid to scholars looking for a glimpse into the Dickinson archive, the variorum again produces a story for a scrap whose contents don't seem to back it up. What story *does* the scrap tell? The shadowy penciled lines loom behind the illegible inked letters whose incoherence stands out more prominently than the penciled lines of echoed poem-fragment. On (or in) one hand we see Dickinson playing with verbs (endows/exalts/delights), nouns (note/cry) and adjectives (zealous/joyful/gallant) and on (or in) another we see her playing with the *forms* of the letters she uses. Thinking against the grain of a publication history and along the grain of a disjointed composition and publication history that the manuscripts actually followed, this scrap seems to tell an interesting story. Visually, it enacts the story of the Dickinson corpus with the penciled lines of poem hiding behind the darker inked letters that have become illegible. Once a scholar has a glimpse of the disorder of the archive and leans

toward the possibility that the work reflects relationships beyond a composition history, the scraps become legible in other ways.

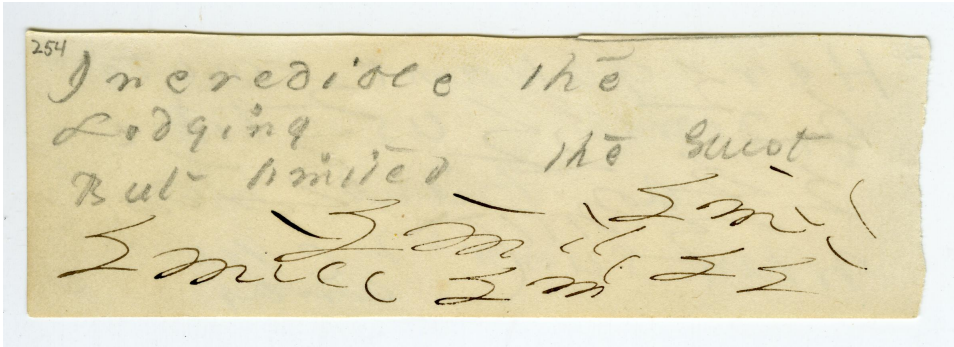


Figure 13: A 254 Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

The scrap known as 254/55 is a fluttering of the elements of Dickinson's archive at play as it exhibits visual and semantic pieces of the work in flux. These elements aren't easily noted in archival documents, nor are they easily accounted for in variorum or other print editions. They are overlooked by Franklin as he makes his way to the documents now housed in the Boston Public Library in the Thomas Higginson letters collection. According to Franklin, Dickinson sent the poem that has been deemed the finished and final version to Higginson in a letter in 1877. Franklin also notes that "ED apparently did not retain a copy of this version for herself," an interesting surmise, since scholars are aware that not everything *has* been preserved by the archival efforts of early family members (1206). This would be a great opportunity for Franklin to give the reader a glimpse into the unstable Dickinson archive, but this would reveal that his version of the relationships between the manuscripts is one

among many that could be crafted. A stable, well-preserved archive yields poems whose drafts eventuate in final versions. The story Franklin is telling has a beginning and an end, but since the connections he makes between the manuscripts are not held together by a drafting process that results in a final draft, his ordering here can be thought of as one possibility among many.



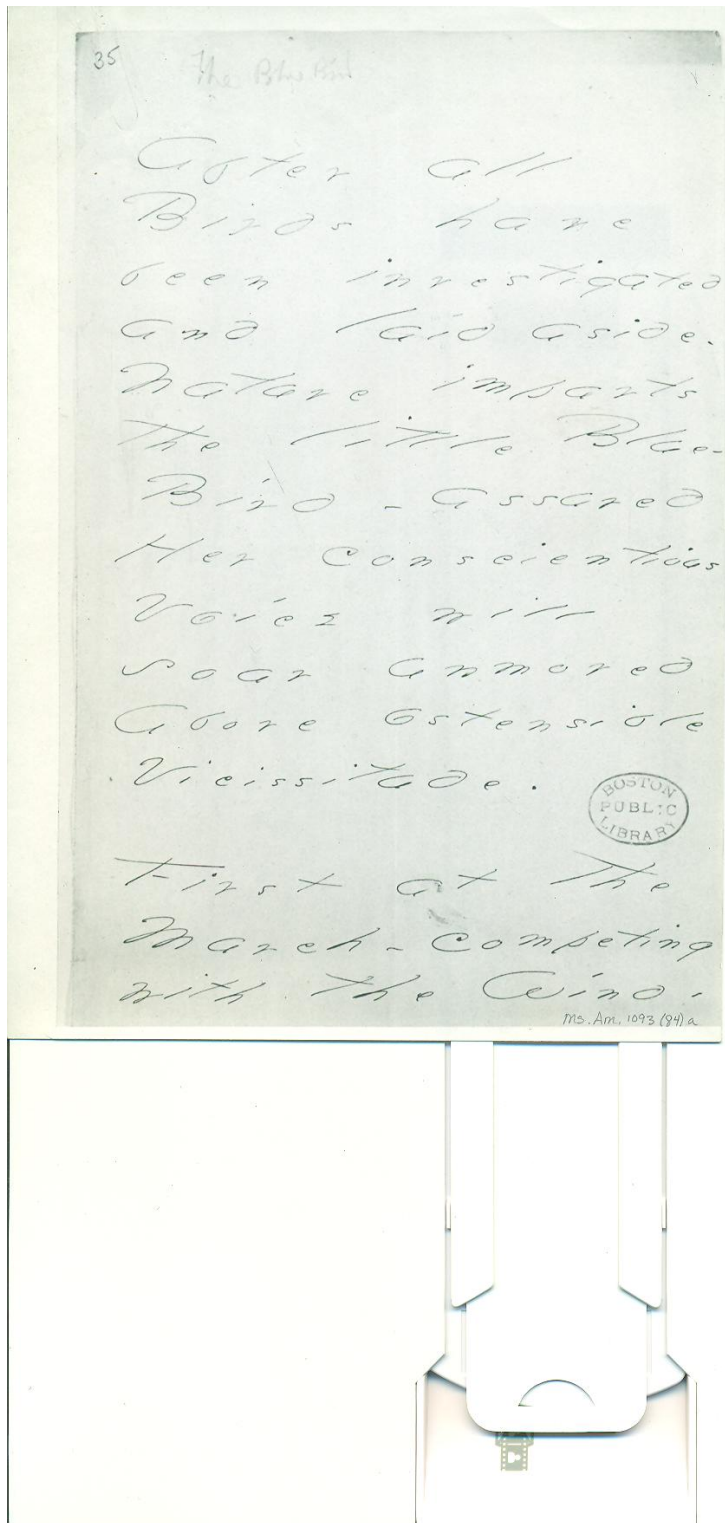
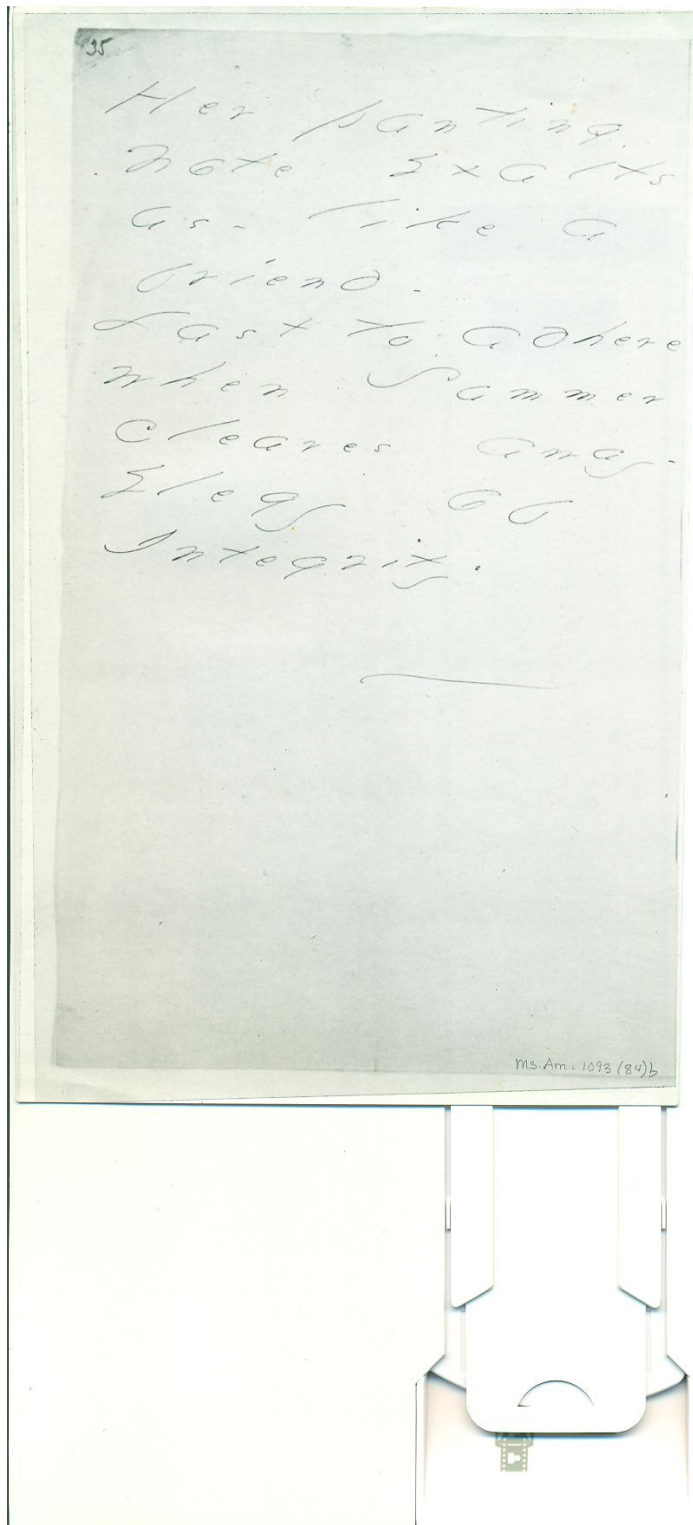


Figure 14: BPL 84. Boston Public Library Thomas Higginson Collection



35  
Her parting  
note 5x4 its  
as like a  
friend.  
Last to adhere  
when summer  
clears and  
flog to  
integrity.

Ms. Am. 1093 (84)b

Figure 15: BPL 85. Boston Public Library Thomas Higginson Collection

The manuscript that has served as the copy text for published versions of the poem has as its archival home the Boston Public Library. The BPL stamps are visible on the manuscript and are the only competing text on the page. The script is as airy and billowed as the first “drafts” of the work. The first stanza is intact and the second stanza is indeed “reflecting decisions in the four intermediate drafts” (1206). As a grand finale and a final draft, it is decidedly anti-climactic. But Franklin seems to *want* to make it seem final, as he emphasizes, strangely, that, “this fair copy also arranged the lines in quatrains” (1206). A look to the manuscripts reveals no such easy observation. Similar to the first entry in the variorum, this manuscript has a space between the two sets of lines. But these sets of lines do not meet an easy definition of “quatrains” at all. Dickinson ends each line after two words. Scholars have decided that the rhythm and sounds of the poems should be the indicators of how lines should be broken and have therefore fixed the work in order to get it to the place where it most resembles a poem.<sup>46</sup> Franklin has decided that this construction, containing elements of the others

---

<sup>46</sup> The printed editions of these poems reveal line breaks in places editors have thought best after analyses of rhythm and with an interest in creating a line most fitting a traditional lyric poem. These alterations obscure the way the poems sit on the page, usually three words to a line, pushing the line to cover the boundaries of the page. The white space between the words looks carefully created in these cases, and, while the cadence of the work might sound more regulated with the line breaks as they are printed, the changes made definitely privilege normative rhythmic patterns. Since meter is based upon the number of syllables in a line, the way we read Dickinson rhythmically depends upon how we make sense of her lines. Most editors choose to follow their ears rather than their eyes when it comes to these poems, and there are different levels of consequence when it comes to what is lost in the translation from script to print. Most poems can be seen as playing with what makes a line, what makes a rhyme, and in many ways, what makes a poem, entirely. The poem with the first line “My Life had stood – A Loaded Gun –” is one of these poems that plays with rhyme, line breaks, and page space—all while undertaking a discussion of power dynamics between an inanimate object and its owner. This

affiliated with it, must be a “final version” and therefore the intended best one according to Dickinson. What I hope to have shown above is that while the thinking around these materials is indeed of the highest scholarship, it is the concern of this study that perhaps the wrong questions are being asked of these documents. Franklin’s inquiry and resulting scholarship yields a composition history based upon a narrative and a process we cannot know ever existed. It places a revision history upon a historical personage we know existed, but whose writing habits are relatively obscure. It places structures and boundaries around texts that don’t fit within them, and what gets left behind are the visual, experimental, and material features of these works.

*“Who are the scholars, supposed agents of integrity and coherence, who desire to mend the past, to make it whole?”<sup>47</sup>*

Paige duBois writes beautifully on our desire to make wholes from broken pieces of the past. In response to the question above, she suggests that we all say, “me.” She muses, “the critic waits for completion, a completion which may never occur, or she recognizes the sensation of working in the dark, of vulnerability to that text which might appear, which might contradict her reading, or subsume it in a fuller, more

---

relationship, much like the slant rhyme, speaker, and almost metrical lines is almost something we can give a generic name to. The gun is almost anthropomorphized in the poem, but it is also seemingly aware of the lack of voice it contains in the poem. This is all just to say that Dickinson’s poetics reflect characteristics that hint at normative generic boundaries, but then always shift, dance, play within and outside of them. Forcing the work into these spaces forces the reader to overlook these innovations and dynamic relationships with the formal elements of poetry.

<sup>47</sup> Paige duBois, *Sappho is Burning*, 20

adequate reading of a fuller, more adequate poem” (*Sappho is Burning*, 37). duBois’ admitted anxiety in the face of the fragment is one that critics and archivists cannot seem to escape. The desires to craft the “full” story and anxieties over adequate readings are ultimately fears of what we do not know. As critics, editors, or archive experts, we are not supposed to admit that we do not know anything. So, we make it full, adequate, and organized—covering over the holes in the story with surmises such as those we see in the Franklin Variorum. Steeped in our own senses of sense (what seems logically possible to us in our time), we sometimes forget the real otherness of the hand that created these pieces we love and know so much about. We cover up spaces that don’t make sense with our sense, and the mysteries of the past are lost.

duBois gives voice to the other anxiety critics feel when confronted with the fragmentary nature of the archive and the manuscripts within. She writes of “the poem-fragments from which we cannot construct a whole, lines repeated to illustrate a point, lines retrieved accidentally from a papyrus so damaged that there is no hope of more,” and although she is talking about fragments organized around the notion of a person named Sappho, she could easily be talking about fragments organized around the notion of a person named Emily Dickinson (*Burning*, 37). duBois continues, asking “can we do more than to place the irretrievably fragmentary remains of these poets in the limbo of the unreadable, as uncanny, damaged and partial ruins of antiquity?” (37). duBois yearns for a reading practice that does not merely strand it in the wilderness of

the unreadable, but is also concerned about reading practices that do too much work by way of settling and refining the work.

*Sappho Is Burning* works towards contextual readings on multiple levels. duBois writes, “I want here to attempt a reading that accepts some very broken lines of Sappho’s poetry, as they stand” (*Burning* 39). This not only means setting the poems within social contexts, but also performing readings that leave the fragments intact in their incomplete states. In duBois’ reading, the poems’ fragmentary state almost becomes another context contributing another layer of meaning to the work. She calls this the “aesthetics of the fragment” (*Burning*, 32). Actually confronting this feature opens another avenue of critical thought for the reader, archivist and editor. These thinkers must then confront *their* own desire for fullness with this practice, where the “art of reading is problematized in the encounter with these fragments, as the reader is made to confront her desire, her desire for wholeness, for more, for coherence, for linear, narrative familiarity” (*Burning*, 53).

The disruptive work of Sappho’s fragments is diminished when they are coaxed into a certain reading by an editor or critic, one that most often reflects our own desires for the works to tell us a complete story. In Sappho’s case (much like Dickinson’s) this is usually a matter of biography and normative sexuality as much as it is about line breaks and word changes. For Dickinson and Sappho, sexuality and textuality emerge as equally editable elements. Sappho scholars translate a word that is not gendered in its original greek into “boy,” while Dickinson scholars avoid the

multiplicity of poems that shift genders across versions.<sup>48</sup> The shape of the archive, and the desires built into its forces of logical organization encourage such urges to edit into normative forms and stories. In duBois' estimation, thoughtful translation and editing can occur when the editor takes the time to attend to and admit their own desires about the text. As I touched on briefly in the introduction, a dynamic archive at play, freed from the constraints of biography and drafting narratives, can allow for a broader discussion of how Dickinson's work undoes gender binaries. This is just one area where the instability of the archive can lend itself to more complicated readings that emphasize difference.

*Headed for Certain Discoveries*

One Dickinson critic who tends to her own desires while also being able to see the frustrating multiplicities the Dickinson archive is Marta Werner. A student of Susan Howe, she brings the nomenclature of textual studies together with the fragmented structures of Howe's poetics. Werner's prose reflects the self-awareness of her own desires to read Dickinson's work as unfinished. In this last section of the chapter, I turn to Werner's essay "Most Arrows" as an example of a response to Dickinson's work that avows its material resistances as well as adherence to archival forms and practices. This chapter concludes, here, with a moment in Dickinson criticism that avows the messiness of the Dickinson archive, rescuing works from

---

<sup>48</sup> Dickinson's poem numbered 346 by Franklin "I showed her heights she never saw" contains a variant "He showed me heights I never saw." Poem 1453 performs a similar shift with "She laid her docile crescent down" and "He laid his docile crescent down."

“failure,” while also resisting the urge to edit them into genres they don’t quite fit into. En route to a discussion in the final chapter which suggests an interdisciplinary, dynamic archive that achieves a playful, contingent representation of Dickinson’s work, my reading of Werner’s work brings us closer to imagining the there of the Dickinson archive.

Werner’s work attends to the features most often overlooked or edited out of the work. Werner’s attention to the material features of the Dickinson manuscripts refocuses our eyes to not only the words on the page, but also the movement of words across pages, what kinds of pages they have been written upon and the fact that the pages do not fit into an easy drafting narrative. Her work takes the structure and logic of textual studies and the workings of the archive and fractures it with the language of poetry. Attentive to the structures of argument that secure certain facts again and again in Dickinson scholarship, Werner’s scholarship is somehow able to be forceful in its articulations without being prescriptive in its readings. What I would like to focus on at the end of this chapter is how Dickinson’s work is generative for Werner. The fleeting, indeterminate and material features of the Dickinson archive come alive in Werner’s prose, specifically.<sup>49</sup> Werner’s essay gives us new language and new ways to think

---

<sup>49</sup> This essay, which follows Werner’s important book-length treatment of the Dickinson materials, *Open Folios*, predates Werner’s most important and generative accomplishment and contribution by over 15 years, but it shows the potential this innovative scholar held in her prose and imagination concerning the Dickinson archive. Werner’s co-creation (with book artist Jen Bervin) *The Gorgeous Nothings* (New Directions and Granary Books, 2013) in both trade hardback and artist book brings, together a genre of Dickinson poems she names “envelope poems” for scholarly consideration and artistic treatment. This project, in arguing that the Dickinson archive pushes against the boundaries of the normative archive and its requisite publications, is also (as we will see in the final chapter most clearly) interested in work that provides other glimpses into the work and also pushes the reader/scholar/critic to respond in a



through the archive, but we are still slave to its structures when we want to create new relationships among fragments.

Werner writes about the Dickinson manuscripts,

Today the manuscripts of more than one hundred of the late fragments are stored in a vault of the Amherst College library's Special Collections. The silent interior of an interior, a complex of protected spaces, the archive would have fascinated Dickinson. Founded on the twinned ideas of memory and order, on the one hand, the archive offers, on the other, a shifting collection of pieces out of place, the remains of a heterogeneous estate that resist reintegration into any single, perfect order. (Werner, "Most Arrows," 43)

Werner's assertion that Dickinson would have been fascinated with the archive compliments my project's framing of Dickinson's work as aesthetically and conceptually interactive with the notions of preservation and destruction, enclosure and escape which are inherent to any archival project. Werner too invokes these problems when she mentions 'other'ness this particular collection inhabits.

Werner names as "trace fragments" the relationship between the fragments she has encountered in the Amherst library and their longer, more finished texts. For Werner, the relationships of echo, or repetition with a difference that these fragments reflect cannot be distilled into a composition narrative. She writes, "yet the

---

dynamic way. I am interested in work that meets the Dickinson materials in their material state and makes meaning through work that pushes against boundaries itself. I have been lucky to have multiple conversations and collaborative experiences with Werner, and much of my thinking about Dickinson is in direct response to hers—which is itself a direct response to the pioneering efforts of our shared mentor, poet-scholar Susan Howe.

painstaking—and ongoing—effort to identify all such trace fragments and link them with the messages and poems in which they appear will not effect any lasting closure” (Werner “Arrows” 54). Werner’s essay, instead of making a line from beginning thought to complete poem, suggests that poems “unwrite” themselves into fragmentary states. Undertaking a poetics of musicology and escaping the nomenclature of the archive, Werner suggests that the fragments almost riff off one another. Mixing metaphors of space and sound, Werner wishes for a reading process that allows for “more amplified space” for these unruly compositions to sound through (Werner “Arrows” 54). She writes that a “truly devious and enlightening reading must therefore attend to the mystery of the encounter between poems, letters and fragments, listening especially to the ways in which the fragments, like leitmotifs, the turns and returns of melody, both change the modalities of the compositions in which they momentarily take asylum” (Werner “Arrows” 54). Werner’s highlighting of the contingent “asylum” of the fragments within other compositions reflects an epistemological shift away from archival ordering. For Werner, Dickinson’s archive is a home where fragments slip through walls and windows, not one whose boundaries are absolute. The drift and flutter of the manuscript scraps cannot be placed into a certain narrative about how this or that poem was written. For Werner, these fragments resist the finish of the bound poems and should be read in a state of incompleteness and dynamic relations.

Importantly, Werner’s work reminds us of the constructed nature of the archive and the corollary to this knowledge: that the work we receive from it has been similarly

socially constructed. For Werner, the archive is not a place where we can “discover” something that has never been seen before. She writes, quite beautifully, “I open a box filled with fragments, ‘lost events.’ Inside folders, pressed between leaves, I find perfect quatrains beside barely legible lists of words held together with straight pins...I am under the spell of traces...strange cominglings”(43, ellipses in the original). Beginning her reading of these texts with their origins, in boxes, separated by sheets of paper, but comingling with other unlike texts, Werner starts the story of her close reading with these texts in their material form. Avowing the notion that Dickinson materials are heavy with their own histories, Werner produces a reading strategy that allows the reader/fellow scholar to hold the unstable and constructed archive together with the very solid material features of the manuscripts. Her essay makes connections between the scraps that reflect the dynamic relationship of echo, riff, and constellative thinking without reducing such connections to Dickinson’s drafting, or the perfecting of a poem that stands to justify an edition.

Discussing materials as we saw them grouped in the discussion above, Werner speaks to a group of poems that begins with a relationship around the phrase “woe of extacy.” Where Franklins sees poems following one trajectory en route to a “perfected poem,” Werner places a dynamic language around the fragments, claiming that they are “drawing” each other “into relation” (57). Werner’s scholarship doesn’t claim to know why the poet we speak of as Dickinson brings things into relation via her scraps of text, nor how one might go about organizing such a collection of materials. Her essay is not

meant as a critique. But, I would like to extend her claims that there are different ways to make connections between these texts that are not bound to publication history and that do not freeze them in a single interpretation via print. What Werner's essay makes possible is the exciting idea that a Dickinson scrap (in Werner's words, fragment), affiliated with a longer poem (trace fragment) somewhere else in the archive, might have multiple relations with multiple fragments and trace fragments. For Werner, the way texts relate to one another in the Dickinson archive could spread beyond similar word groupings, echoed ideas or riffs on summer, ecstasy or woe. Werner's studies group works according to the materials they work with and upon. Taking her interest in spreading a constellative relation system throughout the Dickinson corpus that allows for dynamic readings and scholarly responses up in the third chapter, I look at scholars who have made strides toward this in multiple disciplines.

As this discussion of the boundaries surrounding the Dickinson manuscript archive closes, it does so with a glimmer of hope in Werner's thinking about the manuscripts in the archive. As we move to the Dickinson print archive in the next chapter, we will need Werner's dynamic and imaginative nomenclature again to think about how Dickinson's poems, even in print, resist readings of enclosure. Looking to works that are grouped together by the way they thematically resist containment, boundaries, walls and structure, we see that this body of work is in motion, and that these works in print resist static reading strategies as well.

## Chapter Two: The Space of the Print Archive

Bound—a trouble—  
And lives can bear it!  
Limit—how deep a bleeding go!  
So—many—drops—of vital scarlet—  
Deal with the soul  
As with Algebra!

Tell it the Ages—to a cypher—<sup>50</sup>  
And it will ache—contented—on—  
Sing—at its pain—as any Workman—  
Notching the fall of the Even Sun!  
(Fascicle 9)<sup>52</sup>

Bound a Trouble-and Lives will bear it -  
Circumscription - enables Wo -  
Still to anticipate - Were no limit -  
Who were sufficient to Misery?

State it the Ages - to a cipher -  
And it will ache contented on -  
Sing, at its pain, as any Workman -  
Notching the fall of the even Sun -  
(Fascicle 36)<sup>51</sup>

The two works transcribed above are edited versions of texts penned by Emily Dickinson. The first material iterations were handwritten and bound into hand-sewn gatherings and stored in a wooden trunk. They were not set to print until 1935, over 70 years after their initial inclusion in the hand bound collections. Their translation

---

<sup>50</sup> From the Webster's 1828 Dictionary definition of cipher: "To have, or to learn a cipher, is to be able to interpret it."

<sup>51</sup> This typo-transcription was produced by R.W. Franklin for his *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, 1998

<sup>52</sup> This typo-transcription was produced by Thomas Johnson for his one volume edition of *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 1960

into print in the *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson*, found them drastically altered with normalized spelling and punctuation.<sup>53</sup> The poem on the right can be found in Fascicle 36, a gathering of poems Dickinson sewed together later than the one that holds the poem on the left. Editors preparing these documents for publication consider them one poem, with the one on the right deemed the final draft and the one on the left considered an earlier draft. The version on the left, in fact, is only ever published in variorum editions of Dickinson's work, and is considered an obscure part of her "workshop process" where poems improved over time.<sup>54</sup>

Different editors have had multiple ways of dealing with these difficulties, producing publications that reflect the editors' desired rhyme or rhythm scheme, in the cohesiveness of the edition, or sometimes even the constructed image of the poet. A close reading of the paratextual features of these editions reveals a tendency of the editors to become interested in the construction of the Dickinson biography, often in the face of the difficulties surrounding the organization of the manuscripts. A tracing of these theories across texts helps us to see how the interests of editors have shaped our readings of the poems and of the poet, revealing the interpretive boundaries that

---

<sup>53</sup> See *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson. This edition was important in the history of the battle of manuscripts between members of Dickinson's extended family and it includes poems acquired by transcription only.

<sup>54</sup> Much has been made of the idea that Dickinson was inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "New Poetry" in the October 1840 issue of *The Dial*. Emerson writes of "the Verses of the Portfolio" that they are "not written for publication, they lack that finish which the conventions of literature require of its authors" (Emerson 221). As I discuss below, if we as literary critics and textual editors take Emerson's ideas seriously, then it is the poems in their unfinished and manuscript forms that he finds to have the most value. Scholars and editors seem to normally be interested in Dickinson's mythic workshop as a place where perfection was sought, and therefore the final drafts that end up in their editions. But, this chapter argues that these editors and their edition might be missing the point of the excess and indecision as it is reflected in the manuscripts.

have already been set up around the texts before we read them. The image of the secluded poet trapped at home has become an influential interpretive tool in Dickinson scholarship. This chapter traces the early editors' construction of the secluded poet in the enclosed home through to more contemporary scholarship and finally performs readings of poems that resist enclosure, suggesting movement, revelation, and play in constrained spaces.

*"The purpose of any editorial task is to establish as definitive a text as possible" (Thomas Johnson, "Establishing a Text: Emily Dickinson")*

*"For half a century curiosity has spent itself in two different directions. If the topic, "Who was Emily's lover?" began to pall, it has been equally and enticing and equally unrewarding to ask, "Why after a generation has passed do so many of her poems go unpublished?" (Millicent Todd Bingham, *Ancestors' Brocades: The Literary Debut of Emily Dickinson*)*

From the first three 19<sup>th</sup>-century volumes that did not publish all of the poems to the Manuscript Books that supposedly only reproduce the poems Dickinson sewed into small groupings, all editions of Dickinson's work have errantly promised to give us everything.<sup>55</sup> The archive is filled with scraps of text (later published as lyric poems),

---

<sup>55</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century volumes include *Poems By Emily Dickinson*, edited by two of her friends, Mabel Loomis Todd and T.W. Higginson, Roberts Brothers, 1890; *Poems By Emily Dickinson Second Series* edited by two of her friends, Mabel Loomis Todd and T.W. Higginson, Roberts Brothers, 1891; *Letters of Emily Dickinson* edited by Mabel Loomis Todd, Roberts Brothers, 1894; and *Poems By Emily Dickinson Third Series* edited by Mabel Loomis Todd, Roberts Brothers, 1896. There were many poems and letters left out of these three volumes and they were heavily edited. In 1981, editor Ralph W. Franklin published the *Manuscript Books*, which promised to reproduce all of Dickinson's bound books. Dickinson only put some of her 1,700 poems into the manuscript books. Thomas Johnson's *Letters* contains multiple texts that are published as both poems and letters in different editions. Marta Werner's *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* reproduces the facsimile scraps that serve as the sources for these letters and show examples of poetic text scraps with no salutation or signature.

sculptural mixed media objects and poems that contain various versions that may come in any combination of these forms. What we call these items, how we understand them to be works, works of literature, and what kind, depends upon how scholars have sorted, edited and published them.<sup>56</sup> How each one traces the boundaries around the texts, and why, is reflected in the resulting editions. These texts can be thought about in three different phases: the early 19<sup>th</sup> century editions of poems and letters, the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century biographical/editorial publications, and the later scholarly treatments by Thomas Johnson and Ralph Franklin. While we can separate these texts by time and genre, it is difficult to ignore the influence each one had upon the other. This means that the scholarly volumes are equally informed by the diligent research of textual scholars as well as the more interested efforts of the early scholars and mid century biography writers.

Three volumes of poems and one volume of letters were published before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Higginson. These editors come with personal connections to the poet; Higginson was the recipient of Dickinson's poems and requests for advice and Mabel Loomis Todd was her brother's mistress. As scholars, we should be curious already about how these two would come to Dickinson's texts given their prior connections to the author. After Dickinson died, her sister Lavinia is said to have discovered the poems, and the construction of a poet

---

<sup>56</sup> My own anxiety about what to call these pieces of writing can be seen in the hesitant and clumsy diction in this dissertation. I overuse "work" at times because I don't want to assume that every manuscript is a poem. Are they compositions, word paintings, artifacts?



and her poems began with the idea that they must be published.<sup>57</sup> Todd was given the manuscripts of over 700 hundred poems (this could have been over 1,400 manuscripts) which she sorted, evaluated, copied and edited over the course of the next three years. Higginson refused to assist in the initial copies and edits, too busy to work with her “difficult” writing (“Debut”, 465). He would, however contribute to the introduction. Todd sorted and edited the poems and the two collaborated on titling the poems (which did not occur in manuscript) and placing them into thematic categories. The first edition was published in 1891 as *The Poems of Emily Dickinson edited by two of her friends Mabel Loomis Todd and R.W. Higginson* and was limited to under 500 copies which swiftly sold out, much to everyone’s surprise. Pausing for a moment with the title, it is already interesting to see the work framed on the first page, by this strange title. The reader thinks, these poems were edited by the poet’s friends, this poet had friends who helped edit her poetry, this edition can be trusted.<sup>58</sup> They would not imagine that the poems would be amended with titles they were not written with, nor that many words would be changed to make rhymes.

The preface to this volume sets the template for almost all editions that will follow, centering first on the unfinished nature of the poems, and then focusing on the

---

<sup>57</sup> Mabel Loomis Todd recounts Lavinia’s discovery and how she was recruited to do this work in a 1930’s *Harper’s Magazine* article entitled “Emily Dickinson’s Literary Debut.”

<sup>58</sup> It is actually true that Dickinson never met Todd face to face, although they did have a correspondence and Dickinson would sit in an adjoining room, unseen, while Todd sang for her family. Higginson had a lengthy correspondence with Dickinson and met her twice. He writes of his first meeting, “The impression undoubtedly made on me was that of an excess of tension, and of an abnormal life. Perhaps in time I could have got beyond that somewhat overstrained relation which not my will, but her needs, had forced upon us. Certainly I should have been most glad to bring it down to the level of simple truth and every-day comradeship; but it was not altogether easy.” (“Letters,” *Atlantic Monthly*)

isolated, house-bound poet who wrote them. The first page begins with the now-familiar statement that these poems were not written for publication and instead crafted “solely by way of expression of the writer’s own mind” (Higginson, *Poems* iv). The narrative continues, describing the strangeness of the poetry and mirroring it with the strangeness of the poet. Higginson emphasizes Dickinson’s reclusiveness at some points to bolster his reading of the poems as somehow willfully natural and untouched by any outside influence. He writes, “she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a very few friends; and it was with great difficulty that she was persuaded to print, during her lifetime, three or four poems,” indicating that Dickinson’s work had no attachment to an outside world and that she never meant it to (iv). Thus, the reclusive poet is born via the introduction and before we even get to the poems. The reader assumes the poetry and the poet are confined, free of any outside influence, but also ignorant of any outside literature or other cultural influences. The boundaries around the poetry are of the poet’s “habitually concealed mind,” whatever this might be.

Higginson writes further in the preface that the publication of the poems has been completed “to meet the desire of her personal friends, and especially of her surviving sister,” adding another layer of the personal to the publication (v).

Higginson’s domestication of the poet here seems to make the work more familiar, literally, its main importance situated within the family. But Mabel Loomis Todd writes of Lavinia’s desires to have the work published, “she had no literary appreciation of her

sister's verses" ("Debut" 467). Whatever the motivation of Dickinson's family and friends, the resultant text is alive with a story of the *person* Emily Dickinson who wrote the poems. Higginson claims later on that the poems have been printed "as they were written and with very few and superficial changes," a claim also common to many later editions (v). The preface frames the poems as untouched inventions of naïve genius, generously published by friends for a small audience of friends and family. The reclusive auto-didact poet *as secret and myth* edition of 1890 sold through six printings Todd and Higginson collaborated on another volume in 1891 and then Todd published a two volume collection of letters in 1894 and a third collection of poems in 1896.

Following these publications, the Dickinson manuscripts were separated due to a rift between Lavinia Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd. The manuscripts in Lavinia's possession were given to Susan Dickinson and then passed on to her daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Todd's collection was passed to her daughter Millicent Todd Bingham. Both daughters produced volumes of previously unpublished works which had clearly defined aims at continuing the rivalry between Todd and the Dickinsons and providing more information contributing to the mystery behind Emily Dickinson's persona.<sup>59</sup> These mid-century volumes aren't quite editions and aren't

---

<sup>59</sup> The introductions to both Bingham's *Emily Dickinson's Home* and Bianchi's *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* contain barbed accusations aimed at the other's family and editorial efforts. As works of scholarship they are strange hybrids. They rely mostly on the letters their mothers left them about the Dickinson family, the culture of Amherst, and Emily Dickinson's mysterious persona with them. Each volume claims to reveal something new about the reclusive author figure and each one "publishes" a few more poems or letters. These texts seem to have been produced for commercial success, but their

quite biographies. Attending to the construction of the biography by way of letters and poems, the texts do publish unpublished works. However, the poems and letters are used to solve elements of the Dickinson mystery at the same time they introduce readers to new work. Immensely popular, they were the only publications of Dickinson's poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century until Thomas Johnson's scholarly editions in 1955.<sup>60</sup>

By this time the reading public, literary critics, and scholars had absorbed the mythology surrounding the Dickinson story for over 50 years. The three-volume variorum edition of his *Collected Poems* as well as the *Interpretive Biography* both employed the Dickinson as lonely genius organizational strategy. The table of contents of the *Biography* is separated into three parts: "Growth Stirs Alone," "Dweller in Possibility," and "Flood Subjects." Part one introduces the reader to the Puritan history of Amherst and its surrounds, the Dickinson family itself and Dickinson's relationships with her friends. Parts two and three read familiar themes through the poems: the house, Dickinson's fascination with death, nature and "immortality." Johnson uses the

---

influence over the reading public, and because of the pervasiveness of the mythology, to the scholarship itself, cannot be underestimated. Bingham's *Emily Dickinson: A Revelation*, published in 1954 is one such instance of the popular editions having effects upon the scholarship, as it works to make a case for the love affair between the poet and Judge Otis Lord. Both Johnson and Franklin will rely on the constructed letters we find in this book, and will in fact reproduce them in their editions.

<sup>60</sup> The critique that these volumes aren't more "scholarly" and that the efforts of the women who put them together aren't more academic isn't meant to take away from the gratitude that I, as a Dickinson scholar have for them. Without the work of these early editors the manuscripts might have never been preserved in the first place, let alone taken seriously as literature worthy of scholarly editions. It is almost because of the commercial success of these editions that the work has been given the attention it deserves in the scholarly (or perhaps more exactly, the institutional Harvard approved work) treatments of Johnson and Franklin. I only attend to their faults in order to investigate how the editions we rely upon structure their logic and organization.

poems to read the biography and vice-versa. Johnson states that his hope that this chapter “allows the poetry itself to reveal the artist” (vii). The poetry, as we have seen, doesn’t allow much to be seen, and seems at times willfully opaque. Johnson’s hopes to make the poet and the poetry make meaning while the work avoids narrative structure and the poet’s biography is filled with myth are ambitious, but ultimately leaves the reader with more questions than answers.

Johnson’s variorum, while still structured by the same questions and ambitions as his biography, produces the first compilation of all the materials in one place. It provides poem variants, word variants and manuscript histories for each poem. It orders the work in a drafting process, normally deciding that the last poem was the author’s intended final version. It is filled with references to the work of the early editors and defers to their ordering and editing of the poems. It often reproduces letters written to Bingham about the details of a poem or biographical fact. Still very involved with this early work, it brings the narratives of lost loves and isolation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Franklin’s desires to produce a scholarly text revising Johnson’s author-centered efforts are documented in *The Editing of Emily Dickinson*, published in 1967. Franklin critiques Johnson’s reliance on the work of the early editors and calls for a more thorough investigation of their methodologies. He writes in the introduction that “Mr. Johnson has established the center; the aim of this study is to add to the circumference,” borrowing an oft-used term from Dickinson nomenclature (vxii).

Franklin will add much to the circumference of Dickinson scholarship, but his assessment that the Johnson study will remain at the center does hold true. While Franklin's early career as a textual editor seems to have hope for an edition that made major revisions to Johnson's contributions, his variorum repeats much of the biography every other edition utilizes, and it makes even more forceful claims about drafting processes and ordering of manuscripts.

### *The Idea of Authorship in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

Although Dickinson did not become an author until the very last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a discussion of how she became one would not be complete without a historicized understanding of authorship. *The Transformation of Authorship in America* by Grantland Rice documents the uneasy experience of literary authors leading up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, traced through a shifting legal and political rhetoric. While Foucault's author is made the moment she has written something that she could be punished for, Rice's author is made the moment she has produced something that can be bought and sold. Rice's book echoes and elaborates on William Charvat's assertions in *Literary Publishing in America 1790-1850*, that literary authorship carried with it the responsibility of selling one's art, selling yourself as an author, and even in the case of Longfellow and others, selling the idea of art through one's art. Debates surrounding the idea of literary property were numerous, as many writers saw the Federal Copyright Act of 1790's limits as degrading the literary craft and encouraging the production of a

literature that was merely important and protected for a certain amount of time—the time in which it might be popular and make booksellers and publishers more money. Rice describes the tenor of this anxiety as it appears in the pages of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1844. An anonymous essay reflects anxious reverberations of the debate surrounding literary property. The essayist delves deep into philosophical questions about the substance of intellectual activities, seeming torn between wanting to legitimize writing as productive and the dangers of turning intellectual and “spiritual” ideas into “goods and chattels” (92). Rice writes of this passage in *The Messenger*, “writers, like owners of laborers, sent things to the market. It was this focus on the materiality rather than the activity of authorship which made Anglo-American copyright formulations so very different from those on the continent ” (92).

If the conditions of authorship were being widely debated, and the heart of that debate was the materialization of an author’s thoughts on paper and then collection, binding, and reproduction of those thoughts to be sold to an ever more fickle and demanding market to be catered to, is it any wonder that a writer who pins crickets to poems and cannot decide the gender of her subjects would choose a different kind of occupation? The kind of work Dickinson produced seems leery of what Rice describes as “a philosophical outlook that presupposed the activity of authorship as productive rather than, say, communicative or participatory” (ibid). While she was indeed productive and prolific, these products never saw the light of the literary market, and, therefore the organized world of the bound book in her lifetime. However the marks

on the page were organized in Dickinson's process, they did not and could not adhere to a 19<sup>th</sup> century product-based model in any way, neither in terms of their subject nor their aesthetic presentation.

Rice ends his historical documentation here, and turns to a few case studies before he ends, appropriately, with a gesture to Emily Dickinson's "injunction at mid-century" to: "Tell all the truth but tell it slant -", taking a line from a Dickinson poem (172). The poem continues:

Success in Circuit lies  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise  
As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind  
The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind<sup>61</sup>

Rice does not quote the entire poem, but uses the words of the first line, expecting them to stand on their own. He attributes them to Emily Dickinson, but elaborates no further and the final chapter of the book is done. He points to Dickinson as a later 19<sup>th</sup> century example of authorship, one who reflects the problems that he outlines in an arduous fashion for pages previous, without speaking to how the materiality her particular vexed works reflects the indecision and debate surrounding literary authorship. In my view, Rice missed a tremendous opportunity to aid his

---

<sup>61</sup> The poem is dated by Franklin as being written in 1872. It is numbered F1263, and carries the manuscript number A372. It is written in pencil on a fragment of stationery, containing these word variants (infirm/bold; gradually/moderately).



argument here. An investigation into this poem and poet produces a literal paper trail of unstable authorship moving backwards from the Johnson edition (this is what I assume he used since he doesn't cite it) that prints it, and forward towards the unique writing activities of a mid-century poet struggling with many of the same cultural forces as the writers he examines in his book. A close reading of the poem reveals an anxiety around expression and an avoidance of direct address. Rice's application of the poem is quite apt, as he suggests that the history of authorship he has just presented produced similar sentiments in writers of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. But what speaks more to such avoidance and indirect communication is the fact that this poem was never published by its writer and never published in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century at all.

The poem with the first line, "Tell all the truth" not published until 1945. It contains two lines with word variants. Its place in literary history is much less than an authoritative injunction and much more of a material instantiation of the anxieties around authorship that Rice describes. The poem did not find itself in the literary market until nearly 100 years after it was written, and even then, it was truncated, normalized, trimmed to fit the pages of a mid-century edition by Millicent Todd Bingham. As described above, the idea of Emily Dickinson as author had already been constructed by the early editors when this poem met the world, translated out of its historically specific pencil on fragment of stationary environment and into a book. Rice's appropriation of the assumed ideas behind the poem without looking into its publication history provided him with a reading that made perfect "sense" for the

ending of his chapter. The history of the manuscripts reveals that the poem's resistance to print mirrored the struggles he outlines in his book, but the normalizing efforts of the archive made these difficulties impossible to read.

### *Antinomian Archives*

"my ways are not your ways" E.D.

Opening the introduction to *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*, poet and Dickinson scholar Susan Howe directly confronts the difficulties of the Dickinson archive. She writes, "(t)he issue of editorial control is directly connected to the attempted erasure of antinomianism in our culture" (1). For Howe, the tradition of antinomianism that began with the banishment of Anne Hutchinson from the Massachusetts Bay colony continues with the "lawlessness" of the Dickinson archive. Hutchinson's assertions against state-based rationalities of religious faith to her mainly female followers have earned her a formative place within a feminist canon for Howe. It is important to note that Hutchinson's antinomianism concentrated on faith that could not be quantified or constrained by written law. This was true both literally and figuratively, as the antinomians banished by the Massachusetts Bay Colony claimed that moral laws need not be heeded in order to go to heaven. For Hutchinson and the room full of women to whom she initially pontificated, devotion to God was intuitive and preordained, not lawful. Further, these religious dissenters would not be bound to follow religious leaders appointed by

governors of the colony. Advocating for religious leaders not sanctioned by colony leaders, the antinomians found themselves both theologically and lawfully outside the strict boundaries of Puritanism.

Howe connects Dickinson's writing practices outside of the rules of publication to Hutchinson's thinking and speaking practices outside the rules of religion. She writes, "(l)awlessness seen as negligence is at first feminized and then restricted or banished. For me, the manuscripts of Emily Dickinson represent a contradiction to canonical social power, whose predominant purpose seems to have been to render isolate voices devoted to writing as a physical event of immediate revelation" (ibid). Howe's emphasis on the physicality of writing and its powers of immediacy affirm the antinomian tension relevant to Hutchinson and Dickinson. Howe's articulation of this gendered lawlessness is physical and immediately revealing and therefore cast outside the rules of law and publication usually required to legitimate thinking. Howe's literary history is messy with such unsettled reckless figures, and she opens her collection of essays with two women whose talents of creative and critical thinking would not be constrained by the rules and laws set before them. Howe locates Dickinson's own lack of constraint in terms of form. She writes, "(t)he antinomian controversy continues in the form, often called formlessness, of Dickinson's letters and poems during and after her crisis years of 1858-60," referring to the manuscripts that make up the oeuvre: sometimes bound in handmade books and sometimes not. For Howe, the significance of this formless spirit that cannot be contained can be found

contained within history's circumscriptions and imagined otherwise. Her project to "unsettle" the wilderness of American Literary history, then, is to rethink the boundaries within which thought has been captured.

Howe's project suggests spatial considerations. If literary history is spread out across a terrain then her text is an attempt at redrawing the lines we use to make sense of that terrain. Howe's project calls for re-mapping, un-mapping, and re-reading texts whose bounds never really quite fit, texts whose excesses were always hinted at in unevenly documented composition and publication histories. In her essay on Dickinson, "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values" (its title itself a trespassing across the boundaries of two authors that have come before), Howe comments on the publishing of the manuscripts.<sup>62</sup> Her undoing occurs at the level of the word on the page and she wonders, as many would after, what kinds of limitations the world of print has had on the way we read and understand the Dickinson oeuvre. Comparing Thomas Johnson's typo-translations to the Dickinson handwritten corpus in manuscript, Howe makes a useful initial intervention into what gets left behind when the work is mapped into the shape of a poem, and suggests that we wonder what we miss when an unbound literary life's work is mapped into the shape of a narrative and then into the forward moving pages of a literary history and a book.

---

<sup>62</sup> "These Flames and Generosity of the Heart" is attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson and the subtitle "The Illogic of Sumptuary Values" is attributed to Helene Cixous.

Howe challenges entire sections of major studies of Dickinson that have relied heavily upon the idea that Dickinson's work was striving for publication and that it worked as if it were doing so. Howe's largest critique of Thomas Johnson seems to be his desire to produce an ordering of variant poems that reflects a writing process. This process gives us ideas like drafts and final versions and makes making sense of an unsettled archive much easier. While Johnson's important initial edition of 1955 does include word variants and mentions different versions of poems, it does so still with a nomenclature that suggests a forward momentum, with his decisions being the final word. Howe's desire to interrupt this momentum with the messiness of the Dickinson archive is a move against a normative thinking about how poems are written, archives are organized and literature is produced and consumed.

Howe writes of the manuscript books or fascicles that they have a "halo of wilderness" (Howe, "Flames and Generosities" 136). She continues her description of the handwritten documents, noting "(b)y continually interweaving expectation and categories they (the manuscripts) checkmate inscription to become what the reader offers them (ibid). Howe illustrates her point here with the famous poem whose first line states, "Publication—is the Auction/Of the Mind of Man." The poem continues

Poverty – be justifying  
For so foul a thing

Possibly – but We would  
Rather  
From our Garret go  
White - Unto the White Creator -  
Than invest – Our Snow

Thought belong to Him who  
gave it -  
Then - to Him Who bear  
Its Corporal illustration - Sell  
The Royal Air -

In the Parcel - Be the Merchant  
Of the Heavenly Grace  
But reduce no Human Spirit  
To Disgrace of Price-

(printed in Howe, 136-7)

Howe writes of this poem, “Use value is a blasphemy. Form and content collapse the assumption of Project and Masterpiece. Free from limitations of genre Language finds true knowledge estranged in it self” (137). Connecting back to the antinomian themes discussed above, there seems to be an important distinction here between prescribed forms and their effects on thoughts. If religious rule in the 17<sup>th</sup> century prescribed faiths and inspiration, then publication prescribed literary thought in the 19<sup>th</sup>. Dickinson’s work continually brushes up against limitations, boundaries and constraints. Howe’s attention to the form the manuscript poems take and the forms that they are translated into within a published book focuses on the handwriting, dashes, word variants and other crucial features of the works that cannot be rendered in print form. If we take Howe at her word, that “(t)his space is the poet’s space. Its demand is her method,” then the poet’s space deserves great consideration.

If Anne Hutchinson was accused of antinomianism or promoting doctrines that eroded the authority church or the house (as in material home) of God, then

Dickinson can similarly be accused. The Dickinson archive has consistently agitated the authority of the archive, or the material home of historical memory or official knowledge. If Dickinson's poems articulate tensions with normative thought and visually push up against the space on the page and the shape of the poem and even chirographic letter, then the entirety of her collected work can be said to do the same.

*The Time and Space of Thought: "It is thus, in this **domiciliation**, this house arrest, that archives take place" Jacques Derrida*

A Prison gets to be a friend -  
Between its Ponderous face  
And Ours - a Kinsmanship express -  
And In its narrow Eyes -

We come to look with gratitude  
For the appointed Beam  
It deal us - stated as our food -  
And hungered for - the same

We learn to know the Planks -  
That answer to Our feet -  
So miserable a sound - at first -  
Nor ever now - so sweet -

As plashing in the Pools -  
When Memory was a Boy -  
But a Demurer Circuit -  
A Geometric Joy -

The posture of the Key  
That interrupt the Day  
To Our Endeavor -Not so real  
The Cheek of Liberty -

As this Phantasm Steel -  
Whose features - Day and Night -  
Are present to us - as Our Own -  
And as escapeless - quite -

The narrow Round - the Stint -  
The slow exchange of Hope -  
For something passiver - Content  
Too steep for looking up -

The Liberty we knew  
Avoided - like a Dream -  
Too wide for any Night but Heaven -  
If That -indeed -redeem -

Echoing Howe's anti-utilitarian antinomianism, feminist philosopher Elizabeth

Grosz writes,

A text is not simply a tool or an instrument; this makes it too utilitarian, too amenable to intention, too much designed for a subject. Rather, it is explosive, dangerous, labile, with unpredictable consequences. Like concepts, texts are complex products, effects of history, the intermingling of old and new, a complex of internal coherences of consistencies and external referents, of intension and extension, of thresholds and becomings. Texts, like concepts, do things, make things, perform actions, create connections, bring about new alignments. They are events—situated in social, institutional and conceptual space. (“Architecture From the Outside” 126)

Grosz's plastic text is moving and moved by internal and external connections and tensions. For Grosz, the space of the text affects the movement that the text can undertake. If we begin to think of texts as being results of the social, institutional and conceptual spaces that provide the conditions of their possibilities, we can see where and how space matters.



For Grosz, conceptualizing space has everything to do with how thought is framed or bounded. Her discussions of architecture take seriously the art's ability to manipulate and modify space and time. If texts are situated within specifically framed spaces, how are the space and time of those texts manipulated to fit those spaces? Without assuming that the space necessarily must inscribe certain meaning upon a text or thought, Grosz seeks to ask questions spurred by the notion that spatial differences can have effects. Here Grosz, like Howe, asserts a space of difference: this is an outside, a porous boundary, a changing space of the text.

Howe's assertions about space at the level of the shape a single letter takes upon the variant shape of a page and Grosz's conception of the architectures shaping texts provide a reading strategy for Dickinson's texts about the boundaries of homes, prisons, rooms and walls. The place that these two conceptualizations of space and texts could come together for an analysis of the Homestead, the Amherst, Massachusetts dwelling place of Emily and her family. The Homestead initially housed the manuscripts until they were sent to family and friends. Now, the Homestead is institutionally preserved itself as a museum where visitors can experience Dickinson's space, of course altered and normalized for the utility of moving large amounts of people through its hallways and rooms.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Here, also, Jacques Derrida's occasion for writing the speech that became the bound text *Archive Fever* comes to mind. The lecture was prepared for a conference organized by the Freud house and archives, and this detail was surely not missed by Derrida who refers to the house as keeper of memories and as archives in the introduction to his talk.

Jean McClure Mudge and Aifé Murray have each written books on Dickinson's relationship to the home that bound a majority of her life's experiences. Mudge's *Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home*, written in 1975, is an exploration of the psychological effects the home had upon the poet's work. Looking closely at the multiple poems and letters that reference walls, windows, doors, homes, houses, and apartments the book makes much of Dickinson's seeming conceptual and psychological obsession with space. Murray's text, written nearly 35 years later, focuses more upon the domestic and social space of the homestead and how the specific rooms Dickinson dwelled most in affected the work. Both Mudge and Murray's studies assert the importance of the enclosure the Homestead provided as well as the movement that did occur throughout.

These books importantly situate Dickinson's artistic creations *about* space within the space that created them. As an actual place that housed Dickinson *and* her work as well as a conceptual space whose theoretical weight produces interpretive effects, the Homestead looms large in Dickinson studies. Mudge and Murray utilize the centrality of the Homestead to Dickinson studies to situate their readings of how the boundaries of the home affected how and what Dickinson wrote. Poem 652 (or 456) begins with the line "A Prison gets to be a friend -" and goes on to describe a structure from "beam" to "plank" that embodies elements of both the "prison" and the "friend." As we will see, this oscillation and indecision around enclosure is a common theme in Dickinson's poetry, both thematically and materially. The poems themselves reflect indecision, semantically and materially. The semantic indecision is reflected in Mudge

and Murray's texts: each one seeming to side on one end of the prison or friend spectrum, with Mudge looking into the darker psychological sides of enclosure and Murray complicating the home's image with movement and interactions with other people.

In the chapter "The Image of Home," Mudge situates "A Prison gets to be a friend" as Dickinson's confessional musing with the notion that "(t)hough she (Dickinson) might feel imprisoned, she could prefer it so" (224). Mudge reads the poem as a literal meditation upon the state of Dickinson's dwelling in the home, and while it might in fact *be* such a poem, the chapter does not explore any other conceptual possibilities. Mudge's assumptions about the poem are constrained by the space of the house, and her understanding of Dickinson's seclusion within it, reflecting the constructed author figure produced by early scholarship. The readings that precede the "Prison" poem assert that the moods and contours of Dickinson's own psyche keep her imprisonment somewhat satisfactory. The book ends with a reading of this poem that cements this notion of a fraught "satisfaction" within the walls of the home despite its status as a prison. Mudge's psychological and biographical reading suggests the poem is describing Dickinson's literal satisfaction with her own life as it plays out within the confines of the Dickinson Homestead.

Mudge culminates her reading with the idea that "(t)he prison's reduced dimensions shrink expectation to acceptance and the prisoner's vision no longer searches up for release" (226). This astute reading posits that what the speaker of the

poem is allowed to see has effects upon what they might hope for in release. Once confined, the prisoner's imaginary no longer seeks anything beyond these "dimensions." While this reading is observant, attentive and theoretically interesting, for Mudge, the space of the poem is always the space of the Homestead and the speaker is always Dickinson. This reading seems to rely heavily upon the idea of Dickinson and the Homestead that was produced by early editors and editions, ignoring some of the relations and dynamics built between the space and the speaker of the poem (and leaves the interesting observations of space affecting thought behind). Another reading not bound by biographical information allows us to see a more flexible dynamic between speaker and space.

Mudge's project, as it is stated early in the first chapter, is to explore how the "house and the home language" have created what she calls a "spatial inscape" (225). For Mudge, Dickinson's exterior world has shaped her interior world in a very literal way. The space of the poet's domestic dwelling has formed the poems she created. While it cannot be argued that the home did not in many ways affect Dickinson's work and thinking, what Mudge does with her readings is essentially trap the work within the bounds of the home again. If the poet was held in the house against her will, imprisoned as the poem above suggests, Mudge's readings cement the distinction between inside and outside and render any movement within the home static. The house becomes too much of a symbol and its features begin to mingle with assumptions about Dickinson's biography that halt generative readings of her poems.

In Mudge's assessment, walls begin to seem impassible and we lose sight of the poet's mobility and interactions with the spatial, material and social features of the home.

Mudge is attentive to the space of the prison/friend as it is inhabited by the speaker in the first stanza. She makes note of the speaker's placement outside of the house and facing its anthropomorphized face, which seems to reflect a friendship. Mudge's attention to how space is being negotiated ends here, though, and her reading merely loops back to echo either what other poems have said or how the poem's fluctuations can be fixed in a singular state by the biography.

But, read without these assumptions, how does the poem enact a negotiation of the space and notion of a home? The poem begins "A Prison gets to be a friend —" and goes on to describe how it "gets" to be so. It seems to be in the space between the "face" (outside) of the structure and *our* (we have been implicated in this prison) own faces that the "Kinmanship" is expressed. The outside of the structure is "Ponderous," or thoughtful and the speaker finds this friendship by looking into its "narrow eyes." We have a speaker relating to an inanimate building, finding friendship in the space between its face and the speaker's.<sup>64</sup> In fact, a closer reading reveals that the space

---

<sup>64</sup> Webster's 1828 dictionary contains the following definition under the entry for "face": "The front of a thing; the forepart; the flat surface that presents itself first to view; as the face of a house. Ezekiel 41." The reference to Ezekiel doesn't make perfect sense as is often the case with Webster's cryptic biblical references. The passage in Ezekiel is an architectural description of a prophesized temple, complete with dimensions and wall decorations. The face of the structure is described as being congruent on either side, stating "the posts of the temple *were* squared, *and* the face of the sanctuary; the appearance *of the one* as the appearance *of the other*" (emphasis in the original, KJV). One cannot overlook Dickinson's use of the Websters dictionary, nor the Biblical resonances with certain words and concepts that we may not always have immediate access to.

between “expresses” a familial bond. The prison has made connections to family, friendship and, quite possibly, to the prophesy of a sacred space, yet to be built. The last line of the first stanza continues into stanza two, and speaks of the “narrow Eyes” of the prison (perhaps windows, which might indicate a break from the prison’s encapsulating boundaries) in which “we” (the speaker has again implicated us in her description of this prison, now we are in the prison as well) look “in gratitude” for the ordained “Beam.”

I would like to pause here to closely follow how space is being negotiated here early in the poem. The poem emphasizes the space between our faces and the prison’s, in fact it is within this space that the familial bond is expressed. The logic of the poem doesn’t seem to rely on whether or not we are inside or outside the structure, but instead emphasizes the space traversed and exactly how. A familial bond makes the prison a friend and crosses the space between our two faces. This bond renders a prison a friend and bridges the space that acts as a boundary between two things, one human and the other an object given human powers and thoughts. The structure, a man-made object undergoes a transition in that space, gaining qualities usually reserved for other humans.

The narrow eyes, if read as windows, demonstrate another negotiation of space, this time via the often opaque or cloudy quasi-transparency of 19<sup>th</sup> century glass. Windows for Dickinson often reflect a near-transition, either inside or outside of a space. Here the windows provide the “appointed Beam” to which we look with

gratitude. The poem supports the notion that this is a real beam, central support of the structure that is being referenced. But, it could also be read to support the notion that the windows themselves provide some kind of foundational nourishment. The poem reads, “And in it’s narrow Eyes –// We come to look with gratitude/ For the appointed Beam/ It deal us – stated as our food –/And hungered for – the same –” indicating that the beam as nourishment can be found in the eyes themselves. The ambiguity lies in the “it” which deals us food. The stabilizing and nourishing elements of the physical house-beam could be seen through the windows or the windows themselves could be allowing light in or out in a beam. While Webster’s 1828 dictionary does not contain an entry for beam that defines it as a structure of light, entries for beam-less and beamy do define the four-letter word as emitting rays of light. Either way, the poem is playing with traversals of inside/outside boundaries as well as the very concept of a structure that forms a boundary.

Boundaries are formed and crossed here in the form of the structure’s face, the eyes (perhaps windows) of the structure and the beam that could either be a strong piece of wood giving the structure its stability or a light emitted, providing a vision or a view. These boundaries are physical (the face, the beam as structural support, eyes as actual windows), metaphorical (eyes), and ephemeral (beam as configured light). In all instances the boundaries are not fixed, nor do they seem necessarily good at containing anything, if in the first stanza space is already traversed. If this prison-as-home is indeed a home, it is being described as a space to be negotiated, a space whose compartments

might provide a certain nourishment from the stability of the compartmentalization or via the liminal crossing that occurs at the windows.

The next stanza contains more movement, as we walk across the floors and hear the planks groan underneath our weight. The poem continues in this way, ambiguously describing this home that contains, but also nourishes and most importantly allows for movement within its changing boundaries. I would like to suggest that this poem provides an example of Dickinson's negotiation of bounded space that does not merely assign a strict role of imprisonment. What I have hoped to show so far is how the poem itself seems to explore and express the how movement can still exist within a bound environment, and how these moments of space traversal are even thought of as "nourishment." A fulfilling and productive conceptualization of this space as it is crossed and worked through seems to be the place where "A Prison gets to be a friend" indeed.

Aífe Murray's exploration of the domestic space of the Homestead arose from her interest in a particular member of the house staff, Margaret Maher. In *Maid as Muse*, Murray provides an analysis of the supposed effects the interior of the house may have had on Dickinson's work. Murray's text asks what kinds of effects might writing a poem in the kitchen have upon a poem? Add to that the sounds of dialect and accent bending and stretching the boundaries of language, the surfaces of re-used writing materials that inspire or change the meaning of the poem. While Mudge's assertion is that the poems' reflections upon the space of the home are in fact reflections upon



Dickinson's own mental space, thereby drawing the boundary of the house doubly around the poems, Murray looks at how the spaces themselves can be seen as having effects on the composition of the poems themselves. Murray takes Mudge's fascination with the psychic space the Homestead occupied and applies it to the physical and material spaces of the homestead as she imagines they might have been used by the poet. Murray's book still operates under the same agreement with the early editors that Dickinson was housebound and isolated from outside influence. But instead of the poet locked in an oppressive prison, Murray describes the relations Dickinson finds within her confines.

Thus, Murray's conceptualization of the Homestead helps complicate the notion of the home as prison. While Dickinson's gender, social standing and supposed psychological ailments may have restricted her movements beyond its bounds, in Murray's assertion it can become friendly prison that the above poem attempts to describe: one with rooms to avoid and rooms in which the mind may flourish. The house in Murray's estimation becomes differently bounded, one whose windows, doors, fences and walls reflect movement rather than containment and transition rather than stasis. Murray describes the movement of the poems in their material state as they were held in apron pockets, passed to the post, out doors and across fences, and into a cedar box that itself had crossed borders and seas.

Murray's book hinges upon an assertion about the kinds of temporal boundaries we place around Dickinson's work. Fits and starts in Dickinson's epistolary

and poetic production have been attributed to illness, the Civil War, romantic love and the lack thereof. What Murray traces is the relationship between the poet's production and her family's retention of domestic help. It seems that when the home wasn't properly equipped, the poet had much more household responsibilities and wrote less and when the family hired maids that her work flourished. Murray's findings go deeper and analyze the particular relationship between maid Margaret Maher (hired in 1869) and the poet's output. While the simple hiring of other maids might have given Dickinson less responsibility and more time, Murray asserts that the hiring of this specific maid produced certain effects upon the poet's work.

Murray writes,

It was with Margaret Maher in the household that Emily professed herself content—intellectually and literally. All the ingredients of a writing life existed in the brick mansion and its adjacent gardens. As soon as it was apparent that Margaret Maher was securely in the fold, Emily Dickinson wrote to mentor Thomas W. Higginson that she did not “cross [her] father's ground to any house or town” (JL 330). (*Maid*, 84).

Murray's study cements some of the boundaries around the Homestead, but without the severe implications on the poet's mental state and the subsequent limited readings we find in Mudge's argument. Murray's imagining of the sounds surrounding the poet's movements around the home complicates Mudge's understandings of the works that were produced within the walls that bound them. Murray writes,

The writing began to change immediately. Not just the grouping of the poems. There were more compositions on scraps of paper; the fugitive kind that most often collect on kitchen counters: shopping lists, food

wrappers, recipes, business flyers, letters opened and invitations received (85).

Murray's study argues that the space of the Homestead not only had effects upon the poet's work, but that others who occupied the space had similar effects. The poet's movement through the walls and windows of the home reflect an engagement with, not an estrangement from the world.

Murray sees the site of the kitchen as a space of great inspiration for the poet, writing, "Emily's muse appeared in the domestic, the hidden site of transformations, fired, alchemical. Seemingly lost in a reverie of making—bread, puddings, jelly, poems, she reignited the poetic spark" (85). For Murray, it was the fusing of the domestic activities within domestic spaces of the Homestead that allowed for Dickinson's spike in creativity. The poetic outpour was not as it was in the mid 1860's when the poet initially had duties lessened by a maid, but, as Murray reports, the innovations, combined with the impressive amount of work produced seems to have a connection to the poet's relationship to her work and her maid.

Murray's close attention to the bond between Dickinson and Maher also sheds new light on the storage of the manuscripts before Dickinson's death. Previous reports had the manuscripts kept in the same bureau that held her clothing. Murray's account digs up a deposition from 1897 that states Maher's trunk held the manuscripts. Like all Dickinson mythology, we cannot know, of course, if it is absolutely true. Queries to Harvard reveal no traces of the trunk, they only direct one to the famous bureau whose

reputation is built upon the oft repeated notion of its original archival position in early versions of Lavinia's discovery story.

Murray writes of the trunk, "the trunk, which had carried Margaret Maher's possessions from county Tipperary, to various Boltwood homes, and then to the Homestead, was the receptacle for Emily's written word" (*Maid*, 202). Murray's emphasis on the movement of the trunk seems especially important to re-imagining the context of Dickinson's materials. The manuscripts and their housing are connected in an intimate way to another. The preservation of the writing within a maid's trunk complicates not only the idea that Dickinson was alone, but also questions our assumptions about who she spent time with, complicating class lines and social norms. Framed thus, with a new mythology, how do the manuscripts negotiate space?

Again, the point in emphasizing an alternative mythology for the Dickinson materials is to complicate our reading of the poems to reflect an entrapped, lovelorn poet. As I have suggested above, how we read Dickinson is deeply connected to how we encounter her poems. Is their materiality emphasized, do we know if they were bound in fascicles, do we know if the handwriting is associated with early or late work? With the information that Murray's short chapter suggests, one can begin to frame some of these questions with the knowledge that the manuscripts themselves might have gained refuge in a space outside Dickinson's bedroom. Maher's assertion at the deposition that "She kept them in my trunk," places the agency in Dickinson's hands (Murray, *Maid* 201). SHE kept them in my trunk, almost seems a proud declaration. Maher gives

us further information in her deposition, that the manuscripts kept in the trunk were, “done up in small booklets, probably 12 or 14 tied together with a string” (201).

Murray makes meaning of this last bit, by assuming that Dickinson kept the more finished (as the bound fascicles have come to be thought of) poems in the trunk, reserving the bureau in her own room for poems still in process.<sup>65</sup>

I pause on the case of the trunk, not because I imagine it to be some new origin story for the manuscripts, but because it suggests *another* story that we might tell about the lives of these documents. It gives the documents other lives, moving around the Dickinson homestead, switching versions, penciled and penned onto and into different materials, perhaps mixing with items from Margaret Maher’s trunk, perhaps being read by Margaret Maher’s eyes.

The poem numbered 398 by Thomas Johnson and 554 by Ralph Franklin with the first line “I had not minded—Walls—” is tentatively dated 1862 and was bound in a fascicle that may have been found in Margaret Maher’s trunk. The poem as printed in the Thomas Johnson single volume of *Collected Poems* reads:

I had not minded—Walls—  
Were Universe—one Rock—  
And far I heard his silver Call  
The other side of the Block—

I’d tunnel—til my Groove  
Pushed sudden thro’ to his—  
Then my face take her Recompense—  
The looking in his Eyes—

---

<sup>65</sup> I would caution against this kind of assumption on Murray’s part as it overlooks the poems copied into fascicles at a later date, and generally makes a composition narrative where there might not be one.

But 'tis a single Hair  
A filament—a law—  
A Cobweb—wove in Adamant—  
A Battlement of Straw—

A limit like the Veil  
Unto the Lady's face—  
But every Mesh—a Citadel—  
And Dragons—in the Crease—  
(*Collected, 189*)

This is a poem interested in boundaries and restraint. It is itself reimagining space in the first stanza, changing the unbound and ethereal nature of the universe to “—one Rock—” in order to be negotiated by the speaker of the poem. It should also be noted initially that the poem is also doing something interesting with time. The speaker is looking back, reporting a time when they “had not” minded walls and offering a negotiation of the space, perhaps an escape, before they seem to come back to a limiting factor causing separation in the present. But are we to assume that this is a poem that rests with the assertion that the limit is the final word? What kind of limit is a veil, a mesh? The speaker likens it to citadel and dragon, but how are we as readers to understand the relationships between these seemingly conflicted metaphors?

One can understand why readings of poems like these have been understood by using Dickinson's scant biographical information as the primary analytical tool to decipher their contents. Reading this poem with Dickinson's agoraphobia and homebound nature in mind, we can take the poem to be a meditation on the state of fear and avoidance Dickinson as speaker might have felt within the surrounding walls.

It might in fact be *easy* to read this poem this way, as a meditation on enclosure, as it seems to comment on what we think we know about Dickinson's lived experience. But, as in "A Prison gets to be a friend," what happens when we nuance this reading, and slowly track what happens in the space that is being described?

There are a few things that make this poem impossible to read literally, and therefore ripe for close reading that moves slowly through the space it imagines traversing in an imaginary way. The poem begins "not mind(ing)" walls in the past, due to the speaker's abilities to tunnel under them. But, as noted above, the entire "Universe" must be transformed into "one Rock" before this traversal may occur. An unstable and unbounded space, if turned into a known surface (perhaps squared, as the poem goes on to mention "The other side the Block") can be tunneled, boundaries crossed or avoided. The poem seems to be suggesting that the very bounding of the universe, the formation into a block, provides the access the "sudden" push that brings the speaker into contact with the entity described by the "his." The transformation of the space, the binding of the universe into a block, causes the speaker to push under, until her tunnel meets the "he" of the poem. But, here, only the paths meet, perhaps eyes, and movement in the poem stops.

Another line is drawn here, thin "hair"-like "filament" which is then compared with "a law" and "a Cobweb—wove in Adamant," and finally "A Battlement—of Straw." After the space of the bounded universe, perhaps a room, has been negotiated and eyes and face meet, a boundary smaller than walls produces another "limit." As we have

seen above and will see below, this liminal space is evoked in Dickinson's references to windows and doors in other poems. This space which is both inside and outside seems to be seeking to describe a complicated philosophy where something both frees and contains. We often also see this space evoked when poems brush up against gender or socialized gender roles, for example when the soon to be wife wears the beard or becomes the czar.<sup>66</sup>

The last stanza states "A limit like the Veil/Unto the Lady's face/But every Mesh—a Citadel/ And Dragons—in the Crease—." The limit, which one can assume is being referred to here with the "tis" in the previous stanza, describes something substantially limiting without a substantial size. Filaments, veils and mesh all also provide a real, material limit and boundary that allow one to see what is beyond their thresholds. The evocation of the veil against the "Lady's face" is an instance of this. But it is also an instance of social boundaries and their limitations, if we take the veil in its most traditional context. The marriage veil is described here at the end of the poem to be something treacherous, with the mesh a protective wall or barrier that contains dragons in its creases. A marriage veil is traditionally worn to conceal the features of the bride (whether in ancient times to conceal her protectively or later on in arranged marriages). The poem seems to make the claim that such concealment, as a boundary that is both divisive and transparent, but has treacherous elements hidden within it. The "But" at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of the last stanza seems to suggest the

---

<sup>66</sup> In poems J199 "I'm wife now" and J1737 "Rearrange a Wife's Affections" Dickinson's play with gender and space is similar to what I describe happening here.



marriage veil's dangerous elements as anomalous and we can imagine the poem speaking to these features as exceptional. That the marriage veil is used here as a metaphor for limit links it to other poems that seem to highlight the drastic changes marriage brings to a life. Here, as a limit, it is also a space evoking the deadly adventure of crossing official boundaries, through cities guarded by dragons.

While the poem lands for a moment on the social boundaries carved out by the veil, it doesn't seem to be *about* this social convention. The poem itself slips through multiple conceptual boundaries as it seems to endeavor a description of something beyond the singular experience of the I, which disappears by the end of the poem anyhow. Like many Dickinson poems, the I seems to begin a narrative at the beginning of the poem and seems irrelevant by the end. Here, we begin with the I as a sort of anchor and by the end what seems important is not the I and its experiences within walls, but instead a more complicated understanding of walls, boundaries, laws and social conventions. As the poem reconfigures space in order to traverse it, it also revises its stance on limits multiple times. Initially, it "does not mind them," and tunnels beneath them. At the moment of contact—of almost formally crossing the boundary the space becomes impassible and the smallest limitation (gendered and socialized) becomes difficult to pass. We are not given resolution as to whether or not it is interminably impassible. We only know that after the large space has been crossed, mere filaments can become daunting.

In my reading, as the I drops out, so does the specificity of experience the poem seeks to express. It begins with a specific statement, is followed by a transformation and traversal of space, and then remarks upon the space limitations and boundaries. These boundaries are expressed via metaphors and allusions of the law, bodily materials, spiderwebs and social conventions. The poem isn't about any of these things, but seems to be expressing something about movement and constraint, space and limitations through them. The poem itself can be read as a movement, or perhaps one can move their way through the poem in order to gain some understanding of what it is doing. As I will argue in later chapters, perhaps the printed page is not the correct space for reading these texts that seem to argue with boundaries like margins, bookboards and genres.

In "The Way I read a Letter's—this—" the poem describes the movement of a reader within a locked room. Here constraint is performed on the part of the reader, the I who is preparing to read a letter.<sup>67</sup> Again, it seems prison is a friend, walls aren't minded and again walls and prison are negotiated and maneuvered—but only to a certain point. This poem moves in and out of boundaries in a manner similar to the previous poems discussed, but it also provides a conceptualization of the I in the space as it takes up room.

Johnson prints the poem as 636:

The Way I read a Letter's—this—  
'Tis first—I lock the Door—  
And push it with my fingers—next—  
For transport it be sure—

And then I go the furthest off  
To counteract a knock—  
Then draw my little Letter forth  
And slowly pick the lock—

Then—glancing narrow, at the Wall  
And narrow at the floor  
For firm Conviction of a Mouse  
Not exorcised before—

Peruse how infinite I am  
To no one that You—know—  
And sigh for lack of Heaven—but not  
The Heaven God bestow—  
(*Collected*, 315)

The poem begins with what might seem like a common scene of privacy with a letter. The first two lines describe creating this scene of locking the door with the letter and the speaker of the poem inside. The next two lines are a bit more vexing. The “it” in the third line could be referring to the letter or the door, giving different meanings to the last line of the stanza. Is the door’s locked state being tested here? Where is the letter being pushed, and where is this sure transport headed and for whom? The poem does not give us clear answers to these questions. It merely places us, the readers, in a locked room with a letter and the sense of some kind of movement, although we are not sure what is being moved or to where.

The next stanza moves the speaker far from the door, “the furthest off/To counteract a knock—” perhaps providing the best sense of privacy. The specificity of the use of space in the room again complicates the simple myth of Dickinson’s shy withdrawal. There seems to be a sense of pleasure in the details of this preparation as it is described here. The retreat is described slowly and the multiple boundaries drawn around the scene as it is set up by the speaker. The door is locked, the speaker moves as far from the knock as s/he can and, finally the letter is opened. The letter is opened “slowly,” and again privacy is portrayed by a sense of security enabled by a lock. The reader gets the sense that they are against a wall (the “furthest off” from the door), and savoring the opening of a letter.

This process slows considerably more here. The letter is in hand, ready to be read when the speaker pauses and takes stock of their surroundings. These “narrow” looks are repeated to the wall and floor and seem to heighten the feeling of a small space. The small space is examined, we learn in the third and fourth lines of this stanza, for a mouse the speaker was seemingly convinced to be there before. A sense of paranoia invades the space, made smaller by the locked door, then the narrow looks and now the feeling at the end of the stanza that perhaps we are not alone.

Whether this poem is a reflection of Emily Dickinson’s feelings about her home or sense of privacy could be a tempting inquiry to pursue. But I would like to pause here to remind the reader what kinds of questions we are asking this poem. We are interested in how the poem works through space. We want to look at places where

the poem seems to avow and resist containment, perhaps at times redefining containment and its opposite. We are looking at how the poem complicates the notions of fixity and boundaries, a state we see reflected by the materials in their manuscript forms as well as their archival history.

This poem describes a scene of reading, a space of engagement with a text. The space seems to get smaller as we move through the poem and the sense of paranoia sets in. But then we come to the first line of the last stanza where restraint and enclosure is challenged. The speaker addresses the reader, asking them to “Peruse” their infinity. Webster’s Dictionary of 1828 tells us that perusal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a careful and thorough view. This speaker, after explaining the careful solitude needed to open a letter, and the fear of being intruded upon, then asks the reader to take a long look at their infinity. The space is made small and at the end of the poem the speaker fills it up, perhaps exceeding it. This infinite quality is not observed by “anyone You (the reader) know,” and the reader gets the feeling again that they are getting a view into an intimate world not accessible to anyone else, similar to the feeling the poem slowly reveals about reading a letter. The poem’s last two lines put a cap on this infinity, restraining the space that was just opened up, stating “And sigh for lack of Heaven—but not/ the Heaven God bestow.” Heaven has its limitations at the end of this poem, and looking back, we can see the ebb and flow of possibility, infinity, and space.

In a poem that shifts from the scene of reading to the scene of writing, we are puzzled again by the use of space once we pay attention to how it is being traversed. In

the poem known as number 448 with the first line “This was a Poet—It is That,” the conditions of possibility for a poet are explained. Of course, we are not given a list, and the way poem unfolds follows a pattern of excess and limitation, revelation and concealment, that we have seen in other poems. The poem reads:

This was a Poet—It is That  
Distills amazing sense  
From ordinary Meanings—  
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species  
That perished by the Door—  
We wonder was it not Ourselves  
Arrested it—before—

Of Pictures, the Discloser—  
The Poet—is it He—  
Entitles Us—by Contrast—  
To ceaseless Poverty—

Of Portion—so unconscious—  
The Robbing—could not harm—  
Himself—to Him—a Fortune—  
Exterior—to Time—

This poem uses spatial metaphors to discuss how a poet makes meanings from senses or associations. Notions of enclosure and release vacillate throughout its stanzas, evoking ideas of immensity, arrest, covering and revealing, robbery and finally, the boundaries of time. The first line begins in the past, declaring, “This was a Poet” before the dash. After the dash, we are transported to the present where “It is That/Distills amazing sense/From ordinary meanings.” There is no explanation for this time shift, nor any stylistic echo throughout the rest of the poem for the reader to grasp

onto as some kind of form. Transported into the present, the poet, and her work transcends time as it the first line is read. This first stanza initially *seems* simple as it dances around time. It sends a message that the poet finds meaning in dailyness, and the immensity of the smell of roses.<sup>68</sup>

In a more complicated reading, however, the poet in the first stanza is distilling the ordinary from the “immensity” of “attar,” making meaning, it seems, from something the speaker is aware of as occurring naturally. The distillation process would seem to be one of making something large, small, or, similarly, the making of something complicated, complex. Whether the poet is making “sense” in terms of a logical assessment, or, perhaps a more bodily connection or reaction to these “meanings” remains indeterminate. The first stanza does recount the poet *making* some kind of meaning from the immensity of the ordinary.

The second stanza continues to describe the role of the poet and relays a feeling of anxiety around the activity of capturing the immensity of anything, wondering if it is the action of “ourselves” that “arrested” the familiar species that “perished.” The reader seems to be implicated in the forcing of boundaries and restraint here, *we* wonder if we have caused the roses to perish, after this process of distillation or meaning making. The roses, if we are to take the ending of the first stanza into the beginning of the first, exist at a boundary zone as well, where they

---

<sup>68</sup> Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines “attar” as the essence of roses.

perished at “the door.” On the cusp, at the edge and under perhaps too much pressure to make meaning, to mean, the essence, once immense, is arrested.

In this reading, I am forced to wonder, is this poem talking about reading poems? As I read this poem for meaning, I am actively stomping its natural boundaries of syntax and grammar in order to “distill” its amazing sense? Whose sense is amazing, the poem’s or mine, I wonder, as I fill in the cracks of its fragmentary structures to make the second stanza read like it makes sense. We’ve already changed tenses in the first stanza, and the second brings with it a disconnected “from” which is never resolved with any place and a mysterious “we” and “ourselves.” By not addressing these strange elements of the poem, am I any better than the editors I critique for putting the poem together in print in the first place? How *do* you read a poem like this?

The difficulty of the Dickinson poem causes the reader to overlook many elements when she wants to make meaning of the text. As the previous chapter argued, overlooking the material features of the manuscripts closes off an element of the work. In the earlier parts of this chapter, I argued that certain biographical concerns and scholarly biases also restrain our readings of the works. Reading this poem in print, I am forced to stumble over its many syntactically confusing connections in order to get to a meaning that makes any kind of sense. If Dickinson’s poems need their material



texts and contexts to be read, perhaps they also need new ways of being read in order to do justice to their material features.<sup>69</sup>

The reading of this particular poem could continue, I can keep reading down the page, making connections between the spatial metaphors and notions of enclosure when making meaning, perhaps surmising that the poem reflects an anxiety around using language to capture the natural world. But would I be attending to all the features of the text? I am already ignoring the manuscript copy, and the poem that rests on the verso. I am overlooking the dashes, strange capitalization and reading the poem in translation into a certain kind of creation. I am using the same reading process to read this poem that I would use for a poem that was written for print, and not translated out of a form 50 years after the poet died.

At the end of this chapter, I wonder what kinds of reading strategies can tackle the “immensity” of these poems’ rebellious features. The archive has “distilled” their “amazing sense” into literary creations we think we have the tools to unravel. But what if more complicated reading strategies are required? What would a reading practice

---

<sup>69</sup> Katie King writes in the coda to her unpublished dissertation on the construction of the Emily Dickinson poems that her contribution to Dickinson scholarship provides a critique of “the hegemonic practices of close reading” (220). While it is not the project of this dissertation to take up the politics of close reading, I do agree that King’s assertions that the poet and her work has been created by the “institutional constructions of ‘poems’ through textual editing, commercial and academic” and that continuing a reading strategy meant to make meaning of poems who adhere to these kinds of construction might miss the point of the work we are reading (220). King points to the constructed nature of the work, a notion that Virginia Jackson takes up more than twenty years later in *Dickinson’s Misery* when she asks us to look at how the poems have been read in the lyric tradition. I was also alerted to the problems in reading these works as poems when my advisor, Carla Freccero asked me, quite candidly, if these were indeed poems we were looking at. I am fairly certain that after ten years of Dickinson scholarship, I am not sure half the time what these literary constructions are. While King and Jackson do not give us any alternatives to close reading or lyric reading, the third chapter of this project looks to reading the works through other creative responses to Dickinson’s work as another way of making meaning of the Dickinson texts.

look like that did not fill in the gaps of indeterminacy? Does a poem need to make sense? In the next chapter, I take up creative responses to Dickinson's work that take the forms of films, collages and biographies made from scraps of newspaper and journal entries. Inspired by montage film and notions of material preservations of history, figures like Jay Leyda and Joseph Cornell come to the Dickinson texts with creative responses that help us read the texts without filling in biographical or syntactic gaps.

### Chapter Three: The Poetics of the Archive at Play

<p>envelope  <del>the Fairytale Home I once knew          (to Miss Jimmie Dickinson)</del>  <del>The Mushroom is the best          (yellow - from Adams? Or?)</del>  <del>the spray sounds of the wind          (cream - to Mrs Emily Dickinson) ←?</del>  <del>the vastest earthly day          (large flap - sealed)</del>  <del>The way Hope builds his House          (to Mr E. V. &amp; family - stop missing)</del>  <del>[There is no Frigate] - quadrille          (from Worcester - Currier?)</del>  <del>There's the Battle of Burgoyne          (from Concord - Leo Kibrowski) ←</del>  <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> <p>quadrille              The last of Summer is a time              The Pile of Years              The Road was lit with Moon &amp; Star</p> </div>  <del>Through what transports of Patience          (OPE to ED) ←</del>  <del>tried always &amp; condemned by thee          It was later when the summer          (addressing with a clipping from)</del> </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>blue-ruled</u></p> <p>Tell as a Marksman (r-1)          That odd old man is dead          (r-face, emb; medallion?)          That short-potential stir          (omb; Crystal Palace)          The Bible is an untold Volume          (omb; WARSAW)          addressed: Vinie (by?)          The Balcony is gone (cream)          (omb; CONGRESS)          The Clock strikes one          (omb; CONGRESS)          The Clower's simple Fame          The Face in swanescence          The Fascinating Child that Mr          The Goutier was a pined          a) note from WAD          b) omb: twist he          add. by LND to Mr Vincon          The Jay his constant has struck          The Life that first too bright          The Lightning is a Ye Cow for          The lilac is an ancient stem          The most triumphant Bird          the murmuring of Bees          (11...)</p>
---	--

Figure 16: Section of Jay Leyda's notes in the Dickinson Archive at Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

“Ragpicker and poet: both are concerned with refuse.” (Walter Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” 48)

“I’m not saying there is any correct way to clear this entangled primal paper forest. Maybe this is her triumph. She has taken her secret to the grave and will not give up the ghost” (Susan Howe, *Paris Review* interview, 160).

“A truly devious and enlightening reading must therefore attend to the *mystery of the encounter between poems, letters and fragments*” (Marta Werner “Most Arrows,” 54)

“Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman were all using montage before it was a word for a working method. Their writing practice (varied though it was) involved comparing and *linking* fragments or shots, selecting fragments for scenes, reducing multitudes (chapters or stanzas) and shots (lines and single words) to correlate with one another, constantly interweaving traces of the past to overcome restrictions of temporal framing” Susan Howe (“Sorting Facts or Nineteen Ways at Looking at Marker,” 331)

“*Delight Becomes Pictorial*”

Most often recounted in the footnotes of major studies of Dickinson, Jay Leyda’s study of the material features of the manuscripts produced suggestions for alternative organizations. Leyda also authored a long-out-of-print and difficult to access biography made up of fragmentary texts.<sup>70</sup> After chapter two’s analysis of the editing and publishing efforts that produced singular poems and narrative biographies, I turn now to Leyda’s careful and artful treatment of the texts, which could (and should) produce an entire book project in itself. This chapter will trace Leyda’s poetics of the archive through a cluster of multimedia and interdisciplinary responses that move the

---

<sup>70</sup> For example, Leyda is mentioned only twice in the *Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* compared to the numerous entries for Higginson, Johnson and despite writing a two-volume biography and working with the manuscripts in the archive.

reader beyond the confines of the poem and the book. Read through these projects, Leyda's contributions to theories about author and the archive are revealed, and new ways of reading and responding to Dickinson's poems are made available.<sup>71</sup>

The photograph above captures Leyda's sorting of Dickinson's writing by first line and the materials each piece is written upon. This detail of a larger collection of notes housed in the Amherst College special collections recontextualizes manuscripts that were initially sorted into categories like "love," or "nature" in the early editions discussed in the last chapter. Leyda's studies in the archive look instead to the structures such as envelopes, quadrille ruled paper, and blue ruled paper that hold the poems. Earlier scholars had overlooked these features in favor of constructing a story of the poet and her poetry. But Leyda's scholarship is an inspiration to scholars to pay

---

<sup>71</sup> In an attempt to understand the current organization of the Dickinson archive, I went to the archives in Amherst to see Leyda's notes, and to look at Mabel Loomis Todd's journals. Todd's journals revealed her rating system and ordering of the poems for publication. Leyda's notes in the Amherst collection revealed an organizational strategy that has not resulted in a publication, nor a thorough study. His materials at the Beinecke told me a little about his work with Melville, but the Tamiment Labor Archives at NYU revealed unpublished drafts of Leyda's introduction to *The Years and Hours*, unpublished letters between he and Joseph Cornell and numerous other filmmakers, poets and writers. Perhaps the most astounding letter I found was from Walter Benjamin in 1937, requesting Leyda's assistance in publishing "Art in the age of its capacity of technical reproduction" in English. I left these archives understanding less about how Dickinson's archive was organized, but more and more interested in connections that are made in these inaccessible places. Leyda's notes suggesting new organizations of the manuscripts are kept in Amherst, separate from his writing about film, and his collection of letters that are stored in New York. These materials give the Dickinson scholar a new way to think about how an edition of the work might be structured, but like the manuscripts themselves, they are inaccessible. You have to already wonder how the work was organized in order to look to the materials that help you think through new ways of theorizing their structure. The trip to these archives reminded me yet again of the troubles with archives and access—and that inaccessible materials encourage readers to only consider what is accessible. While I, as a researcher, with academic affiliation can go and look at these materials, they are not readily available to a reader who is just getting acquainted with Dickinson's work. She might not even read the Leyda book, because it has been out of print for many years. Until a few months ago, the manuscripts were similarly inaccessible. Digital archives (which I attend to in more detail in the conclusion) have been launched in the last year.

attention to the fragmented details of the Dickinson archive, in favor of what I call a dynamic reading practice.

Leyda wrote in the *New Republic* magazine that “Emily Dickinson is a conspicuous victim of a scholastic tendency to freeze our concepts of a writer’s life, perhaps because a frozen concept is easier to grasp, and to pass on, than those more slippery and troublesome non-objects known as artists,” echoing the concerns in my last chapter (“Late Thaw of a Frozen Image” 22).<sup>72</sup> By 1955 when he is writing this essay, Leyda had already been awarded a renewal on his Guggenheim fellowship for research on a Dickinson biography.<sup>73</sup> Leyda’s work with archives had begun in the 1930’s in Russia where he documented the production of a failed Sergei Eisenstein film in diaries and photographs.<sup>74</sup> His earliest work as an archivist, filmmaker, and creative biographer draws on Eisenstein’s idea of montage.<sup>75</sup> Eisenstein’s principle idea

---

<sup>72</sup> Leyda writes this the same year Johnson’s important variorum and biography to be published. Leyda affiliates them with the institution publishing them and calls them “Harvard publications.” He is hopeful that they don’t repeat the mistakes of early editors.

<sup>73</sup> *October* magazine devoted an issue to Leyda in 1979 (v. 11), which contains a timeline of his scholarly activities. All references to his biography come from this timeline. Scholarship on Leyda, despite his many accomplishments and contributions to numerous fields of study, is scant; this issue of *October* is the only instance of a single volume devoted to his work.

<sup>74</sup> Upon his return from Russia, Leyda became assistant curator of the NYMOMA’s new Film Department in 1936, where he established and assembled a vast film archive. Since Leyda did not earn a degree, it can be assumed that his work with this archive earned him access to Herman Melville’s materials ten years later, which would result in the two-volume collage biography *The Melville Log*. Leyda would also work establish a film archive in China in the 1959.

<sup>75</sup> Leyda’s work with biography can be seen in his works on Melville and Dickinson, as well as in a chapter devoted to American literary biographer Leon Howard in *Themes and Directions in American Literature*. This volume, produced by students and enthusiasts of the scholar on the occasion of his birthday, consists of response chapters from each contributor. Leyda’s chapter, “A House to be Born In: an essay in biography” consists of italicized lines describing the Dickinson Homestead (perhaps appropriated from a real estate advertisement) and Leyda’s own poetry about the house and the male inhabitants (namely Dickinson’s father, Edward). As an essay on biography, it highlights the fragmentary and creative response in the face of official history or account. It also seems interested in the materiality of the home, as it traces the real boundaries of the house and plot of land it sits upon.

of the dynamic that “montage is conflict” can be seen in Leyda’s desire in the *New Republic* for an understanding of Dickinson’s writing that is unfrozen and freed from the confines of the assumptions of early editors and editions.<sup>76</sup>

Before coming to work with the Dickinson materials, Leyda was a translator of Eisenstein’s pioneering theories of montage in the 1940’s, after a decade of studying and assisting the filmmaker in the Soviet Union. His interest in the idea of the “dynamic” can be traced to his initial attraction to Eisenstein’s theories that led him to Russia to attend the only film school in the world in 1933.<sup>77</sup> Leyda’s first film, *A Bronx Morning*, was made in 1931 with the general principal of montage where images are layered atop one another in order to create an accumulative effect of “Bronx-ness” on the viewer. According to Eisenstein, the effects of montage have everything to do with the how the images are placed together—and the narrative of *A Bronx Morning* is assembled from shots taken from different places in the neighborhood at different times of the day. The feeling of the neighborhood is presented as a sum of its divergent parts.

---

<sup>76</sup> See Eisenstein “Collision of Ideas,” 34.

<sup>77</sup> It is worth noting here that before Leyda traveled to Russia, he worked with experimental filmmaker Ralph Steiner and photographer Walker Evans. His circles in New York in 1930-31 included William Steiglitz and the New York Workers’ Film and Photo League—demonstrating the young Leyda’s interests in both the high aesthetics of Modernism as well as an emergent leftist politics. It would be this combination, evidenced in his first short film *A Bronx Morning*, which would win him favor in Eisenstein’s eyes and access to important film projects in Russia. *A Bronx Morning* was financed by the sale of a folk art figurine of abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher (which he had found in a Dayton, OH junk shop) to the Abby Rockefeller Folk Art Museum—a fortuitous result of Leyda’s everlasting appreciation and intuition for important details among discarded things (although film scholar David Stirk reads this turn of events as just chance in his chapter on Leyda in *Eisenstein Rediscovered*).

Eisenstein lays out his poetics of montage in “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” translated by Leyda.<sup>78</sup> There are a few crucial sections of this text that I see as having a direct effect on Leyda’s own revolutionary poetics of the archive, namely the places in Eisenstein’s aesthetic theory that focus on the playful organization and representation of material things. Eisenstein begins his essay with a quote from Goethe, “in nature we never see anything isolated, but everything is in connection with something else which is before it, beside it, under it, and over it” (“Dialectic” 45). The epigraph serves as an integral part of Eisenstein’s argument, as he folds it immediately into his presentation of dialectical thinking and poetics, finishing the first page of the essay with the statement, “synthesis—arising from the opposition between thesis and antithesis. A dynamic comprehension of things is also basic to the same degree, for correct understanding of art and of all art-forms. In the realm of art this dialectic principle of dynamics is embodied in CONFLICT” (46).<sup>79</sup> A poetics of conflict in Eisenstein’s films manifests itself in the juxtaposition of images, the philosophy of which he works out in great detail according to rhythms of affective and logical understanding experienced by the audience. For him, montage is the delicate weave of conflicting images, not so much opposite or contrasting necessarily, but conflicting in collision and interaction. He writes later in the essay, “the logic of organic form, vs. the

---

<sup>78</sup> This essay was translated by Leyda around the same time he was awarded the Guggenheim for the Dickinson project, but originally written in 1929.

<sup>79</sup> “CONFLICT” in the essay is centered in the middle of the page on the next line, Leyda and Eisenstein clearly using the space of the page for emphasis.



logic of rational form yields, in collision, the dialectic of art-form. The interaction of the two produces and determines Dynamism” (46).<sup>80</sup>

Eisenstein’s theory of colliding forms is relevant to this project’s discussion of the Dickinson manuscripts interacting with the forms of preservation in the archive and in the book—as the forms of each collide and efface elements of the other. A reading method and scholarship that would make these collisions, effacements, and struggles that take place between the “rational form” of the archive and the “organic form” of Dickinson’s work. I am thinking here about the poems with multiple variants or with variant words within, the collisions with page space, line break, and other elements not easily conveyed by normative printing or archiving practices.

Leyda’s scholarly strategies, as informed by Eisenstein’s theories, allow us to see Dickinson’s writing as always moving between these forms. His archival methodologies place it into categories that are not for the purpose of preparing it for publication in the traditional sense.<sup>81</sup> His biographies are interested in the poet’s life, but, like his lists in the archive, the structure of the biography doesn’t allow for any patterns to be foisted upon the work that do not already exist. He does not read a poem in order to read the poet’s life, and he in fact does not try to read her life or poems at all. His

---

<sup>80</sup> Again the use of page space for emphasis occurs here with the centered phrase “the dialectic of the art-form.”

<sup>81</sup> Following Leyda’s scholarship into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we do see his efforts beautifully captured by Marta Werner’s and Jen Bervin’s recent publication *Emily Dickinson’s Gorgeous Nothings* which is an edition of the works written on envelopes. Of *Nothings*, Susan Howe writes in the introduction that “these writings are suggestive, not static,” an idea that Leyda would have been excited about inspiring in new scholarship (7). Werner was a student at SUNY Buffalo and most certainly followed Howe’s favoring of the Leyda text as foundational reading for any Dickinson scholar, despite the fact it doesn’t give you much in the way of factual understandings of the poet or her work.

scholarship is in the presentation of the materials, with an emphasis on the information their combined details can provide about the immensity and innovation inherent in the unfinished Dickinson project.

Leyda's studies produced over one hundred pages of notes, which document the seemingly mundane features of the manuscripts. Scholars such as Susan Howe and Martha Nell Smith speak in constant appreciation of his contributions, but few scholars have taken his research much further.<sup>82</sup> I am curious how Leyda's attention to these details can open up new conversations around Dickinson's compositions. Instead of embracing the logic behind the textual editor that assumes a perfectly edited poem is the most legible, what happens if we look more closely at the imperfect details and histories of these fragmented texts?

*"The Truth"*

In 1960 Leyda published his two-volume "biography" of Emily Dickinson titled *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*. This non-normative biography is made up of "the strangest possible variety of juxtaposed documents, transcribed and extracted from manuscript and printed sources, ordered and dominated by a single chronology, and presented with a single aim: to get at the truth of Emily Dickinson" (Leyda's introduction, *Hours*, xix). Leyda's path to the "truth" is through "strange juxtapositions" produce a biography out of letters and newspaper articles, scraps of

---

<sup>82</sup> Marta Werner is one scholar whose work owes much of its methodology to Leyda's work.

paper much like the Dickinson literary archive itself. Leyda's method in creating what I call "collage biographies" saw a beginning with the co-authored *The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modest Petrovich Musorgsky in Letters and Documents* in 1947. Leyda's second collage biography, *The Melville Log*, was published in 1951 as a birthday present for Eisenstein. Melville's biography and late writings are as shrouded in mystery as Dickinson's, and we can see Leyda applying this technique of fragmentary accumulation as a truthful rendering of that mystery.

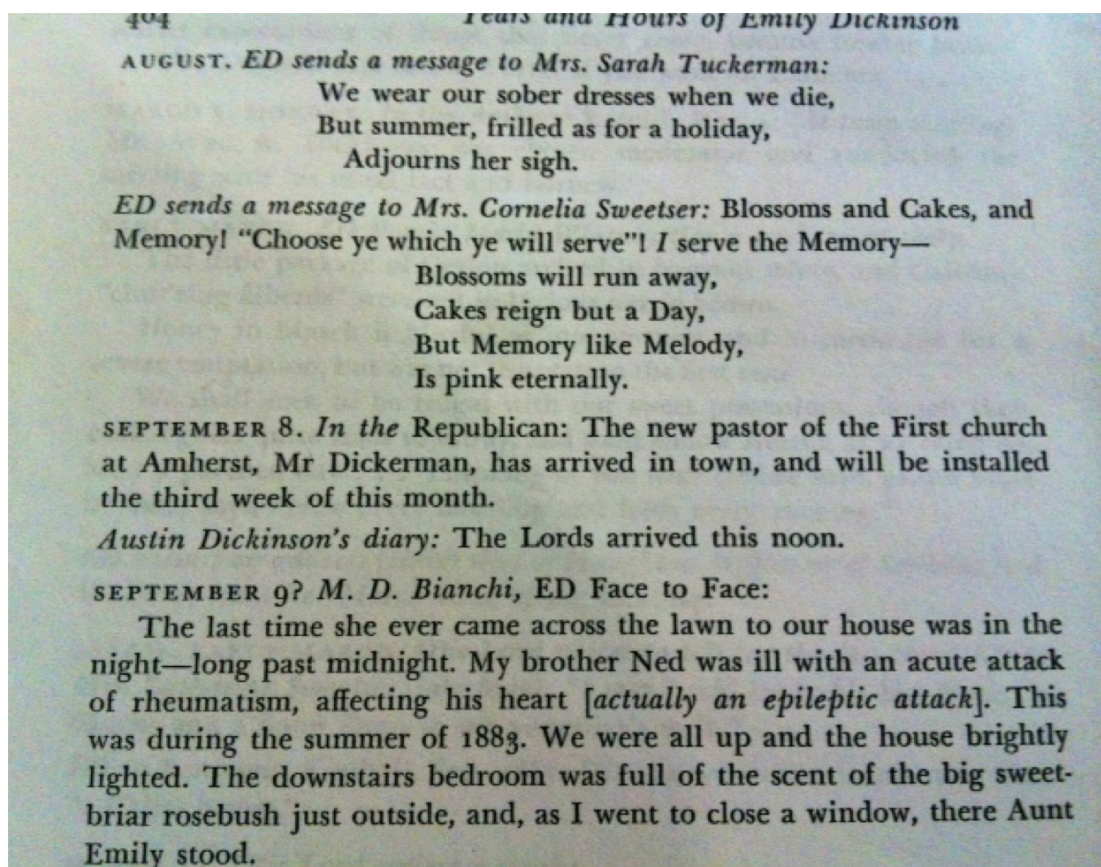


Figure 17: From *Years and Hours*.<sup>83</sup>

Leyda's work with the Dickinson archive can be seen most clearly in this "biography." *The Years and Hours* begins with a thorough chronology of the Dickinson family and follows with a section detailing the lives of friends, family and correspondents of the famous recluse. Immediately one realizes the dailyness of Dickinson's contact with the rest of the world, either through letters, family associations, or friendship. In one scholarly move, Leyda disassembles the notion that

---

<sup>83</sup> The bracketed commentary in the September 9 passage is Leyda the passages written by different family members easier to navigate. Ned's affliction with epilepsy was a disorder that was kept from him by his family. It seems that his sister was unaware of his disease, and Leyda clarifies this in the brackets. Other passages speak to Ned's epilepsy, and it seems here that Leyda is making the complicated family dynamics around his ailments as clear as possible, without delving into the drama and gossip that normally accompanies the stories.

Dickinson was an isolated prisoner. Her world was made up of a variety of connections to the outside world, connections she made most markedly with her language and writing. In his introduction, Leyda writes, “she was no more and no less alone than many another artist, no more or no less isolated, or insulated from the world,” shifting our view of the poet from shuttered and static to dynamic and interactive (*Days*, xx).

In the body of the biography, Leyda enacts a fusion of his scholarly poetics with those he has observed in Dickinson’s writing. Although he does not directly reference Eisenstein in his discussion of Dickinson, he does remark in his introduction on the “mosaics of her oblique quotations, each jagged color fragment lightly contributing to her broad design” (*Days*, xxii).<sup>84</sup> Leyda’s observations take on Eisenstein’s nomenclature of filmic montage to assert the creative possibilities of the fragmented Dickinson archive.<sup>85</sup> For Leyda, as for Eisenstein, the accretion of fragmentary materials and the gaps that come between them (for Eisenstein the enjambment in poetry was

---

<sup>84</sup> This chapter pays close attention to Leyda’s own writing about the Dickinson materials he puts together in his biography—and all of this takes place in his short introduction. As the above image demonstrates, the body of the biography is made up of letters, newspaper articles and excerpts from earlier scholar’s books. With each entry organized around a single date, reading the book is much like looking at an old planner—and an admittedly strange experience. It is incredibly useful when one is looking for context around a letter, or if one wants a broad range specific cultural references with which to decipher some of Dickinson’s more obscure word choices and ideas. It also places the work within the context of the everyday goings on of domestic Amherst life. A digital project that could make this text accessible and dynamic (with links and tags) is much needed in order for this text to be utilized more thoroughly.

<sup>85</sup> Both Eisenstein and Leyda seem excited by an idea of color as particularity, variation, and energy. Eisenstein writes, “We are heirs of the whole incredible fund of past human culture. In its *hues*, in its stylistic peculiarities, in its genres, and simply in certain of its features, our art embraces all the experience which for the pre-synthetic stage of the history of arts appeared as leading banners for whole epochs, for whole styles, for whole stages of art ideology. And art ideas that were once shaped on the battlefields of changing styles now appear as the means for variations and hues within the *unity of our style* of Socialist realism. Apart from this all that is new and unprecedented in it, its particular works can catch fire from those *hues* that were once obligatory and then were doomed to be the sole possible and exhausted *colours*.” (“More Thoughts on Structure,” 96 trans. Jay Leyda)

instrumental in his thinking about the gaps of a montage) become the makers of meaning, not things that need to be explained away or filled in. Reading the Dickinson archive (biographical as well as literary) becomes an exercise in montage, the artful act of reading to make meaning of juxtapositions and gaps, “each jagged color fragment lightly contributing to her broad design.”

If the value of Leyda’s biography can be found in the way it inspires scholars to think about how Dickinson’s work did circulate, relate, and resonate with the world outside of her room, house and town, then Leyda’s archival work can be seen as doing something similar. Leyda’s lists and catalogs of poems and the paper they were written upon seems to want to make connections across texts and, more specifically, across the materials the texts were written with and upon. Leyda does not seek to connect Dickinson to the world of Amherst and to the world in general, but also to make new connections in Dickinson studies, a place he sees as deficient in its treatment of the poet. Leyda writes of this deficiency, “(t)here is little need to expand on the harm done to Emily Dickinson by the sentimental picture of ‘our Emily’ unfortunately so tenacious in the popular imagination” (*Days*, xx). Bringing materials together that have resonance with the work Dickinson produced, rather than mere connections to rumor or misreadings of poems or letters, Leyda is looking to these materials to free Dickinson from the prison of what he calls the “dark ways—the legends, gossip, the pretty or pathetic tales obscuring the poet and the poems” (xx). Both the archival work *and* the biography seek to release the Dickinson archive from these obfuscations.

Leyda writes in *Years*, “(a) major device of Emily Dickinson’s writing, both in her poems and in her letters, was what might be called the ‘omitted center’” (xxi). The chaos of the Dickinson archive seems similarly driven by this device, in the way we’ve come to understand its operations in her time (how letters and poems were written and saved) as well as after her death (Mabel Loomis Todd’s “basket collections” and rating systems, Todd and Higginson’s editing and titling of poems, Johnson’s edition of the letters). Without a map, a key, or other decoding device, we can see that this poet’s archive has been produced and revised with shifting centers. Taking Leyda’s cue in admitting the lack of center within the Dickinson corpus allows for struggle, chaos, juxtaposition, boundary building and transgression, and the binding and unbinding of books to make up the rhythm of composition.

In the place of the omitted center, Leyda shifts his focus to the seemingly minor details at the fringes of Dickinson studies. Rather than seeking out secret lovers, he deciphers and records watermarks in his work for the archive, or scours newspaper’s for his biography. He writes of this method, “(i)f there is contradiction in applying such a rag-picking method to a writer who ‘grapples with immensities and terrors,’ I think it can be a stimulating contradiction,” echoing Eisenstein’s celebration of the generative dynamics of conflict.

Leyda comes to the biography project with a stance similar to that which inspired him as the archivist at Amherst. A silent force whose sorting hand thinks only toward “the truth,” Leyda’s self-appointed role is that of the organizer, the sorter, the

curator of materials having to do with Dickinson. Leyda's intentions and methods have not been set down in lengthy introductions such as those of Ralph Franklin or Thomas Johnson. We know he works toward a truth built by paper fragments and that this truth cannot be contained by any one structure. But, luckily, we are not told what this truth is supposed to suggest about Dickinson, nor what we as readers are to take away about that truth. In the section below, I turn to a group of letters known as the Lord Letters by early Dickinson scholars. Written about in early volumes hoping to pin some sense of biography upon the mysterious works and assign an unrequited love to Dickinson's strange writing, their existence as letters to Judge Otis Lord was cemented fully by the Thomas Johnson edition of 1958. Leyda's work in the archive at Amherst and the biography reveal that the often suspected object of Dickinson's affections was just another person with whom Dickinson exchanged letters. When placed among the many letters, manuscript scraps, and other fragmentary information compiled about the poet, we see that the letters to Otis Lord are not only cobbled together for publication, but also only one of many sets of letters that Dickinson wrote to a single person.

*Thomas Johnson's and Millicent Todd Bingham's Lord Letters*

In 1954, Millicent Todd Bingham, daughter of Mabel Loomis Todd (Austin Dickinson's mistress) published *Emily Dickinson: a Revelation*. The 107-page book is a



description of the author's search for and discovery of an elusive Dickinson romance with Judge Otis Lord. Bingham begins her tale with the story of an envelope of materials given to her mother by Austin Dickinson after Emily's death. She writes of this packet,

In a used brown envelope, addressed in an unknown hand to "Miss E.C. Dickinson, Amherst, Mass.," the cancelled stamps an issue of the early 1880's, it is labeled in my mother's writing, "Rough drafts of Emily's letters.' She told me that when Mr. Dickinson gave her this envelope he indicated that it was something very special and personal (*A Revelation* , 1).

While Austin had brought Mabel multiple packets, the one that begins this book is special, personal, and we find out later in the first chapter, something not to be published.

But, of course, it is published, over 60 years later, and I am not the first to wonder if it is not in response to Rebecca Patterson's *Dickinson's Riddle* in 1951.<sup>86</sup> Patterson's book proposed that the subject of the cryptic love-letters was a woman. It was met with such opposition that it is not a far stretch to speculate that the Dickinson family, or at least those with a vested interest in seeing her work sold in the volumes that they had constructed, might write a book that argues Dickinson's heterosexuality so fiercely. Bingham's text contains a frontispiece opposite the title page with a

---

<sup>86</sup> In 1951, Dickinson scholar Rebecca Patterson wrote a book called *Dickinson's Riddle*, which contained the chief claim that Dickinson was in love with Kate Scott Turner. Trying to debunk the myths that Dickinson was in love with Judge Otis Lord, Samuel Bowles and the mysterious "master," the text was suppressed by Turner's family. Dickinson scholar Martha Nell Smith has spoken of scholarly blocks like these in the US academy in the 1950's in her conference papers citing a "lavender scare" that would work to keep Dickinson's work heteronormalized. Smith's work itself exhibits an intense focus on the relationship between Dickinson and her sister-in-law.

photograph of Judge Otis Lord, an immediate clue as to the “Revelation” of the title. Following the requisite Harvard College approval note, the table of contents lays out the path the text will take, listing the chapter titles as “I. The Challenge; II. The Search; III. The Findings; IV. The Approach; V. The Revelation; and VI. Some Late Poems” (*A Revelation*).<sup>87</sup>

Bingham’s prose takes the tone of the archival positivist, rescuing facts from documents she has discovered. In the first chapter she writes, “As when making other decisions about publishing hitherto unknown facts, my only criterion has been this: will they help to bring about a better understanding of Emily Dickinson?” (*A Revelation*,3). She answers her own question, writing, “after considering these letters it is hoped that the reader will agree that it is better that this source of enlightenment should remain veiled no longer, better that speculation should at last give way to Emily Dickinson’s own revelation of the truth” (3). In Bingham’s estimation, these scraps (as we will see later on) are “Emily Dickinson’s own revelation of the truth,” but the rest of the book (only 20 pages are devoted to the reprinting and transcription of the letters) is needed to explain this truth. Bingham includes details about her own family, explaining her search for a photograph of Judge Lord and her estimations of his personality given the characteristics she saw in the photos she did find. The letters and transcriptions come in at the end of the book, and we have already heard Bingham’s narrative of their formation before we read them. We have been told about how

---

<sup>87</sup> All texts citing the Dickinson poems, whether in manuscript or not, must obtain copyright permission from the “President and Fellows of Harvard College, who claim all the literary rights and copyright therein.”

Dickinson loved Judge Lord the last few years of his and her lives, how she agonized over the fact that he was married and was crushed when he died. The interpretation of Dickinson's "truth" has been made for us, in straightforward, narrative form.

From scissored and sliced leaves of stationary, Thomas Johnson reconstructed Dickinson's innovations in fragmentation into completely formed letters for his *Complete Letters* 3-volume edition published in 1958. Johnson's results can be called transcriptions, translations or inventions. The letters as they are published by Johnson erase any cuts or slashes, marginal scrawls and crossouts. Sterile and starched straight into letter form, the texts are unquestioning, their forms regulated and correct. However there are a few clues that, even if one had never seen the manuscripts, could pique interest in Johnson's creations. The whispers of italics in brackets: "[*part of two pages cut*]... [*top of sheet cut off*] [*sheet cut off*] [*sheet cut away*] (L 561, L 562)" identify the collaboration while mysterious ellipses direct attention toward the constructedness of the letter by Johnson as well as Dickinson. These markers let the reader know that the work has been altered beforehand, but they don't identify the places that Johnson himself alters the work.

A trip to the archive reveals uneven scraps of stationary covered with Dickinson's hybrid print script. Restoration involves separation, the reconstruction a taking apart. Letter 561 is made up of a combination of 3 scraps (A 737, 737a, and 737b), most of the second leaf having been cut away, and another leaf, half of which has been cut away and lost or destroyed. The manuscript page begins with, "To beg for

the / Letter when it is / written,” while Johnson’s letter begins with the italicized: “*To Otis P. Lord.*” The scrap continues: “begging” for a letter, its lack resulting in a “bankruptcy.” The scrap ends with a humorously mysterious cut off “sentence” for the paradoxically ‘seraphic Naughty’ one reading: “Also, my / Naughty one, too / seraphic Naughty, / who can sentence” (A 737). Dickinson’s use of terms like bankrupt, warrant and sentence in the scrap *could* serve as an indication that she was writing to Judge Lord, as Johnson’s edition insists.

However, terminology of the law is not foreign to Dickinson’s writing—her father’s and brother’s influence as men of the law is apparent in earlier poems and letters. Dickinson’s pining and punishment for letters unreceived goes back to 1850, when in letter 29 she is apparently chiding her uncle (in even more obvious humorous tones) for not returning her correspondence. “One promised to love his friend and one vowed to defraud no poor—and *one* man told a lie to his niece—they all did it sinfully—and their lives were not yet taken... That we understand capital punishment, and one another too I verily believe—and sincerely hope—for it’s so trying to be read out of the wrong book when the right one is out of sight” (*Collected Letters*, 31-33).

Johnson’s letter 561 indents the first word ‘To’ and assumes that the break in white space following Dickinson’s famous dash after ‘bankrupted’ deems a paragraph break and a period ending the sentence. It appears to me that the following term, “Sweet One” is written on the following line to preserve the pairing of the words and not to begin a new paragraph. Dickinson’s capitalization and spacing derivations seem to go

hand in hand in aiding emphasis or attention to certain terms, through the reading rhythm of the space and the visual emphasis of the enlarged capitals. It alters the reading to place a period after “bankrupted.” Read without the period, the words rush to a 50- word flow, not stopped and started by standard punctuation, but pulled along with comma and dash, sound and space.

Johnson’s edition follows the untended ‘sentence’ with fragment 737b, skipping over the tiny scrap that is left over from the adjacent leaf, just one fold away. Johnson does not note the jump. He simply follows the “sentence” with “you?” making the sentence complete, at least by his puzzle-piecing standards. The line reads in the Johnson edition, “Also, My Naughty one, too seraphic Naughty, who can sentence you?” Since he gives no explanation, one can assume that his reasoning may be that the cut up rectangle that is 737b is a scrap cut out from the leaf of 737a. However, as Werner notes in her appendix of “Johnson Reconstructions,” “the rearrangement of the leaves is not viable given the dimensions of those leaves in relation to the dimensions of the cut” (286); 737b will not fit into the space made in 737a. Johnson’s redaction has, then, an obvious motivation in what he imagines as the letter’s particular sort of sense. It is not necessarily in his interest to show the scraps as evidence of thought or experimentation; instead, he hopes to tell a story. Perhaps the scrap of 737b does fit into the ending of 737. It is not my aim to call up the ghost of Dickinson’s intention here; it is simply my point that in the *Collected Letters* such emendations are invisible, erased and unavailable for analysis. Without a trip to the

archive, these scraps and fragments are reined in from their place in an almost illegible fringe. Brought back into the central thread of her biography, their strange qualities are trimmed into a legible narrative.

The leaf of 737a contains many problems for editing as well. What remains of the page is an L-shaped space, with the text filling in the bottom horizontal with a gap missing from the top, making a sort of step shaped text. “Perhaps, please, / you are (not) sinful? / Though of power to / make Perdition divine / who can punish you?” (737a). The “not” is penciled in above the “are” in another hand, with another pencil. What looks like another pencil has drawn a vertical line through the “P” of “Perhaps” through to the “n” of “can” at the bottom of the page. The line connects at the top of the “P” to a horizontal line that has been fragmented by the scissoring along it. What is revealed in this scrap is somebody’s hand carving the page, perhaps imagining where to cut. The horizontal line has been executed with scissors, but the vertical would have cut through the text leaving halves of words floating.

Perhaps the line preliminarily divided the blank page, making Dickinson’s spaced handwriting technique closer to the prepared site of a drawing with grid-like lines splitting the space, a technique used by artists transferring their pencil drawings to canvas. We can imagine that this penciled draft was ‘drawn up,’ gridded over and transferred to a copy that was then sent out, saved, or ultimately lost. There are many Dickinson scraps with lines running through them, diagonally through entire blocks of text or horizontally, or vertically. However, most of these lines are thicker and darker

and appear to be blocking out text. The fine pencil lines in 737a are delicate and in the background, not interfering with the text. It seems they are drawn only to prepare the space of the page for the words. In Dickinson's technique where "Delight— becomes pictorial" the delight of writing comes close to the art of sketching.

Johnson's printed "letter" does not address the lines across the page of this scrap. He simply reports "part of two pages cut out" and sets this fragment in to complete the letter. Johnson does not confront the "not" hanging over the "are," his line reading straightforwardly, "Perhaps, please, you are sinful?"—ambiguity abandoned. Johnson creates a begging pleading poem, put together with scraps that do seem to have a common theme. However, when one scrap seems to disobey his rule of meaning, he seems to ignore it and print it as *he* sees fit. Johnson's claim in the introduction to *Collected Letters* that all the letters are "printed in their verbatim form" is clearly not an accurate claim, as an analysis of their manuscript forms reveal.

Between Bingham's book-length "study" of the manuscripts and the Johnson letters published just after, readers and scholars of Dickinson have been given a fragmented narrative with speculative information filled in. Neither Bingham nor Johnson addresses the lack of address in these letters. Bingham's analysis relies on the repetition of statements such as, "the emotional strength of the friendship between Judge Lord and Emily Dickinson as revealed in these letters" or, "the thing to remember is that the attachment between Judge Lord and Emily Dickinson was real and ... it was mutual" (*Revelation*, 22 and 72). As a scholar in 2014, it is strange to see

biographical work done on a major literary figure that relies so much on projection. It wouldn't be so troubling if such theories were isolated to just one book or one theory. But we see that the organization of the archive dictated by these early ideas, as we saw in chapter two. The initial organizing of the manuscripts was done with biographical mysteries, family secrets and gender norms to protect. The fractured sense one gets when one looks to this manuscript archive, however, shows that these stories cannot fill in the gaps.

*Marta Werner and Jay Leyda's "Lord Letters": Imagining There*

Werner's book *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios* uses the pages of Leyda's notes on the archive to produce a study of the "Lord Letters" manuscripts. Both scholars give us a glimpse into the Dickinson archive and seek to read the illegible and fragmented materials they find there. Werner's and Leyda's textual scholarship allows us a glimpse into the archive, and the artwork of Joseph Cornell that concludes this chapter gives us a further intuitive experience with its preservational forces.

In contrast to the work Johnson does in presenting what he feels is a true version of Dickinson's writing, Leyda's biography and in the archival analysis reveals different kinds of desires for different kinds of knowledge.<sup>88</sup> Leyda's entries for Judge Otis Lord do appear in *Years and Hours*, but amidst the multiple other correspondents

---

<sup>88</sup> Johnson claims in the *Collected Letters* is that he presents the work with only the slightest changes made.



Dickinson wrote to.<sup>89</sup> Leyda builds rich context around the Lord correspondence, and while Johnson prints the letters as finished, actual letters, Leyda includes a section in *Years* toward the end of 1879 with the header “passages from the earliest extant drafts of ED’s letters to O.P. Lord:” (*Years* v.2, 305). In montage form, these passages are pasted together like Johnson’s are, but instead of being pasted together with proper grammar to tell a romance story, they run like a long disjointed ramble. Leyda does not craft them or mold them to tell a story. He merely prints them together and moves on to the next year.

Leyda, in describing these “passages,” also does not assume or report that they were ever actually sent. They are pieces of writing that he is associating with correspondence between Judge Lord and Dickinson. Amidst the outpouring of effusive prose coming from Dickinson and her correspondents, these letters hardly seem excessive. Taken out of the context of the singular letter, sent in complete letter-form with salutation and signature framing the words in between, these passages seem more at play with language, captivity, love, boundaries, and imaginary transgressions than they do with an actual brooding romance. Filled with land and law metaphors, desiring punishment and incarceration, these lines are not straightforward expressions of love (although it is not the point to decide whether or not this was their purpose), and it is not even certain whether they are letters to or from anyone. Reading them in

---

<sup>89</sup> Dickinson wrote to literary men like Thomas Higginson, friends and relatives like her cousins, Frances and Louisa Norcross and Helen Hunt Jackson, as well as letters to mysterious “master” which could have been exercises in experiments with epistolary form. Her most frequent correspondent as revealed by letters that have been preserved, is her sister in law and childhood friend Susan.

their manuscript form, we are not convinced about the purpose they serve, or whether they even serve a purpose at all. Purpose does not seem to concern them, as they flutter in and out of sense. Capturing their meaning, placing them into generic categories or even trying to put them into a narrative sequence seems difficult and, as we will see, ill-advised.

Leyda's work in the archive does not attach certainty to the correspondent's identity. His worksheets associated with each manuscript contain multiple question marks, throwing into doubt the composition date of each document, to whom it was sent and from where it came. The "mysterious packet" story lives on through Leyda's work, as each manuscript is given the genealogical marker "WAD to MLT" (William Austin Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd) on the bottom of each sheet of notes.

Leyda's catalog also notes the writing implement and surface material of each manuscript, as well as where it has been published. He notes verso text and material, stationary embossments, and watermarks. The relationship he traces is that of Dickinson and her world: the world of paper, tears, scraps, materials, pencils and texts collaged together.

734

ED to O. P. Lord

1878?

My lovely Salem smiles at me . . .

pencil (draft?)

ms from WAD to MLT, 1892?

Pub: Revelation (1954), 77

facsimile, 78-79

Figure 18: From Amherst College Archives and Special Collections Emily Dickinson collection. Leyda's notes intended to accompany the Lord materials

Following Leyda's lead is Werner, whose *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios* is an exploration and publication of the Lord Letters in manuscript. She devotes the entirety of her 300-page text to the letters, providing facsimiles, transcriptions, and multiple appendices cross-referencing information found in previous scholarly work. Werner's study contextualizes the relationships between Dickinson and her materials within work that has been done before. In a move similar to Leyda's, she does not argue against the biographical readings that have come before and nor does she offer her own

version of the story. Instead, she lets the materials speak for themselves in their fragmented states. The appendices in the back reveal the now-obvious cobbling of earlier editors. When viewing the manuscripts in their unaddressed and unsigned states—it is easy to question the narratives that have come before—and pay closer attention to the features that *don't* tell a story of lost love.

Werner's *Folios* publishes manuscripts that were inaccessible to scholars without a trip to Amherst in 1995. While we can see the manuscripts in the two on-line repositories at Amherst and Harvard now, in 2014, these were not available when Werner published the book. It seems that the inaccessibility of the archives limited scholarship in two ways: on the one hand, the manuscripts were not available to most readers and therefore the access, “discovery,” and presentation of the materials was 90% of the scholarly effort of many scholars.

What Werner does here is present a call to *read* the compositions in manuscript. She writes in her introduction that, “one aim of *Open Folios*, then, is archival. By providing facsimiles of forty of Dickinson's late manuscripts along with typed transcriptions that display as fully as possible her compositional process, I hope to reveal the spectacular complexity of the textual situation circa 1870” (Werner, 1). Werner admits that she is opening up, adding to, interacting with the Dickinson archive. She writes, “the revelations of this archival body moreover—a body ‘totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body’—overturn the

very systems of organization and classification that have until recently defined the editorial enterprise and invested it with authority” (2).<sup>90</sup>

Werner’s interest in overturning these systems of organization begins with the attention to materials started by Leyda’s efforts. It continues beyond a collection and listing of the materials used in Dickinson’s works, and moves to a presentation of a set of them in their manuscript form. Werner’s hopes for these texts is that they “reveal something about the requirements for an aesthetics of open-endedness” by initiating a “break with the analytical methods and claims to comprehensiveness generally associated with scholarly narratives” (2). She hopes that this “poetics (of reading, of editing) takes the place of a unified argument shored up by interlocking theses” offering “a series of speculative and fragmentary ‘close-ups’—a portrait in pieces, *a constellation of questions*” (2). While not directly mentioning the work of Leyda and his association with Eisenstein, her description of the fragments as “close-ups” reminds us of the filmic theories Leyda’s original look into the Dickinson archive employed. Her hopes for the constellation of questions that might be unlocked with a reading strategy not producing a unified argument inspire this project as well. Werner’s text does not produce a reading of the manuscripts that fits into a narrative about the poet, but

---

<sup>90</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 83. Werner’s use of the Foucault here reminds us that the archive is always an extension of power and history. Resistance to the official workings of the archive is always a political act, something most scholars and critics wouldn’t extend to the work Dickinson left behind. While Werner doesn’t exactly argue for this here, either, I would like to suggest that the resistance the work does show, at the very least reminds us what is and is not preserved or remembered once fit into the mechanics of the archival structure. We will never know, nor do we need to, if Dickinson was intentionally not publishing, not preserving, not writing in direct opposition to 19<sup>th</sup> century norms. We only need to know that the work reflects this resistance and still fights to preserve and reflect it in the 21<sup>st</sup>.

instead hopes for a reading that can attend to the visual and material features of the manuscripts.

Werner's introduction to the texts and the transcriptions and facsimile copies of the works unfolds a new vision of Dickinson's writing. Radically different from the Harvard manuscript books edition, which only reproduces the work Dickinson bound into small booklets, these first published scraps make the reader re-imagine completely the Dickinson oeuvre. Much like Leyda, Werner endeavors to present a set of suggestions for how to read the work, not a set of readings per se.

Highlighting responses to Dickinson that utilize the power of montage, collage, affiliation, constellation and suggestion, it is my hope that this project may do the same thing. Asserting that the space of the archive has done damage to our understanding of the manuscripts and in some way demanded a knowledge-based argument about the texts it has produced, this project ends with a suggestion that we re-think how we put texts together, where we put them and how we read them. In the pages that conclude this chapter, I discuss Joseph Cornell, who has done some intuitive work with the Dickinson archive and reveals an understanding of the fragility of its fractured state. If Werner asks for a reading of the material features of the texts, without an interlocked argument, perhaps the work of the visual can match her desires. If Dickinson's work cannot be contained by the boundary of a single poem, or the organization of the codex, perhaps a response not bound by language can lend some meaning to the work.

“small rickety infinitudes”

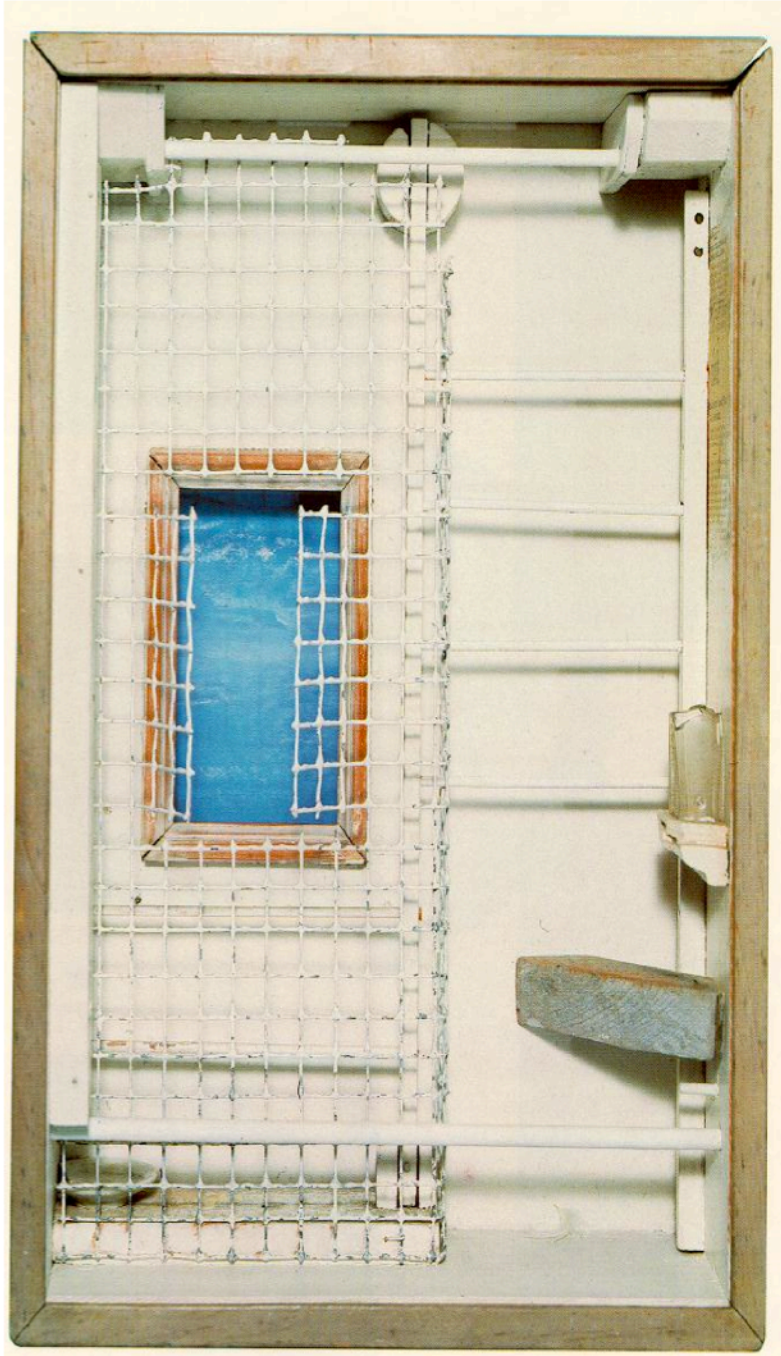


Figure 19: Cornell's *Toward the Blue Peninsula* box, named after a line from a Dickinson poem.

David Porter's essay in *Word and Image*, "Assembling a poet and her poems: convergent limit-works of Joseph Cornell and Emily Dickinson," continues chronicling the constellating literary history that drives this chapter. Porter records the development of Cornell's interest in and artistic interpretation of the Dickinson archive. In Porter's telling, Leyda's friendship with Cornell provided a crucial hinge between the artist's budding interest in Dickinson's poetry and his knowledge of her assemblage techniques. If Leyda's archival interventions can be seen as influenced and inspired by Eisenstein's collage techniques, then Cornell's artistic innovations with collage might have been similarly inspired and influenced by Dickinson's archive, as reported to Cornell in correspondence with Leyda.<sup>91</sup> If these influences and appropriations don't seem to follow a linear narrative history, it is because this scholarship itself is following a montage of inspiration as it seems to ricochet and echo through the archive of Dickinson studies.<sup>92</sup>

Porter's essay begins with an imperative close to the heart of this project. He writes about his motivation to bring Dickinson's and Cornell's work together, stating that "(w)e need to come to terms with their extreme practices which resist traditional

---

<sup>91</sup> When noting that Cornell and Leyda seem exemplary in treating the material and physical features of the Dickinson archive it cannot be overlooked that Cornell and Leyda were themselves early collagist filmmakers.

<sup>92</sup> Porter points to the seemingly chance encounter and artistic echo across these untimely combination in his essay, writing "the story of Emily Dickinson and Joseph Cornell is so unlikely that it could not be imagined apart from the facts. Another way of saying this is that their dialogue across a hundred years is yet another Cornell construction: two figures, solitary and unaccountable, brought into correspondence, as he said of the objects he placed in his boxes, to discover what they would say to one another." (Porter, 199)



analysis or any kind of interpretive closure” (“Assembling,” 199). He continues, “(o)bjects in assemblages can then be seen for the first time to materialize, as paintings and photographs cannot, the way that poems, now and from the beginning, function as linguistic art” (199). Porter makes a connection between the visual/verbal assemblages of Joseph Cornell and Dickinson’s more hidden hybrid art, perhaps suggesting that a way to read these collages might be to read them as one might read a poem, and vice-versa, echoing Eisenstein’s conceptualizations of syntax in poetry for his development of montage theory in film. Porter’s interest in reading the visual page linguistically takes Dickinson’s fragmented poetics seriously in a manner similar to Leyda’s, respecting the boundaries of the fragment and refusing the impulse to fill in the space between.

For Porter, the syntactic fragments that come together as words and phrases in Dickinson’s poems mirror the collaged materials in Cornell’s boxes—even before we get to see the archival organization, or mixed media collages, over-written by most publications. He sees in Dickinson’s poetics a desire to create language able to “express the menacing ascendance of consciousness,” while in Cornell’s work he sees a hope to express “the hidden dialogue between objects and our imaginations” (“Assembling” 199). Porter notes that both artists seem especially interested in enlivening our experience of the daily, domestic and, very literally, the disposable. For Porter, it is important that both artists work to push the boundaries of the languages they work with. When we move beyond their conceptual similarities and look to the collaged materials, we see that both artists made art with the things that surrounded them.

These things included books, envelopes, stamps, and the walls that made up their homes.<sup>93</sup>

Porter tells us that Cornell became acquainted with Leyda in 1952. At this time Leyda was at work on the Dickinson materials at Amherst, and Cornell was already almost a decade into his appreciation of Dickinson's poems.<sup>94</sup> Porter carefully catalogues Cornell's interest in the poet, leading to his eventual artistic outputs in a series of boxes. In the middle of Cornell's self-described "E.D. experience," his correspondence with Leyda begins to pick up.

---

<sup>93</sup> Porter notes in his essay that Cornell lived his whole life with his family and acted as the primary caretaker for his disabled brother. It seems that Cornell's own films and collages of dancers and actresses acted with a similar desire outward from an enclosed life. Porter makes much of this in his essay, reproducing the following quotation: "just now the poem beginning 'Unto my books so good to turn'—what they must have meant in her tortuous seclusion—a clue in the same kind of escape found in books on sunny mornings on Fourth ave (a reference to Cornell's own activity)"(Porter, "Assemblages," 200).

<sup>94</sup> Porter tells us that Cornell printed a Dickinson poem in a dance magazine in 1944, and began reading Rebecca Patterson's *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson* in 1952("Assemblages," 200). He would also collaborate with Stan Brakhage on the film *Centuries of June* (line from Dickinson's poem 1056 with the first line "There is a Zone whose even years") in 1955.

3708 Utopia Plwy  
Flushing 58, NY  
June 19, 1953.

Dear Jay,

One more conversant with the lines of Miss Emily than myself might fit something to this liquid swirl enclosed. For present purposes it betokens an occasion of last winter when first acquaintance with the Jenkins volume was the "door" into the past through a sleet drenched suburban landscape/voyaging via bus, the ordinarily bleak routine shift-

and this, with other prior occasions may well be due to our very chance encounter of a year ago during a muggy high noon in the Dixie Terminal. I think it was your "columbarium" quote that quickened me to gain insights never dreamt of before. The Patterson interpretation helped, too, despite what it might be in others' eyes.

Could the "columbarium" quote be used for a possible exhibition shaping up? Not to go beyond a catalogue. Please advise the type of credit line that should go to you if this is necessary. So far I have <sup>not</sup> had this complete confidence although I should like to have acquainted Miss Moore (Marlannel) with it.

I appreciated your information about colomblers in general but found that I was spending too much time looking elsewhere instead of in my own backyard.

With all best wishes,

Sincerely,

J. P. K.

Figure 20: Letter from Joseph Cornell to Jay Leyda From the Jay Leyda collection at NYU's Tamiment Library Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

In the letter above, Cornell and Leyda meet mid-conversation around the idea of the columbarium in Dickinson's work. Enacting the notion of contingent connectivity, this letter is layered with quotation and the idea of a literary history not normally preserved by scholars. It does not reveal information about Dickinson's life, nor does it provide insight into specific language in her poems. The two scholars seem interested in Dickinson's life to the extent that they are aware of themes of enclosure and drawn to her letter writing as a connection to the world. The letter speaks to the pattern of connections and gaps in the Dickinson archive using the language of scholars and artists trying to make meaning from them rather than force closure upon them. The letter documents a collaborative moment centered around the idea of the columbarium. Close reading this letter unleashes a web of associations around Dickinson's poetics that begins with an uncanny connection between Dickinson's use of quotation in her poems and letters, Cornell's fascination with building structures to preserve his collage-souvenirs, and Leyda's long texts filled with the labors of his "rag-picking" scholarship. Howe's comment on Dickinson and Melville could be just as easily directed at this letter, where we see Leyda and Cornell "reducing multitudes (...) to correlate with one another, constantly interweaving traces of the past to overcome restrictions of temporal framing" (331). They come together in this moment of the columbarium, a space reserved for preserving the materials of the dead.

The columbarium serves as a hinge between the two scholars and as a moment of connection with a letter Dickinson wrote to her sister-in-law, Sue, in which she

quotes Longfellow's novel *Kavanaugh*.<sup>95</sup> In the quotation from Letter 38 in the Johnson collection dated December 1850, Dickinson addresses her childhood friend Susan, who has just lost her sister. Likening her to the character Alice in the Longfellow novel, she says that her "little 'Columbarium is lined with warmth and softness'" (*Letters*, 102). The entire line from the Longfellow comes in a scene between two women who share a correspondence through letters. Longfellow writes, "Unannounced she entered, and walked up the narrow and imperfectly lighted stairs to Alice's bed-room,—that little sanctuary draped with white,—that columbarium lined with warmth, and softness, and silence" (83). Dickinson writes to Susan and refers to a similar correspondence between two women. Cornell and Leyda send the epistolary echo out further, and while they lack the erotic tenor of the first two iterations of the columbarium, the correspondence enacts a web of quotation across time and art forms to connect ideas. Dickinson cites the Longfellow and produces a repetition with a difference. She writes, following the words "warmth and softness," that "there is no silence there—so you differ from bonnie 'Alice'" (102).

If this seems a rough sketch of the relationships between these texts and times, it is because this seems to be the nature of such relationships. This moment reminds us that literary histories are just as constructed as archives and poems. What is clear here is that the idea of the columbarium in *Kavanaugh*—this space of silent enclosure, an idea resonant throughout the Dickinson archive—echoes through this letter and outside

---

<sup>95</sup> Longfellow's novel is most frequently noted for being the first American "lesbian novel." It also highlights the author's interest in work which is not *just* "American" in its creative construction, but also appropriative of European styles and therefore cosmopolitan.

of it, into the letter between Cornell and Leyda. The ideas of enclosure, preservation, and material memory connect all of these figures, and this letter is a reminder of the real effects boundaries have on these various projects.

Our understanding of the Dickinson archive is illuminated by the attention these two scholars pay it. For Cornell and Leyda, the archive was something Dickinson built, something that they could not see the shape of, but something that they intuited, noticed and enacted in their responses to her writing. Cornell's many boxes and collages devoted to ideas of Dickinson or ideas in Dickinson (as chronicled in Porter's essay) are about the feeling of preservation and enclosure, and the promise of connection and correspondence. Leyda's scholarship makes connections via the materials used to create the work—whether they are pencils, paper, advertisements, newspaper articles or journal entries. Cornell and Leyda meet the chaos of the Dickinson archive with a similar chaos, rather than with the constraints of organization or limitation. Without an outside logic mapped onto the manuscripts, we get glimpses of things for which there are perhaps no words or shapes in critical writing or archival organizing.

Though one is technically an archivist and biographer and the other a visual artist and filmmaker, they meet as readers in the space of the Dickinson archive. Their divergent responses make it easier to see that Dickinson's own work is archival, and that for all three, the materials of the archive were generative. It's as if in a time tangle all three artists were making work under the words of Benjamin, when he writes,

“Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them” (“On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress” 459).

Their projects, while working with disparate media, in different disciplines with different expectations, undertake the “literary montage” to make meaning. Meaning is constructed in Dickinson’s own manuscripts making up a literary montage in their fragmentary or layered quotational manner, or Leyda’s scrap-pile biographies, or Cornell’s structures of found objects or films. These thinkers create archives that make space for those things that don’t normally fit into archives, and thus they create contexts and meaning from things we normally cannot or do not see.

Howe recounts the chaotic Dickinson archive nearly thirty years after her important *My Emily Dickinson*, writing, “I’m not saying there is any correct way to clear this entangled primal paper forest. Maybe this is her triumph. She has taken her secret to the grave and will not give up the ghost” (*Paris Review* interview, 2012). Here, she documents that still, nearly three decades later, she has not detangled and does not expect to de-tangle anything. Howe’s absolute devotion to the creative disarray of the archive generates possibilities for scholars and thinkers, still. The collection of artists and scholars I have put together shows that new readings are possible, which do not yearn to make logical arguments from works that themselves defy logic. The poetics of Dickinson’s archive is that of the constellation, the fragment and the unknown, and

any reading strategy attempting to “know” much for certain about the texts will undoubtedly cover over the aesthetic curiosities the manuscripts contain.

“*There is a Zone whose even Years/No Solstice interrupt*” (J1056)

If the work of the first chapter was to look at how the manuscript archive has been constructed, and the second acts as a close reading of the publication history and methodology of the poems, then this third section is a move beyond the archive and the book, inspired by Leyda’s multi-media scholarship. The concluding pages of this dissertation thus discuss the space of the new on-line archives at Harvard and Amherst. At the end of this section, however, I turn to the work Joseph Cornell did with his film, *Centuries of June*. It is my hope that the description of the film will provide a cursory indication of what work such as Cornell’s can contribute to the world of Dickinson studies. He might not have news of a new lover, or a reason for why Dickinson did not leave the house, but a love of houses and walls and windows and doors and the preservation of these materials is reflected in his film-text, instead.

*Centuries of June* takes its title a line from a Dickinson poem, numbered 1056 by Thomas Johnson and 1020a by Ralph Franklin. It can be found at Amherst College, in an unbound grouping (see chapter two) known as Set 90. Its text reads

There is a Zone  
whose even Years  
No solstice interrupt –  
Whose Sun constructs



perpetual Noon  
Whose perfect Seasons  
wait -

(x)Whose Summer set  
In Summer, till  
The Centuries of  
June  
And Centuries of  
August (x) cease  
And Consciousness - is -  
Noon -

(x) Where  
(x) fuse, lapse, blend<sup>96</sup>

This poem muses on the possibilities of preservation, presenting the reader with a space (a Zone) that is not affected by time. More specifically, there might be a sense of organized time (even Years) but time does not affect, interrupt or interfere with this zone; rather, it provides an endless summer of “perfect seasons”—waiting. A sun at noon, a fusing of Augusts and Junes, a collaging, blending of months. On one hand the poem reflects on a space yielding unending “consciousness” at “noon,” and perhaps a heightened mental state—either psychologically or intellectually; on the other, the poem yearns for a stopping of time. Seasons “wait,” noon is “perpetual” and solstices cannot arise. A reading of the poem that leaves the reader stuck in the “zone” is still using language to describe something like preservation. The reading will end with an understanding of sorts, but Cornell’s film is able to visually enact the preservation of pieces of a home with his film. A reading explains, fleshes out ideas, and unearths

---

<sup>96</sup> The transcription of this poem is my own. The manuscript follows on the next page.

meaning. The film gives reader-viewers a sense of the ineffable features of the Dickinson archive.

90-10

There is a Zone  
Whose Year Years  
No Solstice interrupt.  
Whose Sun Constructs  
Perpetual Noon  
Whose Perfect-Seasons  
wait.

+ Whose Summer set-  
in Summer, till  
The Centuries of  
June  
And Centuries of  
August - + Cease  
And Consciousness is  
Done.

+ Where + here. (asse-  
tend

Figure 21: A 90-10 Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

*Centuries* was made in 1955, the same year the Johnson edition was published. Cornell collaborated with a young Stan Brakhage, who would go on to pioneer experimental films.<sup>97</sup> But for this film, he shot according to Cornell's direction. The second of their collaborations (the first being a lovely homage to the soon to be demolished elevated trains of Manhattan), "Centuries" focuses on a house in Brooklyn about to be demolished. Cornell documents the home from top to bottom, the trees surrounding the home, the views from the top cupola, the humans and animals walking the streets that border the home, and, most ghostly and poetic, a strange steam rising from the ground near the home. Silent and shot in black and white film, the ten-minute montage preserves a moment in time the filmmakers know is about to be destroyed.

---

<sup>97</sup> Stan Brakhage worked on two films with Cornell as well as projects with John Cage and Maya Deren. He would go on to be an influential non-narrative filmmaker until his death in 2003. Hand painting and intentionally destroying film were part of his many disruptive techniques.



Figure 22: Film Still from *Centuries of June*

If the poem containing the line “Centuries” is loosely about a patched-together time of a heightened state, then the film, *Centuries* gives us an idea of the patched-together images that might make up this time and state. We see the top of the home (which is itself a visual echo of the Dickinson home that Cornell had visited, see images below) in the opening sequences, followed by a few minutes of breeze whispering through trees. The camera carves out the “zone” for us, capturing it within the space of the film. The montage moves through an even tempo of light and dark, high and low. It focuses on the stuff of the home, the wood of the panels that make up the siding, the criss-crossed lattice covering the base of the home, the view from the bending tree’s branches across the yards. Human time is preserved, too. We see schoolchildren walking either to or from school, their books held against chests with crossed arms.

Shots from the ground, through the grass, are followed by views from the top windows—the white of the horizon blanching our eyes with light.



Figure 23: Film still from *Centuries of June*



Figure 24: Film Still from *Centuries of June*



Figure 25: Film Still from *Centuries of June*.

Is this white light, as seen from both the windows of the cupola and those lining the earth at the basement, “where summer set in summer”? Is this the zone of fused/lapsed/ceased centuries—frozen in the mist or smoke of ghostly walls and ceilings? The sparse nature of the poem is fleshed out, almost literally, by the film, whose fused collage of images places humans into this zone, making the meditation alive with eyes and ears that might capture or be captured by this frozen time. Cornell’s film gives the reader/viewer a sense of this magical preservation, not only in relation to the poem he is referencing, but, I would suggest, in direct reference to the Dickinson materials he knew were behind the poems he loved so much. At this point he had been corresponding with Leyda for two years while Leyda worked with the materials. He had already written to Leyda about the space of the columbarium, and

the “Centuries” home seems to stand in for a sort of silent space of preservation similar to the one taken up in the conversations that span lifetimes across the four correspondents.

Cornell writes of his knowledge of Dickinson’s “capture” within her own home and relates to her love of the materials that give her a sense of the outside. Much like the transgressed boundary of the home in the first chapter, the boundaries of home in this film seem to reflect a sacred space about to be demolished. Many of Dickinson’s poems play with these kinds of spaces, and Cornell’s film seems to play with them as well. The trees still flicker in the sun, the human bodies still pass by, all in the face of this structure’s sure destruction. How can the Cornell film help us in imagining Dickinson’s play with bound space?

Cornell’s film explores Dickinson’s own discussion of divisions, both within the semantic poetics of her verse, and within the strange play with preservation her manuscripts enact. Cornell’s film, itself a collage of zones seeking eternity, plays with the idea of preservation that Dickinson’s archive gestures toward, both in the poem it takes its name from here and elsewhere. It gives us views of high and low, human and non-human materials, lightness and darkness. It moves with the wind in the trees and grass and the gaits of schoolchildren. The rhythms of a life, while suspended in the time of the film, are dynamic—ethereal.





Figure 26: The Dickinson Homestead, Amherst, Massachusetts

The Dickinson Homestead still stands in Amherst, although its inner construction has been altered in order to allow streams of tourists through its halls and doors. Unlike Cornell's Brooklyn house, which is only preserved on film, it remains, a historical symbol of its famous inhabitant. As a symbol, it serves as a strong reminder of

the poet that lived there. It is the centerpiece of the town of Amherst and a crucial piece of contemporary Dickinson appreciation. But, similar to the columbarium, it remains just a shell of what it is purporting to preserve. The Dickinson homestead could never preserve the memory of a poet whose biography is misunderstood and in some ways impossible to know.

Like the archive and the texts it produces, the Homestead serves as an official historical memory of the poet's work. It works with canonical understandings of who she was and what kinds of works she produced. Its structure, like a columbarium, remains, protecting the decaying materials inside. The poet and her work, cloistered within these official histories and publications will naturally decay, and the monuments that protect the work will stand. Replacing the works they were erected to protect, they become the work that we read, visit, and understand.

Cornell's Brooklyn house, on the other hand, only exists now in his artful montage. It could never be a truthful account of the home, just as we will never construct a truthful replacement of the archive that reproduces Dickinson's logic of preservation. But, in both cases, Cornell's film gives us the closest experience of a fragmented, constructed, but preserved history. Employing an aesthetic form that highlights the fragment similar to Leyda's biography and Werner's edition, the film focuses on features of Dickinson's work that are difficult to put into language. We get the feeling of loss and the small things that can be remembered and preserved. We experience continuous and unending Centuries of June as the film can be viewed again

and again. Similar to Susan Howe's illegible poems of colliding bibliographic elements that cannot be closely read, but only experienced, Cornell gives a filmic voice to elements of Dickinson's work that do not fit into structures like language, the archive, or the book.<sup>98</sup>

The Homestead also maintains a digital presence in 2014. On the social networking site Facebook, it posts poems as The Emily Dickinson Museum and maintains a linked relationship with the Facebook page for the poet Emily Dickinson (it seems both pages are managed by the same person). The two linked pages have almost identical postings and presences, enacting a popular culture version of the poet and the space that (in this case quite literally) defines her. The "content" of each page repeats and echoes, as the pages tag and reference one another on an almost daily basis. In this case, we have the interactivity of media that can make connections books cannot and that allows scholars and readers to interact with the poet and her house turned museum. But, the idea of each is stuck in the "frozen" interpretation Leyda names in his writing. In this case, we have a dynamic technology doing nothing to change a static thinking about Dickinson.

As I turn to the recently launched digital archives at Amherst and Harvard to conclude, I am looking at how dynamic notions of the poet and her work can be combined with this interactive technology. When I began this project, I never imagined that these open-access repositories would exist. Their contributions to Dickinson

---

<sup>98</sup> Howe's bibliography collage poems have recently been exhibited at the Whitney Biennial, placing the art of the page on the gallery wall and changing how we might think of experiencing work most often categorized as poems.

scholarship has yet to bear fruit, but in my conclusion I provide an analysis of how each one moves beyond the limitations I've traced through the archive and published texts, and how each one could do more to produce a new experience of the Dickinson texts.

**Conclusion:**

***The Inner Workings of a Mechanical Heart: hope for the plastic life of the digital archive***

One of my favorite pieces of writing about the archive comes from a time when, for me, studying Emily Dickinson was still mostly about manuscript facsimiles, arguments over editions, iterations, versions of poems and archival access. It made me think about the violence of the archive, about what we preserve when we place things into the archive and who gets to look at it, behind closed doors, our white-gloves on folders and boxes of scraps. It seems like a long time ago that I was swooning over the moments in Peggy Kamuf's essay "Deconstruction and Love" where she writes about the fictional love of a material text in Henry James's *Aspern Papers* that leads to their destruction. The essay is a theoretical meditation on the ethical and affective motivations behind Derrida's reading and his notions of deconstruction. It begins with the idea that Derrida loves the things he deconstructs, an argument against the idea that such a reading strategy was inherently negative or willfully destructive. It has become for me, though, the story of the archive and what lies behind our desire to preserve things there.

James' story constructs a narrative around an unnamed narrator chasing the papers of American poet, Jeffery Aspern. He tracks down Aspern's former lover and her daughter Miss Tita (or Tina in revised editions) in Venice in an attempt to gain access to letters and other papers belonging to the dead poet. After her offer of

marriage is rejected by the unnamed narrator, Miss Tita tells him she burnt the letters, “finally, one by one” (James, 80). The two amateur preservationists fail at preserving the papers despite and also because of their very excessive love for them.

When Kamuf writes of the letters burned out of too-much-love, out of preservation, she remembers important things like paper, mechanical reproduction, the technology of reproduced text. While the letters in the fictional text are indeed “originals,” sacred archival objects, they are, as all sacred archival objects are, a fiction. Kamuf remembers this, and also remembers that they will continue to be born and burn and burn again and again as each book containing James’s novella is printed. She remembers that the love for the texts is constructed by the reader, informed by the form in which the reader encounters the text—and that love, preservation, reading, interpretation, archiving and organization of texts all require a certain destruction, interiorization and alteration. Kamuf’s reading of the James story highlights what happens to texts when we read them, love them, interpret them. But it is also a great place for thinking through what happens in the archive.

She writes, “Yes, yes, they burned, one by one, each one, each singular one. And already, yes, one by one, they begin to repeat mechanically: ‘One by one,’ I repeated mechanically” (Kamuf, 43) (an echo of the James text in her text, reproducing the exact text but within a new context, appropriation, collage, quotation, literary criticism). She continues, “If this is the heart of the text, it is also an artificial or mechanical heart” (43).

I always wanted to make so much of the last sentence of this passage. But when I was studying the Dickinson manuscripts in 2006, the most mechanical heart visible to me were the expensive manuscript books. While these massive texts (in comparison to the tiny books Dickinson hand-sewed) were definite translations of the fascicles in the archive into machine printed mass productions, they didn't seem mechanical in a way that technology seemed to be exceeding itself, evolving, beating in a way we might find foreign, artificial. The technology of the book, its organizing principles and structures, remained mostly intact. What fit into the format of the fascicles could be translated into the very similar format of the manuscript books. The "official" nature of the manuscript books' ordering was always up for interpretation, but the way we turn pages, the fact that things looking like poems were on things that looked like pages allowed the publication of the manuscript books to be a translation across the pretty stable medium of the codex.

Derrida writes, in *Archive Fever*, "the archive has always been a pledge, and like every pledge, a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is not longer lived in the same way. Archiveable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives" (18). This dissertation has been inspired by Derrida's attention to the structures of the archive, and curious about what can and cannot fit into them. My initial interests in theorizing a digital archive sent me to the actual archives to understand how they had been put together. As the search took me to other archives, and opened up further questions, the digital archives at

Amherst and Harvard arrived, and, as Derrida reminds me again, there are now new structures to think about. How have these new digital archives been constructed? What assumptions do they bring with them from the physical locations that have produced them? These are questions I asked an on-line forum for Dickinson scholars, and the answer I received was silence.<sup>99</sup>

But, in private conversations and public venues such as *The New York Times* the two archives went head to head.<sup>100</sup> It seems that, to a few people involved in the creation of these archives, the structures that surround the materials have become a topic of conversation again with the recent unveiling.<sup>101</sup> Because the two are remarkably different in their presentation, they are also quite different in the Dickinson they present.

The two digital archives set out to accomplish similar aims. High-resolution images are available at both the on-line Amherst and Harvard repositories and they can be downloaded, magnified, and studied by any eyes that care to pay them attention. As examples of massive open access digital humanities projects undertaken by different kinds of head archivists at two very different private institutions, on the surface, these

---

<sup>99</sup> My work with the Dickinson Electronic Archives allowed me to construct what we eventually called a “virtual conference.” See <http://www.emilydickinson.org/bound-a-trouble> for the structures I collaborated on with Aaron Dinin, as well as the silent response. Recent conversations with artists in digital media have encouraged me to ask these questions again, but perhaps with a more dynamic approach. This project is in the planning stages.

<sup>100</sup> See the October 22<sup>nd</sup> issue’s article “Enigmatic Dickinson Revealed Online.”

<sup>101</sup> The advisory board for the Harvard archives contained scholars from across a spectrum of Dickinson experts. It also included Michael Kelly, the head archivist at Amherst, who launched their digital archive before Harvard did, and loaned them manuscripts for theirs. Kelly’s critique of the Harvard archive states that it follows the logic of the Franklin Variorum and that the institution’s replication of this structure presents a “missed opportunity” for a more open archive (“Enigmatic Dickinson”)



archives are wonderful gifts to Dickinson scholars, teachers, and anyone with curiosity and an internet connection. When Susan Howe wrote about difficulties with academic affiliation and archival access, these kinds of advances were something that even she could not have imagined. I am thrilled about the teaching possibilities these archives will afford. I will be even more thrilled if their status as open-access remains. The hefty price-tag on the variorum and manuscript books is enough to dissuade a reader from diving deep and becoming a scholar, and these resources can make the curious scholar less reliant upon them.

But, as the Derrida quote reminds us, *how* we archive still places meaning upon what is archived. Dickinson in folders and boxes, deep in the basement of Robert Frost Library in Amherst, Massachusetts, takes a different form on the screen of my computer at home when accessed through the library's site. In the physical archive, I can only access one folder at a time. I must know what I want to see before I can see it. "Discovery" happens by chance that is stunted by not knowing what you are looking for, and also not being able to put objects together for comparison, until you get home and compare photos or scans or photocopies. The hours I spent in archives always felt somehow out of time, and the thinking I was able to do with the objects in front me always seemed much less invigorated once I returned home to look at them later.

These digital archives present unprecedented access to the Dickinson materials at whatever time the scholar or students wants them. To a scholar who has navigated the multiple editions and made treks to the physical locations of the archives, they are

relatively easy to use and understand. But after the excitement of the access wears off  
Neither site reports on how the piece of paper that glows on your computer screen  
became the poem you read in a book. Neither site tells you the relationship is  
positing, promoting, and reflecting upon via their digital contributions. Both sites lack  
the editorial voice to tell the visitor what she is encountering when she looks to the site  
for information.<sup>102</sup> A brief analysis of these archives will present some hopes for how  
the Dickinson archive can become a more flexible, playful structure as scholarship and  
technology move our studies from the boundaries of the codex form.

*The Franklin Variorum and The Emily Dickinson Archive at Harvard*

The Emily Dickinson Archive states on its homepage that

Emily Dickinson Archive makes high-resolution images of Dickinson's surviving manuscripts available in open access, and provides readers with a website through which they can view images of manuscripts held in multiple libraries and archives. This first phase of the EDA includes images for the corpus of poems identified in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, edited by R. W. Franklin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1998)" (Emily Dickinson Archive).

Visitors to the site can only access the manuscripts that are listed as poems, or variants of those poems. And, they are then only experienced as pieces of other poems, a problem I pointed out in the codex version as well. The story of Dickinson's drafting is intact in this digital collection, which doesn't call itself an edition, but it might as well

---

<sup>102</sup> It is interesting to note the nomenclature shift in digital editions or collections from "visitors," from "readers" in books.

be one. As such, it states that it organizes the collection with the same principles its expensive codex version does.

However, access to these beautiful documents is incredibly illuminating. Scholars can get close up to the pencil strokes and paper grades without taking a trip to the archives in Cambridge. They can see a transcription (from either Johnson's or Franklin's editions) and they can download the image to their desktop for further study. Perhaps the most useful search is the word search, which can locate words within the entire document (not just in the first-line "titles"). The manuscripts have been encoded in their semantic entirety, and so a search, for the word "house" produces a list of over 200 documents. Before the digital archive existed, the task of finding *all* the poems that contained a single word was an arduous task. Now, with ease, scholars can search the EDA and make thematic connections between poems.

The innovations that time saving search can bring to Dickinson studies is only hampered by the fact that not all of the materials are available on the site. As Michael Kelly reminds us, only the poems that are sorted into composition narratives in the Franklin Variorum are represented in search results, so while access to images has been improved, how we think about these images has been pushed beyond neither the codex form, nor the limitations of what the variorum deems a poem. The structures that hold the poems in place are intact, despite our much-improved access to their material states.

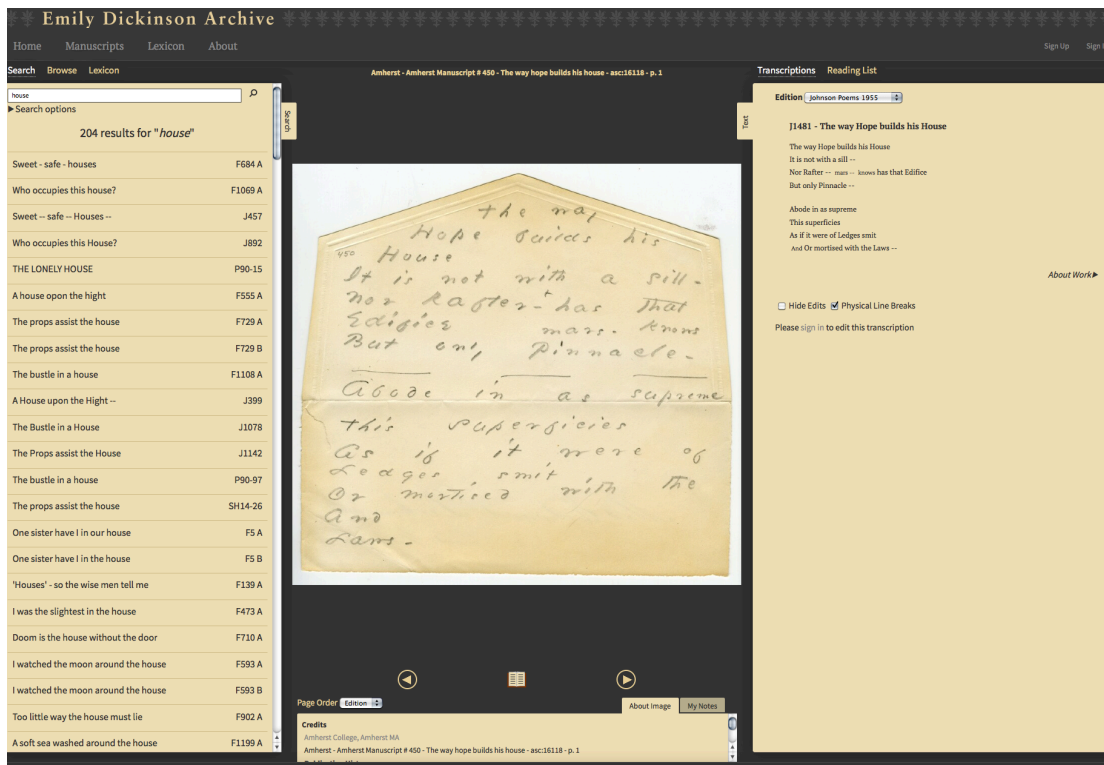


Figure 27: Screenshot of the Emily Dickinson Archives: search for the word house.<sup>103</sup>

### The Amherst Digital Collection's Emily Dickinson Collection

Kelly writes on the archive's blog, *The Consecrated Eminence*, about the open access digital Dickinson housed within the library's larger digital collection known as ACDC, "we are delighted to announce that all of the manuscripts of Emily Dickinson held by Amherst College are now freely available for viewing by anyone with an internet connection anywhere in the world." Kelly tells us that the manuscripts are organized by "Amherst College numbers—simple inventory numbers that enable us to

<sup>103</sup> It is interesting to note that this edition does not note the shape of the envelope, just as the Franklin edition does not.

retrieve the original manuscripts when they are requested” (“Digital Dickinson,”

*Consecrated Eminence*)<sup>104</sup> He continues,

beyond simply searching for individual poems, you can retrieve subsets of manuscripts by searching for phrases such as “Johnson letters” or “Franklin.” My favorite search is “Prose fragment” – a category Johnson included in his 1958 edition of *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. One strength of the Amherst College Dickinson Collection is that we hold many fragments and drafts that provide a wealth of information about Dickinson’s writing process. (“Digital Dickinson”)

Kelly’s emphasis that *all* of the Amherst manuscripts are there and that they are searchable by form, as well (although it should be noted that these are still forms named by the editors), removes the collection from the confines of the codex editions and allows visitors to search a bit differently. However, the poems have not been encoded as Harvard’s has (this is an incredibly time consuming and expensive thing to do), and therefore are not fully searchable. A similar search for poems containing the word “house” on the Amherst site recalls a much shorter list, seen below.

---

<sup>104</sup> Amherst numbers were mostly given by Jay Leyda in his organization of the materials.

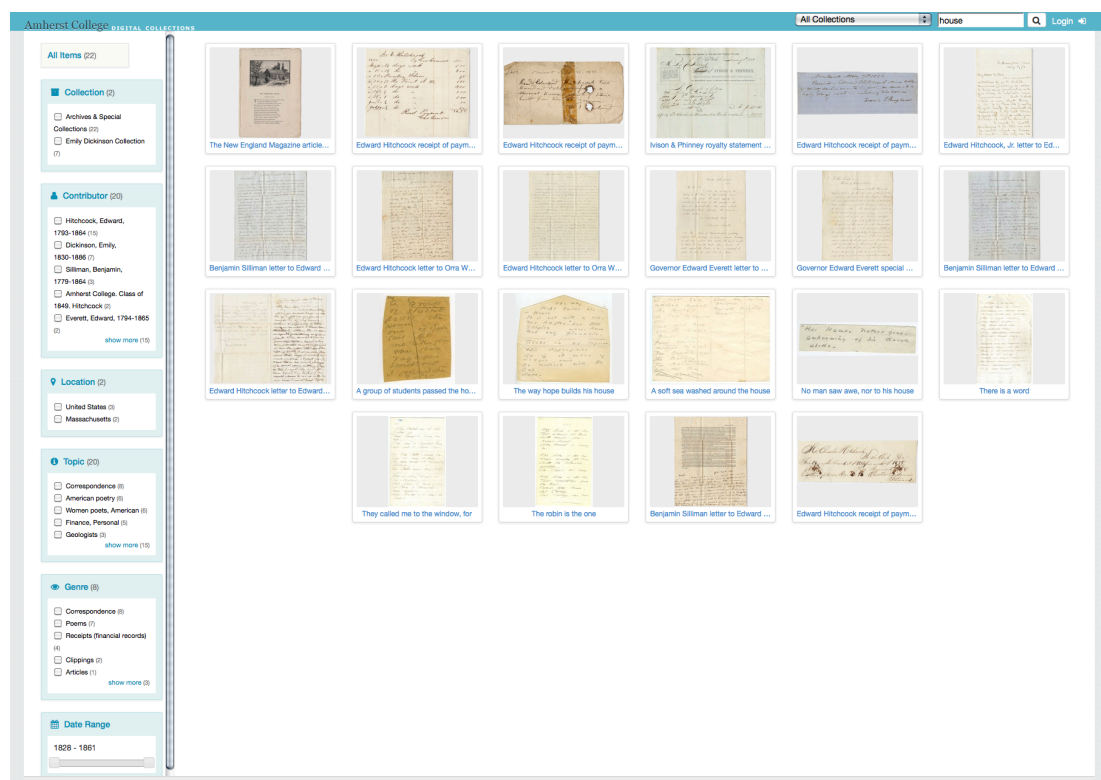


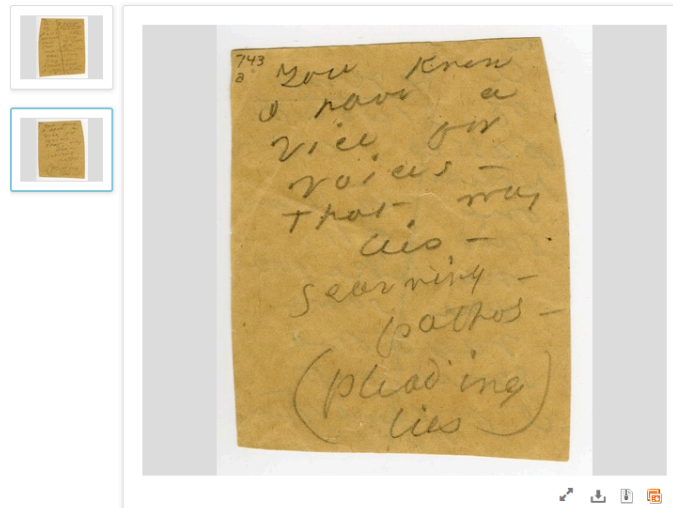
Figure 28: Screenshot of results from the Amherst College Digital Collection.

The results of this search yield thumbnail photos of the manuscript shapes, and include all of the Amherst Collection unless you narrow your terms beforehand. This search returns 22 matches, with only seven of them belonging to the Dickinson collection. What we lose in full-text searchability with this site, we seem to gain in visualizing what each match looks like. We are also not given a transcription option like the Harvard collection provides, and therefore no “official” way to read the text.

We are given the recto and verso images for each manuscript pieces, and therefore an idea of how the whole piece of paper was used (or not).<sup>105</sup>

---

Amherst College Digital Collections > Archives & Special Collections  
Amherst College Digital Collections > Emily Dickinson Collection



**Creator** Dickinson, Emily, 1830-1886  
**Recipient** Lord, Otis P., (Otis Phillips), 1812-1884  
**Contributor** Amherst College. Class of 1832. Lord  
**First Line** A group of students passed the house  
**Identifier** Amherst Manuscript # 743  
**Identifier** Johnson Letters # Prose fragment 19  
**Notes** It is uncertain if Otis Phillips Lord was the recipient of this prose fragment.  
**Physical** 1 sheet (fragment)  
**Description**  
**Languages** English  
**Place of Creation** Amherst (Mass.)  
**Subject** Dickinson, Emily, 1830-1886 – Manuscripts  
**Subject** Poets, American – 19th century – Manuscripts  
**Access and Use** Amherst College provides this item to support research and scholarship. Amherst College can neither grant nor deny permission to publish or quote from materials in its collections. Neither titles nor facts can be copyrighted; therefore, permission is not required to cite a collection as a source or to use facts from it.  
**Part of** Emily Dickinson Collection  
**Repository** Amherst College Archives & Special Collections  
**Shelf Location** Box 9 Folder 24

Figure 29: Screenshot detail of A743. Note the “notes” section questions the fragment’s history as a Lord Letter.

---

<sup>105</sup> This is especially useful when the fragments are pieces of reused paper like chocolate wrappers or advertisements.

The Amherst collection's organizational methodology (there is no official statement on the site) seems to privilege the manuscript document over the edition they would someday make up. The scholar with access to the Variorum can piece together the relationships these manuscripts share with printed poems, and the scholar who wishes to look at the work separate from the publication may attend to the material and visual features the pieces offer. However, just as it seems strange to look at the printed poems without knowledge of the manuscripts, it seems similarly misguided to not take into consideration the poems in which these pieces have been printed. As we saw in earlier chapters, taking the manuscripts completely out of the book overlooks the idea that the manuscripts were organized and collected in order to be placed in books. An archive that does not give a publishing history alongside the manuscripts is removing them from a crucial part of their history. Gains that are made in visual access are lost with the historical context surrounding the works. Even if the manuscripts are not sorted or tagged with this information, at least an informational statement about their publication history might help the less informed scholar confront the images. Here, access to scholarship is revealed to be as crucial as access to the materials themselves.



*In Possibility*

Although it seems impossible to create perfect archival structures for these objects, both digital archives neglect elements of the manuscripts and their histories.<sup>106</sup> They are a disappointment under the terms that this dissertation has set out to investigate: those of the very boundaries that guide our reading from manuscript collection to their editing and publication. As initial digital interventions into this body of work, they are providing a new generation of readers and researchers with much more material to analyze, appreciate, and understand. But, they are also a reminder to all digital humanities projects that the medium of the digital should seek to alleviate problems beyond access. And, as creative innovation in digital technology is more widespread in humanities research, I cannot help but wonder what else is possible if we begin thinking about how to present these materials in spaces not dominated by pages, bindings, and typeface.

New Media theorist and practitioner Sharon Daniel puts Foucault's subject position in the collaborative author construct into conversation with Bakhtin's notion of the dialogue to read histories as circulating discourse through networks of shared information. She likens this collaborative relationship to the structure of a database and suggests that the aesthetics of the database can help us read, theorize and conceptualize multivocal—yet authorless—narratives.<sup>107</sup> As I bring my discussion about

---

<sup>106</sup> Neither archive gives us any idea of the size of these documents, which seems to be a major oversight. They also do not seem to be color corrected, as images from the same pieces of paper turn out different shades of yellow-white when scanned in.

<sup>107</sup> See Daniel "The Database: an Aesthetics of Dignity" in *Database Aesthetics*

Dickinson's materials to a close, I would like to imagine what a digital collection would look like if informed by Daniel's notions of reimagining the way data is organized.

Quite simply, the way we have organized data until relatively recently has been dictated by physical archives and the codex form. Daniel, like the post-colonial theorists of the archive in the second chapter, reminds us that these social constructions place boundaries on what is thought, imagined, seen and read.

With the entirety of the collection scanned and encoded, a digital Dickinson could perhaps finally be at play in the archive. Set free from the initial organization, able to sit atop a touch screen desktop and be manipulated by the scholars hands to create new kinds of ordering, new connections can be made between the poems. Or, perhaps the scholar does not want to think about these pieces of paper as poems at all. Equipped with the knowledge that they have been published as poems, she can produce a digital visualization of the works that highlights their visual elements over the poetic. I myself have had many ideas for the perfect archive, some of which were realized in the two new digital archives. But as I've learned more about the construction of the poems by larger institutional and social forces, I am convinced that this history must also somehow be present in a digital Dickinson, as a reminder that these troubles will never be completely erased. This dissertation's title "Bound—a Trouble" is such a reminder, on one hand that we as readers of this work are always bound to the troubles it will bring to our reading and understanding, and on another that binding the work in any concrete structure will do damage to it. Dickinson's work

as an unsettled archive will evade all attempts to normalize, organize, and collect. The best we can hope to do is imagine conceptions of the author, the poem, the book and the edition to be flexible enough to allow these complications and contradictions to be exposed and to exist.

## **Works Cited**

- “A New Daguerrotype of Emily Dickinson?” Web. *Dickinson Electronic Archives*. March 2013.
- Arondekar, Anjali. “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. v. 14 n. 1/2. 2005.
- Benjamin, Walter. “On the Method of Knowledge, Theory of Progress.” *The Arcades Project*. Harvard University Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire.” *Selected Writings, v.4*. Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Bianchi, Martha Dickinson. *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Houghton, 1929.
- Bingham, Millicent Todd. *Emily Dickinson’s Home*. Harper, 1955
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Emily Dickinson: A Revelation*. Harper, 1954.
- Bloch, Susi. “Marcel Duchamp’s Green Box.” *Art Journal*. v.34n.1, Autumn 1974.
- Blouin, Frances X. and Rosenbuerg, William G. ed. *Archives, Documentation and Insitutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Burton, Antoinette. *Dwelling in the Archive*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Burke, Frank G. *Research and the Manuscript Tradition*. Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 1997.
- Cameron, Sharon. *Choosing Not Choosing*. Chicago University Press, 1993.
- Chavrat, William. *Literary Publishing in America*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1959.
- Cornell, Joseph. *Centuries of June*. Web. Film. *Dailymotion.com*. July 2012. (1955)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Letter to Jay Leyda. TS. New York University Tamiment Labor Archives.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Toward the Blue Peninsula." Web. *The Artchive*. March, 2012.
- Cull, Ryan. "Beyond the Cheated Eye: Dickinson's Lyric Sociality." *Nineteenth Century Literature*. v65n1, June 2010.
- D'Harnoncourt, Anne and Kynaston McShine eds. *Marcel Duchamp*. exhibition catalogue, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973.
- Daniel, Sharon. "The Database: an Aesthetics of Dignity." *Database Aesthetics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever*. The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Word Processor." *Paper Machine*. Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Dickinson, Emily. A 90-1. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 94-2. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A94-2. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 127. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 254. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 255. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 297. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 298. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 450. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A 450a. MS. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- \_\_\_\_\_. BPL 84a. MS. Boston Public Library. Thomas Higginson Collection.
- \_\_\_\_\_. BPL 84b. MS. Boston Public Library. Thomas Higginson Collection.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Poems by Emily Dickinson, edited by two of her friends, Mabel Loomis Todd and T.W. Higginson.* Roberts Brothers, 1890.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Poems by Emily Dickinson Second Series, edited by two of her friends, Mabel Loomis Todd and T.W. Higginson.* Roberts Brothers, 1891.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers (124)." Web. *Poets.org* March, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers (216)." Web. *Poets.org*. March, 2014.

Dickinson, Emily and Mabel Loomis Todd. *Bolts of Melody: New Poems of Emily Dickinson.* ed. Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham. New York and London, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1945.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Letters of Emily Dickinson.* ed. Mabel Loomis Todd. Roberts Brothers, 1894.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Poems of Emily Dickinson.* ed. Mabel Loomis Todd. Roberts Brothers, 1896.

Dickinson, Emily and Martha Dickinson Bianchi. *The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime by Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Boston, Little and Brown Company, 1914.

Dickinson, Emily, Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson. *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Little, Brown. 1936.

Dickinson, Emily and R.W. Franklin. *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson.* Edited by R. W. Franklin. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Variorum Edition).* Edited by R.W. Franklin. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: the Reading Edition.* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

Dickinson, Emily and Thomas Johnson. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Edited by Thomas Johnson. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1955.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts*. Edited by Thomas Johnson. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson: Including variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts*. Edited by Thomas Johnson. 3 vols. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958.
- Dickinson Electronic Archives*. Web. Eds. Martha Nell Smith, Marta Werner, Jessica Beard and Julie Esner. Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, University of Virginia, 2014.
- The Emily Dickinson Archive*. Web. Harvard University, 2014.
- The Emily Dickinson Collection*. Web. Amherst College Digital Collection. Amherst College, 2014.
- Emily Dickinson Papers 1862-1907*. Web. Boston Public Library. June, 2010.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" trans. Jay Leyda. *Film Form*. Harcourt, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Collision of Ideas." *Film: a Montage of Theories*. ed. Richard Dyer MacCann. Dutton, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "More Thoughts on Structure" *Film Essays and a Lecture*. trans. Jay Leyda. Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "New Poetry." *The Dial*. October, 1840.
- duBois, Page. *Sappho is Burning*. Chicago University Press, 1988.
- Duchamp, Marcel. "A Window Into Something Else." *Dialogues With Marcel Duchamp*. ed. Pierre Cabanne. DaCapo Press, 1967.
- Duchamp, Marcel and Richard Hamilton, Ecke Bonk. *In the Infinitive: a Typotranslation of Marcel Duchamp's White Box*. The Typosophic Society, 1999.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" trans. Jay Leyda. *Film Form*. Harcourt, 1949.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Collision of Ideas." *Film: a Montage of Theories*. ed. Richard Dyer MacCann. Dutton, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "More Thoughts on Structure" *Film Essays and a Lecture*. trans. Jay Leyda. Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "New Poetry." *The Dial*. October, 1840.
- Essays in Honor of Jay Leyda*. *October Magazine* v.11. MIT Press, 1979
- Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. The New Press, 1998.
- Franklin, Ralph W. *The Editing of Emily Dickinson: A Reconsideration*. Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- Fuss, Diana. *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them*. Routledge, 2004.
- Greetham, D.C.. *Textual Scholarship*. Garland Reference Library for the Humanities, 1994.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Architecture from the Outside." *Architecture from the Outside*. MIT Press, 2001.
- Hart, Ellen and Smith Martha Nell. *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. Paris Press, 1998.
- Higginson, Thomas. "Emily Dickinson's Letters." Web. *The Atlantic Monthly*. Oct, 1891.
- Howe, Susan. "The Art of Poetry No. 97: An interview." *The Paris Review*. Winter, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *My Emily Dickinson*. North Atlantic Press, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sorting Facts, or Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker." *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film*. Ed. Charles Warren. Wesleyan University Press, 1996.



- \_\_\_\_\_. "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values." *The Birth-mark: unsettling the wilderness in American Literary History*. Wesleyan University Press, 1993.
- Humphries, Thomas. "Making Memories in Early America." *Reviews in American History*. Johns Hopkins University Press. v.33n1, March 2005.
- James, Henry. *The Aspern Papers*. Dover Press, 2001.
- Jackson, Virginia. *Dickinson's Misery*. Princeton University Press, 2005
- Johnson, Thomas. *Emily Dickinson: an Interpretive Biography*. Harvard University Press, 1955.
- Kamuf, Peggy. "Deconstruction and Love." *Book of Addresses*. Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Kelly, Micheal. "Digital Dickinson." Web. *The Consecrated Eminence*. Amherst College Special Collections Blog, Robert Frost Library. April, 2013.
- King, Katherine Ruth. *Canons Without Innocence: Academic Practices and Feminist Practices Making the Poem in the Work of Emily Dickinson and Audre Lorde*. Unpublished Dissertation, 1987.
- Leyda, Jay. "A House to be Born In: an essay in biography." *Themes and Directions in American Literature*. Purdue University, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Bronx Morning*. Web. Film. *Dailymotion.com*. March 2014. (1931)
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Late Thaw of a Frozen Image." Web. *The New Republic*, February 21, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Melville Log*. Harcourt Brace, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modest Petrovich Musorgsky in Letters and Documents*. W.W. Norton, 1947.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*. Yale University Press, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Unpaginated Notes in MS and TS. The Emily Dickinson Collection. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Kavanaugh*. College and University Press, 1965.

- Matthiessen, F.O.. *The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. Oxford University Press, 1941.
- McKenzie, D.F.. *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Merewether, Charles. "Art and the Archive." *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*. MIT Press, 2006.
- Miller, Christianne. *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.
- Mitchell, Domnhall. *Measures of Possibility: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.
- Mudge, Jean McClure. *Emily Dickinson and the Idea of Home*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1975
- Murray, Aife. *Maid as Muse*. University of New Hampshire Press, 2009.
- Patterson, Rebecca. *Dickinson's Riddle*. Houghton, 1951.
- Porter, David. "Assembling a poet and her poems: convergent limit-works of Joseph Cornell and Emily Dickinson." *Word and Image*. v.10.n. 3, September, 1994.
- Rice, Grantland. *The Transformation of Authorship in America*. Chicago University Press, 2000.
- Scheussler, Jennifer. "Enigmatic Dickinson Revealed Online." Web. *The New York Times*, October 22, 2013.
- Smith, Martha Nell. *Rowing in Eden: Re-Reading Emily Dickinson*. University of Texas Press, 1992.
- Smith, Martha Nell and Ellen Louise Hart. *Open Me Carefully*. Paris Press, 1998.
- Socarides, Alexandra. *Dickinson Unbound*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Spieker, Sven. *The Big Archive*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 2008.
- Stabile, Susan. *Memory's Daughters*. Cornell University Press, 2008.

Stoler, Ann Laura. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form." *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*. ed. Francis X Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006.

*The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*. ed. Wendy Martin. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

*The Consecrated Eminence*. Web. Amherst College Frost Library Special Collections

"The Poetry Foundation: History and Mission." Web. *Poets.org*. March, 2014.

"Timeline of Art History" Web. New York Museum of Art.

Todd, Mabel Loomis. "Emily Dickinson's Literary Debut." *Harper's Magazine*, March 1930.

Tompkins, Calvin. *Duchamp: A Biography*. Holt Press, 1998.

Webster, Noah. *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828). Foundation for American Christian Education, 2000.

Werner, Marta. "Most Arrows': Autonomy and Intertextuality in Dickinson's Late Fragments." *Text* V. 10, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing*. University of Michigan, 1995.

Werner, Marta and Jen Bervin. *Emily Dickinson's Gorgeous Nothings*. New Directions, 2013.