

EMILY DICKINSON

1830 – 1886

Emily Dickinson wrote in a letter to a friend that “Biography first convinces us of the fleeing of the Biographied—.” And indeed, as several generations of critics and biographers have approached this enigmatic poet’s work and life, the poet herself remains elusive, though legends about her abound. Widely considered one of America’s greatest writers, Dickinson has attracted a dedicated and passionate readership, as well as worldwide critical acclaim. Working entirely in compact poetic forms, she left us close to 1,800 poems, among which are some of the most incisive and psychologically powerful lyrics in English on the subjects of death, love, nature, and religion.



Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born in Amherst, in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts, on 10 December 1830, and for most of her life she continued to live with her family in an Amherst mansion called the Homestead. She was the second of three children to Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson. Edward Dickinson was a locally prominent lawyer and politician, who entered the United States House of Representatives in 1853. He was also a pious man who regularly read to his children from the Bible; Dickinson later said of him that “his heart was pure and terrible, and I think no other like it exists.” Dickinson’s mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, came from a family that valued education for women, and she herself studied the sciences intently while at school. She suffered ill health throughout her life, and seems to have been emotionally distant; Dickinson said to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1870 that she “never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled.”

In 1840, Dickinson and her sister Lavinia were both enrolled at Amherst Academy, a converted boys’ school with progressive educational ideals; here they studied subjects such as botany, chemistry, languages, and art, and attended lectures by visiting academics. By all accounts Dickinson was an engaged scholar, respected for her sense of humor and the strength of her intellect; she was also passionate about music and enjoyed dancing. In 1847, she began her secondary education at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, where there was more emphasis on religious faith. Dickinson, who had not been baptized and who even at a young age maintained her distance from the established Puritanism of her community, publicly upheld her nonconformity. A fellow student, Clara Turner, remembered a day when the director of the school “asked all those who wanted to be Christians to rise.” Dickinson remained in her seat and said to Clara: “They thought it queer I didn’t rise—I thought a lie would be queerer.” For reasons that remain somewhat unclear but that likely had to do with ill health, Dickinson left Mount Holyoke after a year, returning home in 1848.

In her time at school, Dickinson had developed several significant and intense friendships with both men and women. While at Amherst Academy, she became close to Leonard Humphrey, the principal of the school, who nurtured her love of reading. He was the first of a series of older male friends that Dickinson would refer to variously as “Tutor” or “Preceptor.” The second was an attorney, Benjamin Franklin Newton, who worked with her father, and who introduced her to the works of William Wordsworth, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Lydia Maria Child. In the late 1840s, Dickinson met Susan Gilbert (later Susan Gilbert Dickinson), who was to become a life-long friend and eventually sister-in-law; the two formed a close bond and carried on a passionate correspondence; their letters have been interpreted by some later scholars as evidence of a romantic relationship. Dickinson wrote at least ninety-four poems to Susan, who—intelligent, sensitive, and open-minded—became very dear to the poet.

Dickinson’s early life was also repeatedly marked by tragic loss. Her cousin and friend, Sophia Holland, died of typhus fever in 1844, and Dickinson’s grief and ensuing depression were so deep that she

was sent to Boston to recover. In May 1848, another friend, Jacob Holt, died, and two years later, Leonard Humphrey died of a brain aneurysm at the age of twenty-five. Three years later, Benjamin Newton died of tuberculosis, when he was thirty-two. These were deep emotional blows to Dickinson, whose sensibility was marked by this series of young deaths; her poetry returns to the themes of death, loss, and separation: “Parting is all we know of heaven / And all we need of hell.”

When Dickinson returned home from school, she felt acutely the contrast between the relative freedom of school life and the constrictions of a home life in which a young woman was expected to devote her time to domestic duties. As she wrote to her friend Abiah Root in 1850, “God keep me from what they call households.” Dickinson nonetheless took on many of these duties—and continued to do so throughout her life. She was a dedicated and gifted gardener; she baked the family desserts and bread; and she took care of her often-ailing mother. Dickinson also took steps, however, to secure some hours to herself, and she began in 1849 to write poetry. She refused to accept many of the social demands typically placed on the women of a prominent family like hers, withdrawing from the custom of “visiting” and receiving visitors; she saw only her family and closest friends.

Her need to preserve freedom may also have had a good deal to do with her decision not to marry. She wrote to Susan in 1852 about the merits of a single life: “How dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold, and who gathers pearls every evening; but to the *wife*, Susie, sometimes the *wife forgotten*, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world.” Dickinson’s choice to remain single did not mean that she lived without passionate attachments, however. She had intense relationships with both men and women throughout her life, mainly carried on through written correspondence (with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, Benjamin Newton, and Susan Dickinson, among others). It is not clear to what degree these relationships were sexual, but it is abundantly clear that they could be passionate—and that, as the poet Adrienne Rich put it, Dickinson “was attracted by and interested in” men and women “whose minds had something to offer her.”

In 1850 the Great Revival swept through Amherst, and Dickinson’s father, sister, and many of her friends joined the local Congregationalist Church and declared themselves “for Christ.” Dickinson did not join the church, as she had trouble accepting some of the tenets of the Congregationalist faith—particularly those surrounding predestination and hell. As she began to write more and more poetry, Dickinson often voiced religious concerns, but her spirituality was individual; she refused to adhere to a prescribed form of Christianity. In a letter to Jane Humphrey in 1850, she wrote: “Christ is calling everyone here, all my companions have answered ... and I am standing alone in rebellion, and growing very careless. ... I can’t tell you *what* they have found, but *they* think it is something precious. I wonder if it *is*?”

At the Homestead, Dickinson continued to read widely in British and American literature, particularly the novelists and poets of her own century. She was also fond of the early modern poets—especially of William Shakespeare, of whose works she wrote to a friend, “Why is any other book needed?” Dickinson’s own verse carries echoes of all these sources—as well as of the King James Bible, to whose rhetorical structures and poetic language she had been thoroughly introduced as a child.

However much she drew on literary traditions, Dickinson’s own use of language, and the poetic forms she shaped, are unique. Most of her poetry is loosely organized according to stanzaic and metrical forms commonly used in Christian hymns—forms with relatively short rhymed lines, typically grouped in four-line stanzas. But Dickinson experiments with and transforms these traditional structures, using enjambment, imperfect and suspended rhymes, iconoclastic punctuation, and unusual word order to disrupt expectations and present compressed thoughts and feelings in extraordinarily suggestive ways.

Over the course of the 1850s the group of friends with whom Dickinson corresponded grew into something of a literary network. During her lifetime this was the primary audience for her poems, a quarter of which she sent to her friends in letters—letters which often also included reflections in prose that could be almost as cryptically expressive and fascinating as the poems themselves. “A letter,” she wrote, “always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend.”

In the 1850s, Dickinson began to write to several correspondents from the literary world; these included two editors of the abolitionist newspaper *Springfield Republican*, Samuel Bowles and Josiah Holland. Bowles published seven of her lyrics in his paper, smoothing out a good deal of what he saw

as Dickinson's idiosyncratic punctuation, rhymes, line breaks, and rhythms—a practice her other early editors also followed. Dickinson does not appear to have made any attempt to prevent such publication, and there is evidence in her letters with Susan that the two young women were looking forward to seeing "Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers" in print. In other letters and poems, however, such as "A Narrow fellow in the Grass" (1863) and "Publication—is the Auction" (1865), the speaker expresses highly ambivalent views toward the ideas of publicity and fame.

Dickinson's most prolific period of writing began in the late 1850s and continued to the mid-1860s, by which time she had written over a thousand poems. In 1858, she began making fair copies, organizing the poems into groups later called "fascicles," which she sewed together by hand. In the spring of 1862, Dickinson read an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* by the literary critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Wanting an educated opinion on her work, she sent him four poems, asking if her poetry "breathed." This letter prompted the beginning of a correspondence with Higginson that would last until Dickinson's death. Though he offered her some criticism and some poetic advice, Higginson greatly admired the poetry and was sensitive to the power of her personality; he became a great support to her (she later told him that he had saved her life by responding to her query). Though she wrote to him in the language of a student to her teacher, she maintained a confident independence about her work; rarely if ever did she take his advice. For his part, Higginson may have suggested regularizing a good deal of her grammar and punctuation, but he described her poetry as "woven out of the heart's own atoms," and later acknowledged that "when a thought takes one's breath away, a lesson in grammar seems an impertinence."

In the early 1860s, Dickinson's reclusiveness increased, as did her creativity and poetic output. Her poems became even more experimental and dynamic, and she began increasingly to add variants to her manuscripts—alternative word choices that she wrote down in footnotes or in marginalia, allowing for at times radically different readings to coexist within a given poem. Scholars have noted that her most productive period coincided with the Civil War. She wrote in a letter that "Sorrow seems more general than it did, and not the estate of a few persons, since the war began; and if the anguish of others helped one with one's own, now would be many medicines...."

The loss of Dickinson's father in 1874 caused prolonged grief, as her letters attest. "I dream about father every night," she wrote, "always a different dream, and forget what I am doing daytimes, wondering where he is. Without any body, I keep thinking, What kind can that be?" Her mother had a stroke the following year and broke her hip, and Dickinson became the primary caregiver until her mother's death in 1882. After a period of increasing ill health, Dickinson herself died on 15 May 1886, of kidney disease; she was buried beside her parents in Amherst.

The story of how the bulk of Dickinson's poems first saw publication after her death is complicated by a family disagreement. It began with the arrival in Amherst of David Todd, an astronomy professor, and his talented wife, Mabel Loomis Todd, in 1881. Dickinson's brother Austin and his wife, Susan Dickinson, both befriended Mabel. Dickinson also took an interest in her, albeit from afar: she would listen to Mabel sing and speak to her through a door, but the two never met. (Mabel, however, took a deep interest in Dickinson, and felt assured of her poetic genius.) The web of friendship frayed, however, when Austin and Mabel fell in love; the two began an affair that lasted for the remainder of Austin's life. After Dickinson's death, her sister Lavinia found a large cache of poems in Emily's chest of drawers; Lavinia eventually gave these to Mabel Todd to prepare for publication. Susan Dickinson, meanwhile, had a separate collection of poems and letters that Emily had given her over the course of their lifetime of friendship. The ensuing feud between Susan and Mabel over Dickinson's legacy continued down through their daughters' generation.

Mabel Todd, together with Higginson, edited the first two editions of Dickinson's verse, *Poems* (1890) and *Poems* (1891); these editions did not include any of the material from Susan Dickinson's collection. Todd and Higginson added titles to the poems, grouped them thematically—Dickinson did not title or number her work—and standardized much of her grammar and punctuation, with the intent of making the poetry more accessible. Their interventions received considerable censure in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; the uncomplicated view that Helen McNeil expressed in the introduction to her 1986 edition—that Dickinson's "works were mangled by editors"—was widely shared. More recent

scholarship has been less censorious and more alive to historical context—alive both to the extent that Dickinson's approach to poetry was ahead of her time, and to the sort of reception that her work would likely have received in the late nineteenth century had it been published with her manuscript capitalization, punctuation, and grammar intact. Even in Todd and Higginson's "cleaned up" versions, Dickinson's style met with a hostile reception from not a few critics; the reviewer for the popular *Scribner's Monthly*, for example, complained of her "neglect of form" and her "perverseness and eccentricity," while the famous British critic Andrew Lang was more caustic, writing in the *Daily News* that Dickinson "reminds us of no sane nor educated writer." Other critics were far more positive, however. The reviewer for the *New York Commercial Advertiser* termed Dickinson "the poet in quintessence," and in *Harper's*, William Dean Howells (perhaps the leading American arbiter of literary taste during the period) praised her "short, quick impulses of intense feeling or poignant thought," and concluded that her "strange poetry" constituted "a distinctive addition to the literature of the world." The poems were popular with the public as well—particularly among female readers; eleven editions were issued by the end of 1892.

After Susan Dickinson's death, her daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, decided to publish the Dickinson poems and letters that had been in her mother's possession, under the title *The Single Hound* (1914). This volume sparked another surge of interest in Dickinson's poetry, one that launched her as a proto-modernist. In a review of *The Single Hound*, Harriet Monroe called Dickinson "an unconscious and uncatalogued Imagiste." This marked a moment in the history of Dickinson criticism when scholars began situating the poet within larger intellectual contexts—in relation not only to New England Transcendentalism and Puritanism, but also to international movements such as Imagism, the early-twentieth-century literary movement that valued concision, clarity, and formal experimentation. Modernist critics also placed Dickinson within the tradition of seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets such as Henry Vaughan and John Donne. By the early 1920s, Dickinson was firmly established as a significant American poet. In Conrad Aiken's introduction to *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1924), he describes her poetry as "perhaps the finest, by a woman, in the English language." Interestingly, however, Dickinson remained marginalized in many conventional narratives of the development of American literature; neither the 1924 *Short History of American Literature* nor the 1925 *Literary History of America* include any mention of her at all.

In 1955, the scholar Thomas H. Johnson collected all the Dickinson poems and letters that were, at that time, known to exist; his edition presented the poems for the first time in an approximation of their original state, and in an attempt at chronological order. Johnson's edition sparked renewed interest in her poetry—and that interest has never let up in the intervening decades. Scholars in the 1960s focused largely on thematic and linguistic concerns, those in the 1970s largely on feminist and psychoanalytic readings. Scholars continued as well to research her life and build her biography, as well as to consider her within wider nineteenth-century contexts. In 1998 came another major editorial achievement, Ralph Franklin's edition of the poems, which offered a more reliable order and chronology than had that of Johnson (Franklin was able to trace, from watermarks and pinholes, the original order of poems in Dickinson's fascicles). In 2013, the online open-access Emily Dickinson Archive was launched, allowing all interested readers and scholars to engage with images of the manuscripts. And in 2016, Crisanne Miller published a ground-breaking new edition, *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*, presenting all the poems in Dickinson's canon as they were copied down—those that were sewn into her forty fascicles, and those that she had kept in draft form.

In the twenty-first century, critical approaches to Dickinson have emphasized the materiality of her manuscripts and probed into the history of her various editors, with a focus on gender politics. Critics have also been considering Dickinson's poetry from the perspectives of ecocriticism, animal studies, queer theory, disability studies, race studies, and digital humanities. Dickinson's influence on American and world literatures has been profound. Readers, poets, and critics alike return to Dickinson for her ability to push the boundaries of language and poetic form, and for her articulation of a vision of human experience that is unique in its suggestive power, its compressed emotion, and its ability to prompt questions. As Dickinson biographer Richard B. Sewall has put it, "We still are not quite sure of her. We ask and ask."

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS: As do the editors of almost all anthologies, we make an exception in the case of Emily Dickinson to several of our usual practices. It is by this time a commonplace to acknowledge that Dickinson's style is so idiosyncratic as to make it entirely appropriate to suspend an anthology's conventions regarding modernizing or regularizing punctuation, and capitalization—as we have done in these pages. We have also suspended the anthology's conventions regarding the dating of works; our normal practice is to foreground the date of first publication of each work; in Dickinson's case it is for obvious reasons the date of composition that appears after each poem.

The texts printed in these pages are based on the handwritten manuscripts themselves, in the facsimile form in which the Emily Dickinson Archive, in cooperation with the Houghton Library at Harvard University (and other institutions holding the manuscripts), now makes the vast majority of Dickinson's manuscript versions available to the general public. (Like all editors—and all readers of Dickinson—we are greatly in their debt for the opportunity to experience her manuscripts directly.)

In preparing the texts of the poems included in this anthology we have also consulted the three major editions that are based directly on the manuscripts: Thomas H. Johnson's *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955); R.W. Franklin's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1998); and Cristanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (2016). In many cases where the transcriptions of these editors differ from one another, we provide information in the notes as to those differences, often indicating our reasoning in siding with one editor over another or—in a very few cases—in offering a reading different from those of any of the three.

We also in these pages provide examples of the manuscripts themselves in facsimile form. As those examples show very clearly, *any* transcription of Dickinson's poems into a printed form entails judgment calls as to what constitutes a dash and what a period; as to whether or not a letter is capitalized; as to where line breaks occur, and so on. Following Johnson, Franklin, and Miller, we standardize all marks perceived to be dashes (Johnson standardizes using an em dash; we, like Franklin and Miller, employ a spaced en dash). But as all editors acknowledge—and as anyone reading the manuscripts for themselves can plainly see—those marks in a substantial number of poems¹ vary very widely indeed. Some are high in the line, some in the middle, some well below the line; some are very long and emphatically rendered, others are so short as to make it difficult to be sure if they are intended as dashes or as periods. A great many marks—especially at the ends of lines—have a downwards left to right slant to them, and are distinctly below the line. Miller conjectures that, “like many of her contemporaries, [Dickinson] probably quite often wrote elongated periods—in a kind of rolling stop. She may also have written commas both high within her row of script and slanting right rather than left.” Miller nevertheless decides not to “thoroughly revise earlier interpretations of these marks.” Such decisions are entirely defensible; they have the merit of simplicity, and do not risk confusing readers who have, over the decades since the publication of Johnson's edition, become familiar with the convention of representing a wide variety of Dickinson's marks in the same way. (For that very reason we have maintained the “one-size dash” convention in the transcriptions found in these pages.) But such decisions implicitly concede that print transcriptions of Dickinson's handwritten manuscripts inevitably entail a good deal of interpretation. The reality is that it is simply not known, for example, whether Dickinson intended a mark that resembles a right-slanting comma to be read as some form of dash, as a comma, or as a mark with some other, special meaning. In recognition of these realities, we have also, in the case of a small number of the poems presented in these pages, presented alternative transcriptions alongside the conventional ones. (As part of the anthology's website component we present several more such alternative transcriptions.)

In the case of several poems, we have also provided examples of early editing practice; this anthology's two column format allows us conveniently to place different versions side by side, providing a convenient portfolio for the purposes of comparison.

In these pages we order the poems chronologically, taking the lead of Johnson and Franklin (and drawing as well on the scholarship of Miller). As one other part of the website component of this anthology, however, we present one complete fascicle—Fascicle 13—for the benefit of those who wish to study a group of Dickinson's poems “as she preserved them,” to use Miller's phrase. Miller's edition has many merits, not the least of which is the degree to which it encourages scholars, students, and readers generally, to think of Dickinson afresh; we hope that the various ways in which Dickinson is presented in these pages will, in much more modest fashion, serve a similar end.



¹ Much as the transcription issues are of considerable interest and real significance, it is important too to make clear that they are not ubiquitous. A poem such as “These are the days when Birds come back” is in this respect not typical. Indeed, a great many of Dickinson's poems present few transcription issues, or none at all; all editors are in agreement as to what is capitalized, what is a dash and what is a comma, etc.

[*It's all I have to bring today* —]¹

It's all I have to bring today —
 This, and my heart beside —
 This, and my heart, and all the fields —
 And all the meadows wide —
 5 Be sure you count — sh'd I forget
 Some one the sum could tell² —
 This, and my heart, and all the Bees
 Which in the Clover dwell.
 —1858

[*I never lost as much but twice* —]³

I never lost as much but⁴ twice —
 And that was in the sod.
 Twice have I stood a beggar
 Before the door of God!
 5 Angels — twice descending
 Reimbursed my store —
 Burglar! Banker — Father!
 I am poor once more!
 —1858

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 26; in Franklin as Poem 17; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 1, page 38. The present text is in complete accord with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller; the marks after “fields” and after “count,” however, could plausibly be transcribed as right-slanting commas.

² *the sum could tell* I.e., it would be reflected in the total number.

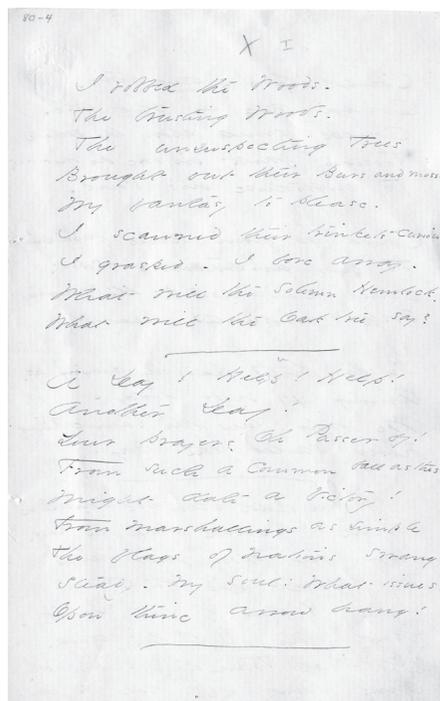
³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 49; in Franklin as Poem 39; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 3, page 57. There are no transcription issues.

It is worth noting that Sheets 3 and 4 of this fascicle are made up of poems composed in 1858, whereas the fascicle's first two sheets are made up of poems dating from 1859.

⁴ *but* Except.

[*I robbed the woods* —]⁵

I robbed the Woods —
 The trusting Woods —
 The unsuspecting Trees
 Brought out their
 5 Burs⁶ and mosses
 My fantasy to please.
 I scanned their trinkets curious —
 I grasped — I bore away —
 What will the solemn Hemlock⁷ —
 10 What will the Oak tree say?
 —1859



⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 41; in Franklin as Poem 57; and in Miller as the fourth poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 2, page 47. The present text is in agreement with Johnson in reading the mark at the end of the sixth line as a period, but in agreement with Franklin and Miller in reading the mark at the end of line 2 as a dash. The marks at the ends of lines 7, 8, and 9 could all plausibly be transcribed as right-slanting commas. A facsimile of the manuscript appears above.

⁶ *Burs* Acorns from the bur oak tree.

⁷ *Hemlock* The reference is to the North American hemlock pine, not to the poisonous plant of the same name.

[*Success is counted sweetest*]¹

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

5 Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag² today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated – dying –
10 On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!
—1859

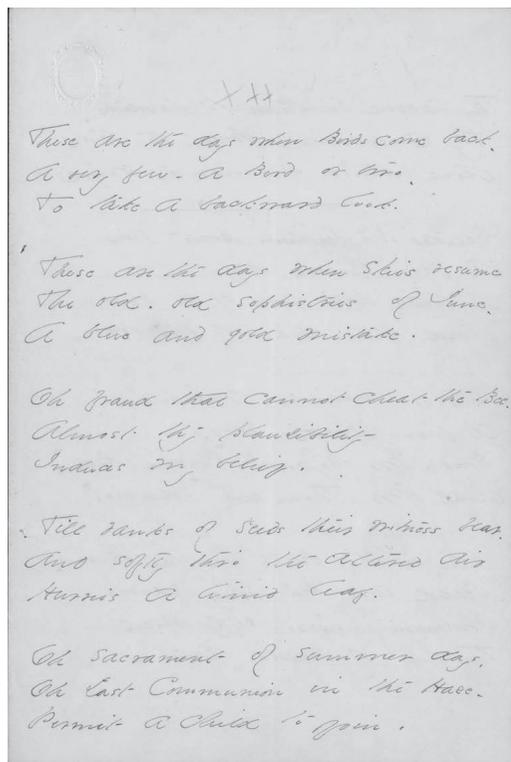
SUCCESS.

SUCCESS is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a Nectar
Requires the sorest need.
Not one of all the Purple Host
Who took the flag to-day,
Can tell the definition,
So plain, of Victory,
As he defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Break, agonizing clear.

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 67; in Franklin as Poem 112; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 1 of Fascicle 5, page 69. The present transcription is in complete agreement with those of all three of these editors. The fascicle version probably dates from the summer of 1859; variant manuscript versions (in which the poem is not divided into stanzas) were sent to Susan Dickinson in 1859 and to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in July of 1862. The poem was first published in the *Brooklyn Daily Union*, 27 April 1862; that version (the source of which is presumed to have been a now-lost manuscript copy) was reprinted in 1878 in the anthology *A Masque of Poets*. Higginson and Todd made slight revisions for *Poems* (1890); this is the poem that opens that volume.

² *took the Flag* Won the battle.

[*These are the days when Birds come back* ,]¹



¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 130; in Franklin as Poem 122; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 6, pages 81–82. The fascicle manuscript is the only manuscript version extant.

This poem is a good example of how difficult it is to transcribe Dickinson's manuscript writings into print with complete confidence. Karen Dandurand (the scholar who, in the 1980s, discovered that three poems had been published in *Drum Beat* in the 1860s) has fairly suggested of this poem that "most of the marks rendered by Johnson as dashes look as much, or more, like commas angled downward to the right, or like indeterminate dots." But subsequent editors have in this case followed Johnson; Franklin and Miller diverge from Johnson only in how they reproduce the mark at the end of one line ("Permit a child to join"), which Johnson prints as a period, Franklin prints as a dash, and Miller prints as a comma.

A facsimile of the first page of the 1859 manuscript version appears to the left. In the next column we offer a transcription that endeavors to present the marks more-or-less as they appear in the manuscript. In the third column a conventional transcription is provided, with the right-slanting marks interpreted as dashes. The fourth column prints the text as it was published (from a now-lost manuscript) in *Drum Beat*, 11 March 1864.

A version of the poem was included in Todd and Higginson's *Poems* (1890) under the title "Indian Summer."

[*These are the days when Birds come back* ,]

These are the days when Birds come back ,
A very few – a Bird or two ,
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume
5 The old . old sophistries² of June ,
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee.
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief,

10 Till ranks of seeds their witness bear –
And softly thro' the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion³ in the Haze ,
15 Permit a child to join,

Thy sacred emblems to partake ,
Thy consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!

—1859

² *sophistries* Deceptive reasonings.

³ *Last Communion* Christian sacrament administered to the dying; the recipient eats bread and drinks wine in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. The ritual is thought to bind the departing soul with Christ and thus with the promise of eternal life.

[*These are the days when Birds come back —*]

These are the days when Birds come back —
A very few — a Bird or two —
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume
5 The old — old sophistries of June —
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee,
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief,

10 Till ranks of seeds their witness bear —
And softly thro' the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion in the Haze —
15 Permit a child to join —

Thy sacred emblems to partake —
Thy consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!
—1859

[*October*]

These are the days when birds come back,
A very few, a bird or two,
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume
5 The old, old sophistries of June,—
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh, fraud that cannot cheat the bee!
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief,

10 Till ranks of seeds their witness bear,
And softly, through the altered air,
Hurries a timid leaf.

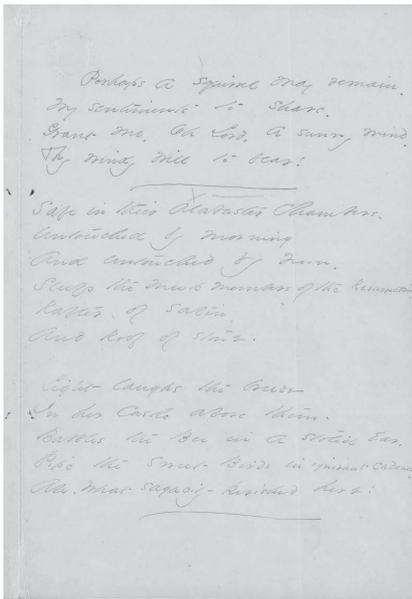
Oh, sacrament of summer days,
Oh last communion in the haze,
15 Permit a child to join!

Thy sacred emblems to partake,
Thy consecrated bread to take,
And thine immortal wine!
—1864

[*Safe in their Alabaster Chambers*—]¹

Safe in their Alabaster² Chambers –
 Untouched by Morning
 And untouched by Noon –
 Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection³ –
 5 Rafter of satin,
 And Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
 In her Castle above them –
 Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
 10 Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence –
 Ah, what sagacity perished here!
 —1859 VERSION

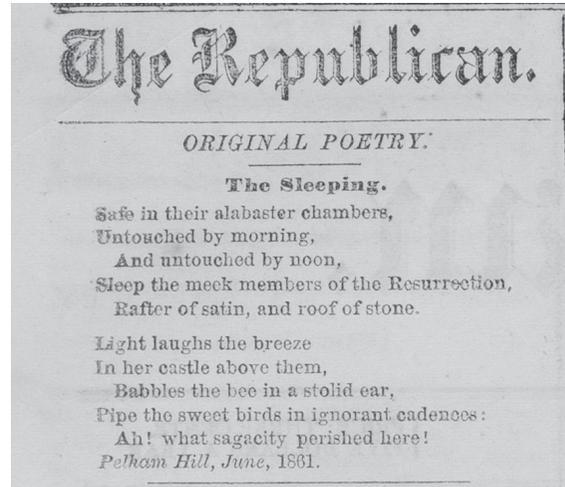


¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 216; in Franklin as Poem 124; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 6, page 83 [the 1859 version] and also as the third poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 10, page 122 [the 1861 version]. The present transcription is in agreement with those of Franklin and Miller—though it is worth noting that the marks at the ends of lines 1, 3, and 4 may plausibly be read as right-slanting commas rather than dashes.

A variant of this 1859 version was published (with the title “The Sleeping”) in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, 1 March 1862.

² *Alabaster* Smooth, translucent white stone, frequently used for carving and statuary.

³ *members of the Resurrection* I.e., the dead; those awaiting Judgment Day and the resurrection of the body.

[*Safe in their Alabaster Chambers*,]⁴

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,
 Untouched by Morning –
 And untouched by Noon –
 Lie the meek members of the Resurrection –
 5 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 Doges⁵ – surrender –
 10 Soundless as dots – on a Disc of snow –
 —1861 VERSION

⁴ This 1861 version of the poem appears in Johnson as a variant of Poem 216; in Franklin as a variant of Poem 124; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 10, page 122. The present transcription of the 1861 fascicle manuscript is in agreement with those of Franklin and Miller, except in two particulars: with Franklin, we read “Chambers” in line 1 as upper case; and, with Miller, we read “Noon” in line 3 as upper case. (Both can plausibly be read either way.)

An additional 1861 trial version of the second stanza is available under the heading *Dickinson's Personal Correspondence*, page 11, in the online component of this anthology.

⁵ *Doges* Magistrates holding high civil office in the Venetian Republic from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries; the republic of Genoa also had a similar office.

[*Besides the Autumn poets sing*]¹

Besides² the Autumn poets sing
A few prosaic days
A little this side of the snow
And that side of the Haze.

5 A few incisive mornings –
A few Ascetic³ eyes –
Gone – Mr Bryant’s “Golden Rod” –
And Mr Thomson’s “sheaves.”⁴

10 Still, is the bustle in the Brook –
Sealed are the spicy valves⁵ –
Mesmeric fingers softly touch
The eyes of many Elves –

Perhaps a squirrel may remain –
My sentiments to share –
15 Grant me, Oh Lord, a sunny mind –
Thy windy will to bear!
—1859

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 131; in Franklin as Poem 123; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 6, page 82. The present transcription has been made according to conventional principles and, except for reading the mark after “Haze” as a period, is in accord with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller (all of whom print the poem with a dash after “Gone” in line 7, and with dashes at the ends of lines 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, and 15). These marks could all plausibly be read differently, however—the mark after “Gone” as a period; and the other marks as right-slanting commas. An alternative transcription appears in the website component of this anthology.

The poem appears in Todd and Higginson’s *Poems* (1891) as Poem 49; they assign to it the title “November.”

² *Besides* In addition to, beyond.

³ *Ascetic* Austere, self-denying; Christian Ascetics withdrew from society and practiced abstinence and fasting, adhering to rigorous schedules of work and prayer.

⁴ *Mr Bryant’s “Golden Rod”* See “The Death of the Flowers,” line 15, by American poet William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878); *Mr Thomson’s “sheaves”* See “Autumn,” a section of the longer work *The Seasons*, by Scottish poet James Thomson (1700–48), lines 168 and 180.

⁵ *spicy valves* I.e., flowers or seed pods that open or split like valves or doors; may refer more specifically to the “valves” of the flower’s nectaries (which release scent as well as nectar).

[*All overgrown by cunning moss,*]⁶

All overgrown by cunning⁷ moss,
All interspersed with – weed,
The little cage of “Currer Bell”
In quiet “Haworth” laid.⁸

5 This Bird — observing others
When frosts too sharp became
Retire to other latitudes –
Quietly did the same –

10 But differed in returning –
Since Yorkshire hills are green –
Yet not in all the nests I meet –
Can Nightingale⁹ be seen –

Or –
Gathered from many wanderings –
15 Gethsemane¹⁰ can tell

⁶ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 148; in Franklin as Poem 146; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 1, Fascicle 7, pages 86–87. The poem exists in only one manuscript version; at the end of the third stanza Dickinson writes “Or –” on a separate line, and then provides two more stanzas as alternatives. The poem is thus frequently printed including only the first three stanzas—although some editions have printed it as a three-stanza poem with Dickinson’s alternative stanzas substituted for stanzas 2 and 3.

The transcription provided here is in agreement with those of Franklin and Miller except in one particular; the present editors read the mark between “with” and “weed” in line 2 as a dash, whereas Franklin and Miller have presumably read the mark between the two words as the cross from the “t” in “with.” Dickinson certainly often places the crosses for her “t”s well beyond where the letter itself appears, but rarely so far forward as here—and rarely so low.

⁷ *cunning* Skillful and crafty, as well as quaint, attractive.

⁸ *Currer Bell* Pseudonym of English novelist and poet Charlotte Brontë (1816–55); *Haworth* Name of the parsonage where the Brontë family lived in Yorkshire, England (the graveyard attached to the church was directly adjacent to the parsonage house).

⁹ *Nightingale* Migratory thrush whose beautiful, haunting song and habit of night-time singing have led to a symbolic association with poets and singers.

¹⁰ *Gethsemane* Garden in Jerusalem where Christ prayed and endured agony of mind before his arrest and crucifixion.

Thro' what transporting anguish
She reached the Asphodel!¹

[*Title divine – is mine!*]⁴

Soft fall the sounds of Eden
Upon her puzzled ear –
20 Oh what an afternoon for Heaven,
When “Bronte” entered there!
—1860

[*I’m “wife” – I’ve finished that –*]²

I’m “wife” – I’ve finished that –
That other state –
I’m Czar³ – I’m “Woman” now –
It’s safer so –

5 How odd the Girl’s life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse –
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven – now –

This being comfort – then
10 That other kind – was pain –
But why compare?
I’m “Wife”! Stop there!
—1861

Title divine – is mine!
The Wife – without the Sign!
Acute Degree – conferred on me –
Empress of Calvary!⁵
5 Royal – all but the Crown!
Betrothed – without the swoon
God sends us Women –
When you – hold – Garnet to Garnet –
Gold – to Gold –
10 Born – Bridalled⁶ – Shrouded –
In a Day –
Tri Victory
“My Husband” – women say –
Stroking the Melody –
15 Is this – the way?
—c. 1861

¹ *Asphodel* In Greek mythology, this white flower covers the Elysian Fields, where heroes and virtuous souls rested after death.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 199; in Franklin as Poem 225; and in Miller as the fourth poem in Sheet 6, Fascicle 9, pages 112–13. There are few transcription issues—though the “dash” following “kind” in line 10 arguably might be better represented by a dot than a line of any length.

Todd and Higginson included the poem under the title “Apocalypse” in their edition of *Poems* (1890); aside from differences in punctuation, the version there includes two word changes in the second stanza; “feels” to “seems” and “folks” to “those.”

³ *Czar* Title of the emperor of Russia.

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1072; in Franklin as Poem 194; and in Miller under “Poems Not Retained” on page 701. The poem exists in two manuscript versions (one to Samuel Bowles, the other to Susan Dickinson), both sent by Dickinson as letters, and both including this message following the poem itself: “Here’s what I had to ‘tell you’ –you will tell no other: – Honor – is its own pawn.” (Dickinson uses the “Honor is its own pawn” appeal in her 16 April 1862 letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson.)

One line appears only in the version sent to Susan Dickinson; the Bowles version does not include the line “Tri Victory.” In the Bowles version (but not in the Susan Dickinson) the word “this” in the final line is underlined. The present transcription is from the Susan Dickinson letter; Miller transcribes from the Bowles letter, while both Johnson (in *Final Harvest*) and Franklin (in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*) offer a composite version, including the “Tri Victory” line from the Susan Dickinson version and the underlining of “this” from the Bowles version.

An alternative transcription (in which this mark , is used for “dashes” that have the form of right-slanting commas) appears in the website component of this anthology.

⁵ *Calvary* Place where Christ was crucified.

⁶ *Bridalled* I.e., married (with a pun on “bridled”).

[*Faith is a fine invention*]¹

Faith is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who *see*.
But *Microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency!
—1861

[“*Faith*” is a fine invention]

“Faith” is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who see!
But *Microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency!
—1861

[*Some keep the Sabbath going to Church* –]²

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –
I keep it, staying at Home –
With a *Bobolink*³ for a Chorister –
And an Orchard, for a Dome –

5 Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice⁴ –
I just wear my Wings –
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton⁵ – sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman –
10 And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last –
I’m going, all along.
—1861

¹ The earliest extant version of this poem is that which appears in a letter to Samuel Bowles (dating probably from late 1860 or early 1861):

Dear Mr Bowles
Thank you.
“Faith” is a fine invention
When Gentlemen can see –
But *Microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency.

You spoke of the “East.” I have thought about it this winter.
Don’t you think you and I should be shrewder, to take the
Mountain Road?

That Bareheaded life – under the grass – worries one like a wasp.
The Rose is for Mary.
Emily.

Dickinson included a revised version of the poem in Fascicle 10 (printed first above), and included a slightly different version in Fascicle 12 the next year (also printed above). The standard editions take different approaches to the poem: Johnson prints a transcription of the 1860 Bowles letter version as Poem 185; Franklin prints a transcription of the Fascicle 12 version as Poem 202; and Miller prints both fascicle versions (Fascicle 10, Sheet 1, page 119; Fascicle 12, Sheet 1, page 137), while noting in a footnote the existence of the Bowles letter version. Miller reads the punctuation at the end of the second line of the Fascicle 10 version as a dash; in other respects the present transcriptions are in accord with hers.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 324; in Franklin as Poem 236; and in Miller as the final poem of Fascicle 9, Sheet 7, page 115. In their one-volume editions, both Johnson and Franklin print the version that Dickinson sent to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in July of 1861; that version is also used as the base text here. Miller prints the fascicle version (believed to date from the spring of 1861).

The poem was published (from a now-lost manuscript copy) in *Round Table*, 12 March 1864, under the title “My Sabbath,” and was published by Todd and Higginson in *Poems* (1890) under the title “A Service of Song.” As was standard practice when Dickinson’s poems were published in her lifetime, capitalization, and punctuation were regularized; this resulted in the removal of most of the dashes—but also in the addition of one dash (both the *Round Table* version and the *Poems* [1890] version add a comma after “preaches” in line 9).

An alternative transcription (in which this mark , is used for marks that have the form of right-slanting commas) appears in the website component of this anthology; the “dashes” at the ends of lines 2, 3, and 6 take this form, and the mark after “Heaven” is represented as a dot in the middle of the line rather than a dash.

³ *Bobolink* North American songbird with a cheerful, tinkling song; its black and white plumage gives the bird a clerical look.

⁴ *Surplice* Type of vestment worn by ministers, choristers, and other church officials.

⁵ *Sexton* Caretaker of a church who traditionally rang the church bells.

[*The Lamp burns sure – within –*]¹

The Lamp burns sure – within –
 Tho' Serfs² – supply the Oil –
 It matters not the busy Wick –
 At her phosphoric³ toil!

- 5 The Slave – forgets – to fill –
 The Lamp – burns golden – on –
 Unconscious that the oil is out –
 As that the Slave – is gone.
 —1861

[*I came to buy a smile – today –*]⁴

I came to buy a smile – today –
 But just a single smile –
 The smallest one upon your cheek
 Will suit me just as well –

- 5 The one that no one else would miss
 It shone so very small –
 I'm pleading at the counter – sir –
 Could you afford to sell?

I've Diamonds – on my fingers –
 10 You know what Diamonds are!
 I've Rubies – like the Evening Blood –
 And Topaz – like the star!
 'Twould be a bargain for a Jew!⁵
 Say – may I have it – Sir?

—1861

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 233; in Franklin as Poem 247; and in Miller as the fourth poem in Sheet 1 of Fascicle 10, page 117. The present text is in complete accord with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller; the mark at the end of line 3, however, could plausibly be transcribed as a right-slanting comma.

² *Serf* Person in servitude; slave.

³ *phosphoric* Phosphorescent, glowing in the dark.

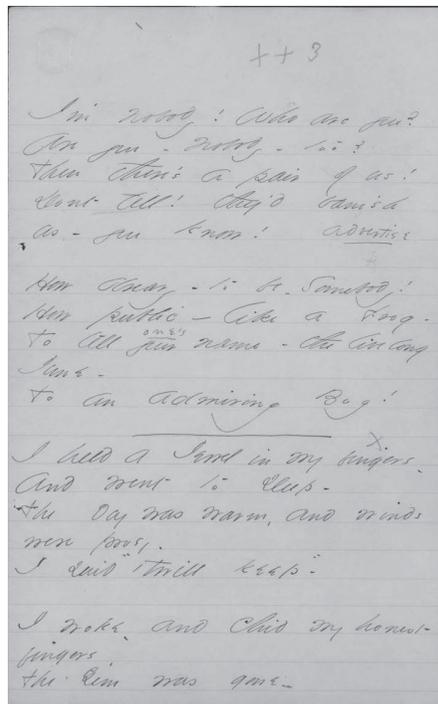
⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 223; in Franklin as Poem 258; and in Miller as the only poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 11, page 127. The present text is in agreement with Franklin and Miller regarding the punctuation of the poem, and with Miller in emending “upon” to “upon” in line 3.

⁵ *'Twould ... Jew* I.e., you would get a good deal (Dickinson is referring to the racist stereotype that Jewish people get the better of others in financial dealings).

[*I'm Nobody! Who are you?*]⁶

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
 Are you – Nobody – too?
 Then there's a pair of us!
 Don't tell! they'd banish us – you know!

- 5 How dreary – to be – Somebody!
 How public – like a Frog –
 To tell your name – the livelong June –
 To an admiring Bog!
 —1861



⁶ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 288; in Franklin as Poem 260; and in Miller as part of Fascicle 11, Sheet 4, page 128. The poem was printed by Todd and Higginson in *Poems* (1891), with “Don’t tell” printed at the end of the third line rather than the beginning of the fourth. There is only one manuscript version extant; transcriptions of the fourth line vary. The present editors follow Johnson in emending “Dont” to “Don’t,” while printing “they’d” in lower case; Franklin transcribes the line as-is (“Dont ... they’d”), while Miller emends “Dont” to “Don’t” and capitalizes “They’d.”

Dickinson provides two variant word choices in the manuscript: “advertise” for “banish” in line 4, and “one’s” for “your” in line 7.

A facsimile of the manuscript appears above.

x 2

Wild nights - Wild nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild nights - should be
 Our canopy!

Fatall - the winds -
 To a heart in boat -
 Come with the Compass -
 Come with the Chast -!

Rising in Eden -
 Ah! the Sea!
 Night - " but - Dawn -
 Tonight -
 In thee!

[*Wild nights – Wild nights!*]¹

Wild nights – Wild nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild nights should² be
 Our luxury!

5 Futile – the winds –
 To a Heart in port –
 Done with the Compass –
 Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden –
 10 Ah – the Sea!
 Might I but moor – tonight –
 In thee!
 —1861

[*Wild nights – Wild nights!*]

Wild nights – Wild nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild nights should be
 Our luxury!

5 Futile – the winds –
 To a Heart in port –
 Done with the Compass –
 Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden –
 10 Ah! the Sea!
 Might I but moor –
 Tonight –
 In thee!
 —1861

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 249; in Franklin as Poem 269; and in Miller as part of Fascicle 11, Sheet 8, page 133. Here we present first a facsimile of the only manuscript version (see the previous page). Next is a conventional transcription of the poem, according to the principles followed by both Franklin and Miller—with the mark after “Ah” interpreted as a dash, and with “tonight” interpreted as the final word of the eleventh line, written in lower case. The next column presents an alternative transcription, with the mark after “Ah” interpreted as an exclamation mark missing its dot, and “Tonight” read as a capitalized word, forming a line on its own. Given that Dickinson capitalized with great frequency, and that she did not generally indent so as to make it clear if a word at the beginning of a line was intended to be carried over from the previous line or to begin a new line, other readings seem possible as well. Johnson reads the mark after “Ah” as a comma and capitalizes “Tonight,” while keeping it as part of the eleventh line.

Todd and Higginson include the poem in their edition of *Poems*, second series (1891), with “To-night” capitalized and printed at the beginning of the twelfth line rather than at the end of the eleventh; their version is reproduced here in the third column.

² *should* Would.

[*Wild nights – Wild nights!*]

Wild nights! Wild nights!
Were I with thee,
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

5 Futile the winds
To a heart in port,
Done with the compass,
Done with the chart.

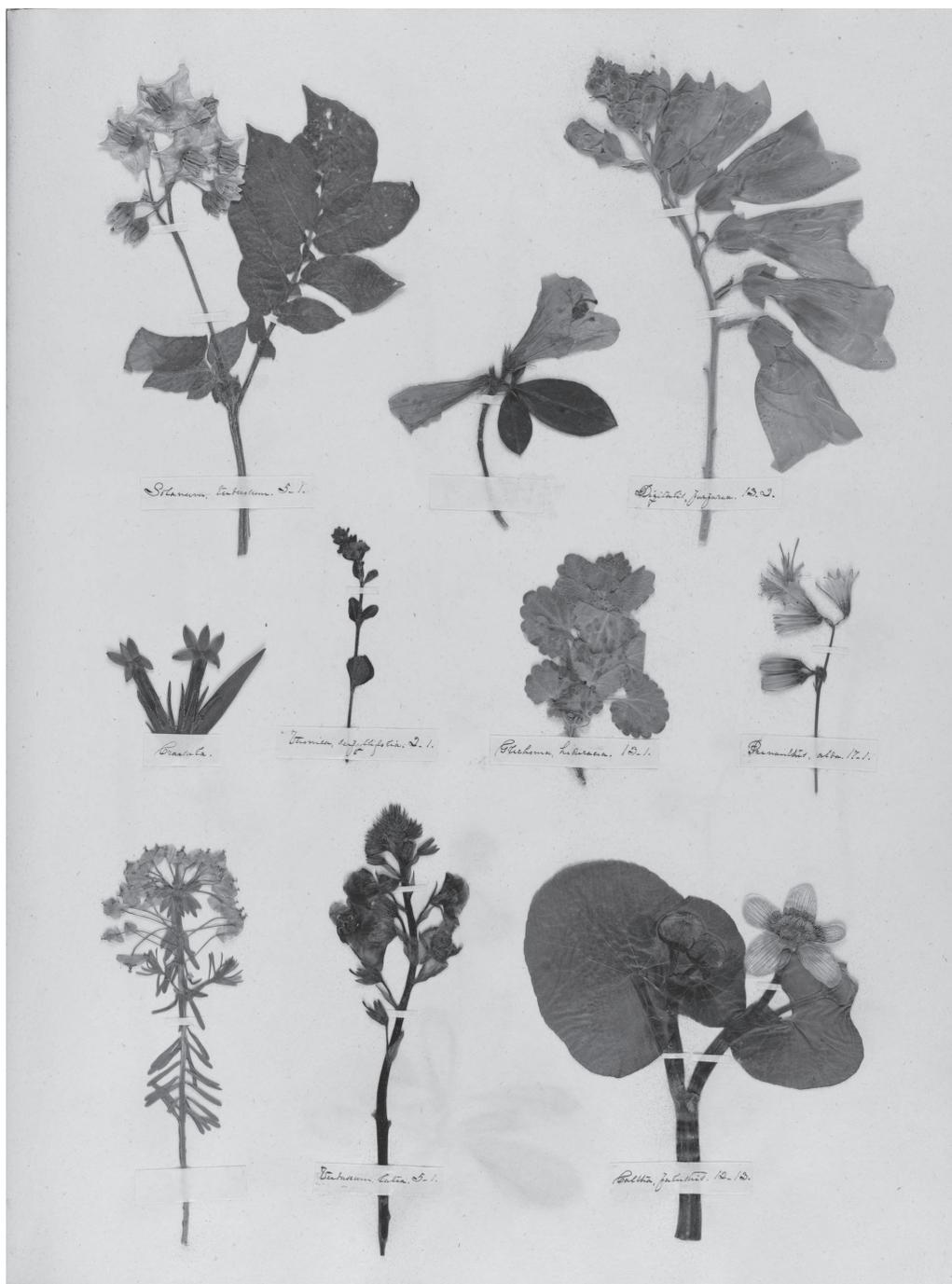
Rowing in Eden!
10 Ah! the sea!
Might I but moor
To-night in thee!
—1891

[*Over the fence –*]¹

Over the fence –
Strawberries – grow –
Over the fence –
I could climb – if I tried, I know –
5 Berries are nice!

But – if I stained my Apron –
God would certainly scold!
Oh, dear, – I guess if He were a Boy –
He'd – climb – if He could!
—1861

1 This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 251; in Franklin as Poem 271; and in Miller as the last poem of Fascicle 11, page 134. The present transcription is in agreement with those of all three; it is worth noting, however, that the marks on either side of “dear” could plausibly be read as single quotation marks rather than commas—and that the following mark could easily be read as a comma rather than a dash.



Between around 1839 and 1846, Dickinson kept a detailed herbarium consisting of over sixty pages of flowers labeled with their Latin names and carefully pressed into a clothbound book. The flowers on this page include *Solanum tuberosum* (the potato flower), *Veronica serpyllifolia* (thyme-leaved speedwell), and *Digitalis purpurea* (common foxglove).

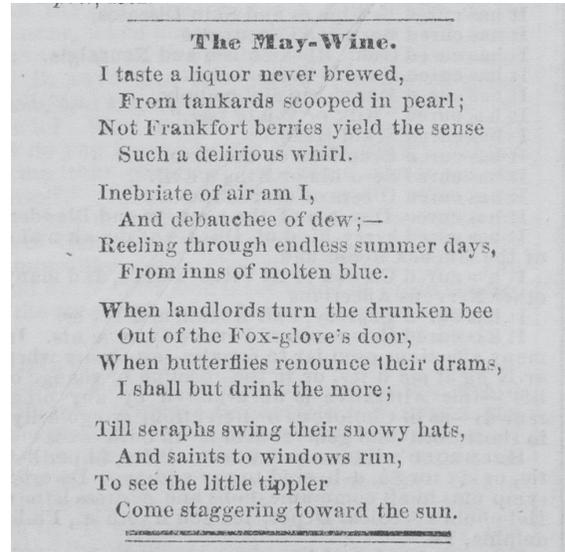
[*I taste a liquor never brewed* –]¹

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries²
Yield such an alcohol!

5 Inebriate of air – am I –
And Debauchee of Dew –
Reeling, thro' endless summer days,
From inns of molten Blue –

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
10 Out of the foxglove's door –
When Butterflies – renounce their "drams"³ –
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs⁴ swing their snowy Hats –
And Saints – to windows run –
15 To see the little Tippler
From Manzanilla⁵ come!
—1861



¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 214; in Franklin as Poem 207; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 1 of Fascicle 12, page 135 [the 1859 version] and also as the third poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 10, pages 122–23 [the 1861 version]. The fascicle manuscript is the only manuscript version extant. Dickinson provides two variant readings: "Vats upon the Rhine" for "Frankfort Berries" and "Leaning against the – Sun –" as an alternative last line (Franklin adopts the variant last line in his *Poems of Emily Dickinson*). The present transcription is in agreement with those of Franklin and Miller, except in one particular; we read the small mark at the end of line 7 (which resembles a right-slanting comma) as a comma rather than a dash.

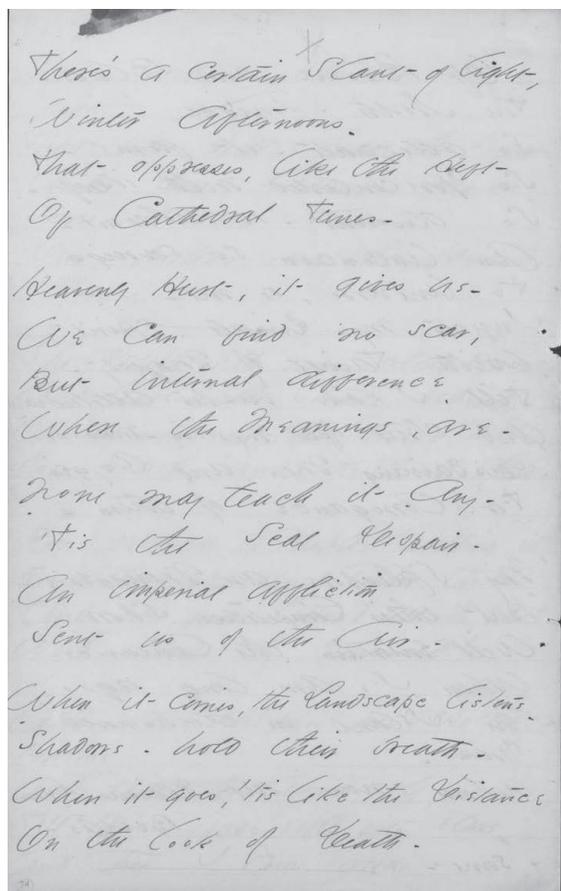
A variant of this poem (from a now-lost manuscript copy, with a different last line) was published in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, 4 May 1861, under the title "The May-Wine."

² *Frankfort Berries* Grapes grown in Germany's Rhine Valley.

³ *drams* Small cups of liquor or wine.

⁴ *Seraphs* Angels.

⁵ *Tippler* Habitual drinker, but not a full-fledged alcoholic;
Manzanilla Spanish sherry.



[*There's a certain Slant of light,*]¹

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

5 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference –
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
10 'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
15 When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –
—1862

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 258; in Franklin as Poem 320; and in Miller as the fourth poem in Sheet 3, Fascicle 13, page 153. A facsimile of the only manuscript version extant appears to the left. Above is a conventional transcription of the poem following the principles established by Johnson, Franklin, and Miller; both Franklin and Miller read the poem as having thirteen dashes. (Johnson reads the mark after “difference” as a comma; in other respects his transcription is identical to those of Franklin and Miller.) The left column on the following page offers an alternative transcription, with this mark , used to designate punctuation that takes a form resembling a right-slanting comma.

Todd and Higginson edited the poem for their edition of *Poems* (1890), with “weight” replacing “heft” in line 3, and with only one dash; that version is reproduced on the following page in the far right column.

[*There's a certain Slant of light,*]

There's a certain Slant of light,
 Winter Afternoons ,
 That oppresses, like the Heft
 Of Cathedral Tunes –

5 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
 We can find no scar,
 But internal difference ,
 Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it , Any –
 10 'Tis the Seal Despair –
 An imperial affliction
 Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens ,
 Shadows – hold their breath –
 15 When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
 On the look of Death –
 —1862

[*There's a certain Slant of light,*]

There's a certain slant of light,
 On winter afternoons,
 That oppresses, like the weight
 Of cathedral tunes.

5 Heavenly hurt it gives us;
 We can find no scar,
 But internal difference
 Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
 10 'Tis the seal, despair, –
 An imperial affliction
 Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
 Shadows hold their breath;
 15 When it goes, 't is like the distance
 On the look of death.
 —1890

[*“Hope” is the thing with feathers –*]¹

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

5 And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land
10 And on the strangest Sea –
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me.
—1862

[*Your Riches – taught me – Poverty.*]²

Your Riches – taught me – Poverty.
Myself – a Millionaire
In little Wealths, as Girls could boast
Till broad as Buenos Ayre³ –

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 254; in Franklin as Poem 314; and in Miller within Fascicle 13, Sheet 2, page 150. All three of those editors punctuate the poem identically, as have the editors of this anthology—which is an entirely defensible reading, though alternative readings are certainly possible in lines 6, 11, and 12, and perhaps line 4 as well.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 299; in Franklin as Poem 418; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 5 of Fascicle 14, pages 165–66. The present text is in agreement with Johnson, Franklin, and Miller regarding the punctuation of the fascicle manuscript of the poem, and with Franklin and Miller in transcribing the “m” in “mine” in line 23 and the “S” in “school” in the poem’s final line as lower case rather than capital letters. The marks at the ends of lines 4, 18, 21, and 22 could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas.

This poem was originally sent as a letter to Dickinson’s sister-in-law and dear friend, Susan Huntington Dickinson. “Dear Sue” was inscribed above the poem, and following it was a simple note: “Dear Sue – You see I remember. Emily.” Dickinson also copied the poem into Fascicle 14 and sent a copy to Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

³ *Buenos Ayre* Buenos Aires, here representing the wealth of South America, whose mines of gems and silver had been much

5 You drifted your Dominions –
A Different Peru –
And I esteemed All Poverty
For Life’s Estate with you –

Of Mines, I little know – myself –
10 But just the names, of Gems –
The Colors of the Commonest –
And scarce of Diadems –

So much, that did I meet the Queen –
Her Glory I should know –
15 But this, must be a different Wealth –
To miss it – beggars so –

I’m sure ’tis India – all Day –
To those who look on You –
Without a stint – without a blame,
20 Might I – but be the Jew⁴ –

I’m sure it is Golconda⁵ –
Beyond my power to deem –
To have a smile for Mine – each Day,
How better, than a Gem!

25 At least, it solaces to know
That there exists – a Gold –
Altho’ I prove it, just in time
It’s distance – to behold –

It’s far – far Treasure to surmise –
30 And estimate the Pearl –
That slipped my simple⁶ fingers through –
While just a Girl at school.
—1862

discussed in American periodicals during this period; the other place names of this poem, “Peru” and “India,” share this association with riches and splendor and were considered sources of exotic luxuries.

⁴ *Jew* Stereotypes in Dickinson’s day often depicted Jewish people as merchants of precious gems.

⁵ *Golconda* Region in India known for its diamond mines.

⁶ *simple* Innocent, foolish.

[*I found the words to every thought*]¹

I found the words to every thought
 I ever had – but One –
 And that – defies me –
 As a Hand did try to chalk² the Sun

- 5 To Races – nurtured in the Dark –
 How would your own – begin?
 Can Blaze be shown in Cochineal³ –
 Or Noon – in Mazarin?⁴
 —1862

[*I like a look of Agony,*]⁵

I like a look of Agony,
 Because I know it's true –
 Men do not sham Convulsion,
 Nor simulate, a Throe –

- 5 The eyes glaze once – and that is Death –
 Impossible to feign
 The Beads upon the Forehead
 By homely Anguish strung.
 —1862

[*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,*]⁶

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
 And Mourners to and fro
 Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
 That Sense⁷ was breaking through –

- 5 And when they all were seated,
 A Service, like a Drum –
 Kept beating – beating –
 till I thought My Mind was going numb

And then I heard them lift a Box
 10 And creak across my Soul
 With those same Boots of Lead, again,
 Then Space – began to toll,

- As all the Heavens were a Bell,
 And Being, but an Ear,
 15 And I, and Silence, some strange Race
 Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
 And I dropped down, and down –
 And hit a World, at every plunge,
 20 And Finished knowing – then –
 —1862

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 581; in Franklin as Poem 436; and in Miller as the last poem in Sheet 5 of Fascicle 15, page 175. Dickinson provides two variant word choices in the fascicle manuscript: “phrase” for “words” in line 1; and “done” for “shown” in line 7.

² *chalk* Sketch, but also “make pale” or whiten.

³ *Cochineal* Lustrous scarlet color, made from a dye composed of the desiccated bodies of an insect, the *coccus cacti*, commonly found in Mexico.

⁴ *Mazarin* Deep shade of blue.

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 339; in Franklin as Poem 241; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 16, page 179. All three transcribe the poem in the same way—as is done here.

⁶ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 280; in Franklin as Poem 340; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 16, page 179. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem; the mark at the end of line 6 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma, and the mark at the end of line 8 as a period. Dickinson provides two variant word choices in the manuscript: “Crash” for “plunge” in line 19, and “Got through” for “Finished” in line 20. The poem was first published by Todd and Higginson in *Poems* (1896), with the final stanza omitted and numerous smaller changes.

⁷ *Sense* Meaning, but also sensory perception, consciousness.

[*It was not Death, for I stood up,*]¹

It was not Death, for I stood up,
And all the Dead, lie down –
It was not Night, for all the Bells
Put Out their Tongues, for Noon.

5 It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
I felt Siroccos² – crawl –
Nor Fire – for just my Marble feet
Could keep a Chancel,³ cool –

And yet, it tasted, like them all,
10 The Figures I have seen
Set orderly, for Burial,
Reminded me, of mine –

As if my life were shaven,
And fitted to a frame,
15 And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like Midnight, some –

When everything that ticked – has stopped –
And Space stares, all around,
Or Grisly frosts – first Autumn morns,
20 Repeal the Beating Ground –

But, most, like Chaos – Stopless – cool –
Without a Chance, or Spar⁴ –
Or even a Report of Land –
To justify – Despair.
—1862

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 510; in Franklin as Poem 355; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 17, pages 187–88. There is only one manuscript version extant; two alternative readings are written in the margins: “Knees” for “Flesh” in line 5, and “two” for “my” in line 7. Other than in line 18, the transcription here is in accord with the three standard editions. Miller and Johnson both transcribe the punctuation in line 18 as two dashes, while Franklin reads the line as having a dash at the end and no punctuation after “stares.” In the manuscript the marks that appear after “stares” and after “around” are similar—both shaped like right-slanting commas.

² *Siroccos* Hot, dry winds from North Africa that sweep across the Mediterranean to Southern Europe.

³ *Chancel* Section of a church where the services are performed.

⁴ *Spar* Piece of timber, often used for supportive wooden structures on a ship, such as masts, booms, or gaffs.

[*A Bird came down the Walk* –]⁵

A Bird came down the Walk –
He did not know I saw.
He bit an Angleworm⁶ in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

5 And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass –
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass –

He glanced with rapid eyes
10 That hurried all around –
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought –
He stirred his Velvet Head ,

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
15 And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home –

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver⁷ for a seam –
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
20 Leap, plashless as they swim.
—1862

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 328; in Franklin as Poem 359; and in Miller as the third and last poem in Sheet 5 of Fascicle 17, pages 189–90. There are two manuscript versions extant, both evidently from 1862; the punctuation of the two differs in several respects, beginning with the comma that appears after “Bird” in the first line of the version that both Franklin and Miller take as their primary copy text. The present text is (like that in Johnson’s edition) transcribed from the variant manuscript; the transcriptions are identical except for the punctuation at the end of the second line, which Johnson reads as a dash. It is one of several points of uncertainty; several of the other dashes could well be read as right-slanting commas.

Another now-lost manuscript version was sent to Higginson, who printed the full poem in his October 1891 *Atlantic Monthly* article on Dickinson (see the website component of this anthology); Todd and Dickinson edited the poem for *Poems* (1890), giving it the title “In the Garden.”

⁶ *Angleworm* Earthworm (like those used by “anglers,” or fishers).

⁷ *silver* Glistening and in motion, like quicksilver (mercury), as well as silver in color. Dickinson describes the ocean in similar terms elsewhere, for example as an “everywhere of silver.”

[*I know that He exists.*]¹

I know that He exists.
Somewhere – in Silence –
He has hid his rare life
From our gross eyes.

5 'Tis an instant's play.
'Tis a fond Ambush –
Just to make Bliss
Earn her own surprise!

10 But – should the play
Prove piercing earnest –
Should the glee – glaze –
In Death's – stiff – stare –

15 Would not the fun
Look too expensive!
Would not the jest –
Have crawled too far!
—1862

[*After great pain, a formal feeling comes*]²

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before?'

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 338; in Franklin as Poem 365; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 18, pages 193–94. There is one manuscript version extant, with little disagreement over the transcription. The present text agrees with Johnson in transcribing the mark at the end of line 5 as a period; both Franklin and Miller transcribe it as a dash.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 341; in Franklin as Poem 372; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 18, page 198. The manuscript transcriptions by Franklin and Miller diverge in several respects from that by Johnson—most notably in that Johnson does not transcribe the quotation marks, and ignores the manuscript marks regarding the ordering of the lines in the second stanza. The present text agrees with those of Franklin and of Miller in every particular; it may be worth noting, however, that the mark at the end of line 7 could perhaps more plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma than as a dash, and that the mark after "First" in the last line appears to be a dot rather than a dash.

5 The Feet, mechanical, go round –
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

10 This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –
—1862

[*This World is not conclusion.*]³

This World is not conclusion.
A Species⁴ stands beyond –
Invisible, as Music –
But positive, as Sound –
5 It beckons, and it baffles –
Philosophy, don't know –
And through a Riddle, at the last –
Sagacity, must go –
To guess it, puzzles scholars –
10 To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown –
Faith slips – and laughs, and rallies –
Blushes, if any see –
15 Plucks at a twig of Evidence –
And asks a Vane,⁵ the way –

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 501; in Franklin as Poem 373; and in Miller as the fourth poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 18, pages 198–99. There are several alternatives indicated in the manuscript: "sequel" for "Species" in line 2; "prove" for "guess" in line 9; "Sure" for "Strong" in line 18; and "Mouse" for "Tooth" in line 19. The transcriptions by Johnson, Franklin, and Miller are in agreement except in one particular; Franklin does not emend "dont" to "don't" in line 6. The present text agrees with those of Franklin and of Miller; it is worth noting, however, that several of the marks at the ends of lines could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas, and at least two others as periods.

⁴ *Species* Metaphysical ideal or vision.

⁵ *Vane* Weather-vane.

Much Gesture, from the Pulpit –
 Strong Hallelujahs roll –
 Narcotics cannot still the – Tooth
 20 That nibbles at the soul –
 —1862

[*I like to see it lap the Miles* –]¹

I like to see it lap the Miles –
 And lick the Valleys up –
 And stop to feed itself at Tanks² –
 And then – prodigious step
 5 Around a Pile of Mountains –
 And supercilious peer
 In Shanties – by the sides of Roads –
 And then a Quarry pare

To fit its sides
 10 And crawl between
 Complaining all the while
 In horrid – hooting stanza –
 Then chase itself down Hill –

And neigh like Boanerges³ –
 15 Then – prompter than a Star
 Stop – docile and omnipotent
 At its own stable door –
 —1862

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 585; in Franklin as Poem 383; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 19, page 204. Franklin leaves “it’s” uncorrected both in line 9 and in line 17; Dickinson provides several alternative readings in the fascicle manuscript: “hear it” for “see it” in line 1; “Ribs” for “sides” in line 9; “then” for “And” in line 14; and “punctual” for “prompter” in line 15. Todd and Higginson edited the poem for *Poems* (1890), giving it the title “The Railway Train.”

² *Tanks* Water stations (also called “water stops”) for steam engines, where they could replenish their supply of water.

³ *Boanerges* Loud, denunciatory preacher.

[*The soul selects her own Society* –]⁴

The Soul selects her own Society –
 Then – shuts the Door –
 To her divine Majority –
 Present no more –

5 Unmoved – she notes the Chariots – pausing –
 At her low Gate –
 Unmoved – an Emperor be kneeling
 Upon her Mat

I’ve known her – from an ample nation –
 10 Choose One –
 Then – close the Valves of her attention –
 Like Stone –
 —1862

[*One need not be a Chamber – to be
 Haunted* –]⁵

One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –
 One need not be a House –

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 303; in Franklin as Poem 409; and in Miller as the last poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 20, page 218. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of the three standard editions; it is worth noting, however, that several of the marks at the ends of lines (notably, at the ends of lines 1, 3, 5, and 11) could plausibly be read as a right-slanting commas—as could the marks after “Chariots” in line 5 and “her” in line 9. Todd and Higginson include the poem under the title “Exclusion” in *Poems* (1890); they adopt the variant word choices Dickinson provides for lines 3 and 4: “On” for “To” in line 3, and “Obtrude” for “Present” in line 4. Dickinson also provides manuscript variant readings for line 8 (“On her Rush mat”) and line 11 (“lids” for “Valves”).

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 670; in Franklin as Poem 407; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 20, page 217. The present editors follow Johnson and Franklin in transcribing from the 1864 variant that Dickinson sent to Susan Dickinson; it differs in several small particulars from the 1862 fascicle text, and in one large one: the fascicle text ends with “More near” rather than “Or More.” The fascicle manuscript also includes numerous variants. Like Johnson (but unlike Franklin), we emend “it’s” to “its” in line 7. Todd and Higginson include the poem in *Poems* (1891) under the title “Ghosts,” evidently using the fascicle manuscript as their base text, but adopting Dickinson’s variant word choice for line 8 (“cooler” for “Whiter”).

The Brain has Corridors – surpassing
Material Place –

5 Far safer, of a Midnight Meeting
External Ghost
Than its interior Confronting –
That Cooler Host.

10 Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,¹
The Stones a'chase –
Than Unarmed, one's a'self encounter –
In lonesome Place –

15 Ourself behind ourself, concealed –
Should startle most –
Assassin hid in our Apartment
Be Horror's least.

The Body – borrows a Revolver –
He bolts the Door –
O'erlooking a superior spectre –
20 Or More –
—1862, 1864

[*They shut me up in Prose* –]²

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me “still” –

5 Still! Could themselves have peeped –
And seen my Brain – go round –

¹ *through an Abbey gallop* Abbeys—usually haunted—are common settings in Gothic literature.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 613; in Franklin as Poem 445; and in Miller as the last poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 21, page 223. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Johnson and Miller; Franklin prints “upon” (for “upon”) in line 11, rather than silently correcting, as is done by other editors. It is worth noting that several of the marks at the ends of lines (notably, at the ends of lines 1, 3, 5, 6, and 11) could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas. The manuscript provides a variant of line 11: “Abolish his Captivity” for “Look down upon Captivity.”

They might as wise have lodged a Bird
For Treason – in the Pound –

Himself³ has but to will
10 And easy as a Star
Look down upon Captivity –
And laugh – No more have I –
—1862

[*This was a Poet* –]⁴

This was a Poet –
It is That
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings –
5 And Attar⁵ so immense

From the familiar species
That perished by the Door –
We wonder it was not Ourselves
Arrested⁶ it – before –

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

15 Of Portion – so unconscious –
The Robbing – could not harm –
Himself – to Him – a Fortune –
Exterior – to Time –
—1862

³ *Himself* I.e., the bird.

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 448; in Franklin as Poem 446; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 21, page 224. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Franklin and Miller; Johnson reads what appear in the manuscript to be the poem's first two lines as one, thus regularizing the poem into stanzas of four lines each. It is worth noting that several of the marks at the ends of lines (notably, at the ends of lines 1, 4, 10, and 12) could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas.

⁵ *Attar* Essential oil made from roses.

⁶ *Arrested* Caught, laid hold of.

[*I died for Beauty – but was scarce*]¹

I died for Beauty – but was scarce
 Adjusted in the Tomb
 When One who died for Truth, was lain
 In an adjoining Room

5 He questioned softly “Why I failed”?
 “For Beauty”, I replied –
 “And I – for Truth – Themselves are One –
 We Brethren, are”, He said –

And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night –
 10 We talked between the Rooms –
 Until the Moss had reached our lips –
 And covered up – our names –
 —1862

[*The Malay – took the Pearl –*]²

The Malay³ – took the Pearl –
 Not – I – the Earl –
 I – feared the Sea – too much
 Unsanctified – to touch –

5 Praying that I might be
 Worthy – the Destiny –
 The Swarthy fellow swam –
 And bore my Jewel – Home –

Home to the Hut! What lot
 10 Had I – the Jewel – got –
 Borne on a Dusky Breast –
 I had not deemed a Vest
 Of Amber – fit –

The Negro⁴ never knew
 15 I – wooed it – too –
 To gain, or be undone –
 Alike to Him – One –
 —1862

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 449; in Franklin as Poem 448; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 21, page 225. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with that of Johnson, who emends “brethren” to “brethren.” (Franklin and Miller print the word with the additional “e.”) The word was spelled (and presumably pronounced) with three syllables in late medieval times (“bretheryn”), though by Shakespeare’s time it had become standardized as a two-syllable word. It is certainly possible that Dickinson intended the archaic spelling and pronunciation, but it seems at least as likely that this was an inadvertent misspelling; Dickinson was, as Miller says, “an erratic speller.” It is also worth noting that, with the two-syllable “brethren,” the line scans as iambic trimeter—as do the last lines of the other two stanzas.

There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem, though the marks at the ends of lines 10 and 11 could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 452; in Franklin as Poem 451; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 21, page 226. The present text is in agreement with Johnson, Franklin, and Miller regarding the punctuation of the poem—though the mark at the end of line 7 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma.

³ *Malay* Person from the Malay Peninsula. Prior to the industrialization of the pearl industry, many pearls were harvested by divers in Southeast Asia.

⁴ *Negro* In the nineteenth century, this term could be used to refer to any person perceived as having dark skin.

[*Our journey had advanced* —]¹

Our journey had advanced —
 Our feet were almost come
 To that odd Fork in Being's Road —
 Eternity — by Term

5 Our pace took sudden awe —
 Our feet — reluctant — led —
 Before — were Cities — but Between —
 The Forest of the Dead —

Retreat — was Out of Hope —
 10 Behind — a Sealed Route —
 Eternity's White Flag — Before —
 And God — at every Gate —
 —1862

[*Because I could not stop for Death* —]²

Because I could not stop for Death —
 He kindly stopped for me —
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves —
 And Immortality.

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 615; in Franklin as Poem 453; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 5 of Fascicle 21, page 227. The present text is in full accord with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller—though it may be noted that the mark at the end of line 7 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma. The poem was first published by Todd and Higginson in *Poems* (1891), under the title “The Journey.”

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 712; in Franklin as Poem 479; and in Miller as the opening poem in Fascicle 23, Sheet 1, page 239. The fascicle version (reproduced on the following pages) is the only manuscript version extant. The transcriptions in the Johnson, Franklin, and Miller editions are in complete accord, interpreting the marks at the ends of lines 3, 12, 13, and 24 as dashes, and the mark after “Centuries” in line 21 as a dash as well; the transcription here takes the same approach. In the “Alternative Readings” section that appears as part of the website component of this anthology we present an alternative transcription, in which the same marks are read as reverse or right-slanting commas (,).

The Todd and Higginson edition of *Poems* (1890) includes a version of this poem, under the title “The Chariot,” in which there are several substantive changes—including the omission of the fourth stanza.

5 We slowly drove — He knew no haste
 And I had put away
 My labor and my leisure too,
 For His Civility —

We passed the School, where Children strove³
 10 At Recess — in the Ring —
 We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain —
 We passed the Setting Sun —

Or rather — He passed Us —
 The Dews drew quivering and Chill —
 15 For only Gossamer,⁴ my Gown —
 My Tippet — only Tulle⁵ —

We paused before a House that seemed
 A Swelling of the Ground —
 The Roof was scarcely visible —
 20 The Cornice⁶ — in the Ground —

Since then — 'tis Centuries — and yet
 Feels shorter than the Day
 I first surmised the Horses' Heads
 Were toward Eternity —
 —1862

³ *strove* Fought or quarreled.

⁴ *Gossamer* Extremely fine material.

⁵ *Tippet* Small shawl or capelet; *Tulle* Fine, netted fabric.

⁶ *Cornice* Decorative molding that runs along the base of a building's roof.

31
 12
 Because I could not
 stop for Death -
 He kindly stopped for me -
 The Carriage had but one
 passenger -
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He
 knew no haste
 And I had put away
 My labor and my leisure too,
 For His Civility.

We passed the School,
 where Children strove
 At Recess - in the Ring -
 We passed the Fields
 of Gazing Grain -
 We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - We passed
 his -
 The Corns were quivering
 and chill -
 For only Gossamer, my
 Gown -
 My Tippet - only Tulle -

We paused before a
 House that seemed
 A Smelling of the Ground -
 The Roof was scarcely
 visible -

The Cornice - in the Ground -

Since then - 'tis Centuries
 And yet
 'tis shorter than the Day
 I first surmised the
 Horses' Heads
 Were toward Eternity -

[*I dwell in Possibility*—]¹

I dwell in Possibility –
 A fairer House than Prose –
 More numerous of Windows –
 Superior – for Doors –
 5 Of Chambers as the Cedars –
 Impregnable of Eye –
 And for an Everlasting Roof
 The Gambrels² of the Sky –
 Of Visitors – the fairest –
 10 For Occupation – This –
 The spreading wide my narrow Hands
 To gather Paradise –
 —1862

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 657; in Franklin as Poem 466; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 22, page 233. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of all three of these editors—all of whom silently emend “visiters” in line 9. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem, though the mark at the end of line 5 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma. Dickinson provides one alternative reading in the manuscript—“Gables” for “Gambrels” in line 8.

² *Gambrels* Roofs with two slopes on each side. (This variety of roof was common in the northeastern states.)

[*He fumbles at your soul*]³

He fumbles at your Soul
 As Players at the Keys⁴
 Before they drop full Music on –
 He stuns you by degrees –
 5 Prepares your brittle nature
 For the ethereal Blow
 By fainter Hammers – further heard –
 Then nearer – Then so slow
 Your Breath has time to straighten –
 10 Your Brain – to bubble Cool –
 Deals – One – imperial – Thunderbolt –
 That scalps your naked Soul –
 When Winds take Forests in their Paws –
 The Universe – is still –
 —1862

[*It feels a shame to be Alive*—]⁵

It feels a shame to be Alive –
 When Men so brave – are dead –
 One envies the Distinguished Dust –
 Permitted – such a Head –

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 315; in Franklin as Poem 477; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 6 of Fascicle 22, pages 237–38. Miller transcribes from the fascicle manuscript, in which “substance” appears instead of “nature” in line 5; “chance” instead of “time” in line 9; “peels” instead of “scalps” in line 12; and “Firmaments – are” instead of “Universe – is” in line 14. The variant readings are included in the fascicle manuscript, and were adopted in the manuscript version sent to Susan Dickinson (also believed to date from late 1862), which is the basis for the present text. The first 12 lines in the fascicle version are organized into three four-line stanzas. Franklin’s Poem 477 adopts all the variant readings of the Susan Dickinson version, but adopts the stanza structure of the fascicle version. Both Franklin and Miller retain the misspelling of “ethereal” as “etherial,” which appears in both versions. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of this poem.

⁴ *Keys* I.e., piano keys.

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 444; in Franklin as Poem 524; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 6 of Fascicle 24, pages 257–58. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of both Franklin and Miller. It is perhaps worth noting that nineteenth-century reading habits in a poetic context such as line 15 of this poem would almost certainly have taken “dissolved” as having three syllables (dis-sol-ved).

5 The Stone – that tells defending Whom
This Spartan put away¹
What little of Him we – possessed
In Pawn for Liberty

The price is great – Sublimely paid –
10 Do we deserve – a Thing –
That lives – like Dollars – must be piled
Before we may obtain?

Are we that wait – sufficient worth –
That such Enormous Pearl
15 As life – dissolved be² – for Us –
In Battle’s – horrid Bowl?

It may be – a Renown to live –
I think the Men who die –
Those unsustainable – Saviors –
20 Present Divinity –
—1863

[*This is my letter to the World*]³

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me –
The simple News that Nature told –
With tender Majesty

¹ *The Stone ... put away* Allusion to the famous epitaph at the site of the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE), where all 300 of the Spartan soldiers who were sent to defend Greece against the Persian army died; one translation of the epitaph reads, “Go tell the Spartans, thou who passest by, / That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.”

² *Enormous Pearl ... dissolved be* Reference to the commonly held belief that pearls dissolve in strongly acidic solutions. See also Matthew 13.45–46: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 441; in Franklin as Poem 519; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 24, page 254. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of all three of these editors. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem, though the marks at the ends of lines 2 and 6 could plausibly be read as periods rather than dashes.

5 Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see –
For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –
Judge tenderly – of Me
—1863

[*I’m sorry for the Dead – Today* –]⁴

I’m sorry for the Dead – Today –
It’s such congenial times
Old Neighbors have at fences –
It’s time o’ year for Hay.

5 And Broad – Sunburned Acquaintance
Discourse between the Toil –
And laugh, a homely species
That makes the Fences smile –

10 It seems so straight to lie away
From all the noise of Fields –
The Busy Carts – the fragrant Cocks⁵ –
The Mower’s Metre⁶ – Steals

A Trouble lest they’re homesick –
Those Farmers – and their Wives –
15 Set separate from the Farming –
And all the Neighbor’s lives –

A Wonder if the Sepulchre
Don’t feel a lonesome way –
When Men – and Boys – and Carts – and June,
20 Go down the Fields to “Hay” –
—1863

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 529; in Franklin as Poem 582; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 5 of Fascicle 25, page 266. Franklin leaves “Dont” uncorrected in line 18, whereas Miller emends to “Don’t”; in other respects the present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of both Franklin and Miller. It is worth noting, however, that many of the dashes in the last two stanzas of the poem could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas.

⁵ *Cocks* I.e., haycocks, or piles of hay.

⁶ *The Mower’s Metre* I.e., the rhythm of the scythe.

*[I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –]*¹

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
 The Stillness in the Room
 Was like the Stillness in the Air –
 Between the Heaves of Storm –

5 The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
 And Breaths were gathering firm
 For that last Onset – when the King
 Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
 10 What portion of me be
 Assignable – and then it was
 There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –
 Between the light – and me –
 15 And then the Windows failed – and then
 I could not see to see –
 —1863

*[The Brain – is wider than the Sky –]*²

The Brain – is wider than the Sky –
 For – put them side by side –
 The one the other will contain
 With ease – and You – beside –

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 465; in Franklin as Poem 591; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 1 of Fascicle 26, page 270. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Franklin and Miller. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem, though the marks at the ends of lines 3 and 12 could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas. The second dash in line 13—if dash it is—takes the form of an underline mark beneath the “s” of “stumbling”; Johnson does not read there as being any punctuation mark here.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 632; in Franklin as Poem 598; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 26, page 273. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem; the mark at the end of line 11 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma, and the mark at the end of line 12 as a period. Dickinson provides one variant word choice in the manuscript: “include” for “contain” in line 3.

5 The Brain is deeper than the sea –
 For – hold them – Blue to Blue –
 The one the other will absorb –
 As Sponges – Buckets – do –

The Brain is just the weight of God –
 10 For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –
 And they will differ – if they do –
 As Syllable from Sound –
 —1863

*[There’s been a Death, in the Opposite House,]*³

There’s been a Death, in the Opposite House,
 As lately as Today –
 I know it, by the numb look
 Such Houses have – always⁴ –

5 The Neighbors rustle in and Out –
 The Doctor – drives away –
 A Window opens like a Pod –
 Abrupt – mechanically –

Somebody flings a Mattress Out –
 10 The Children hurry by –
 They wonder if it died – on that –
 I used to – when a Boy

The Minister – goes stiffly in –
 As if the House were His –
 15 And He owned all the Mourners – now –
 And little Boys – besides –

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 389; in Franklin as Poem 547; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 1 of Fascicle 27, page 279. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller, except in one particular; Franklin spells “mattress” just as the word appears in Dickinson’s manuscript, whereas other editors correct the spelling error. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem; the marks at the end of lines 11, 20, and 23 could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas, as could the mark after “Milliner” in line 17. Dickinson does not provide any variant words in the manuscript.

⁴ *always* Always.

And then the Milliner¹ – and the Man
 Of the Appalling Trade² –
 To take the measure of the House –
 20 There'll be that Dark Parade –

Of Tassels – and of Coaches – soon –
 It's easy as a Sign –
 The Intuition of the News –
 In just a Country Town –
 —1863

[*I measure every Grief I meet*]³

I measure every Grief I meet
 With narrow, probing, Eyes –
 I wonder if It weighs like Mine –
 Or has an Easier size.

5 I wonder if They bore it long –
 Or did it just begin –
 I could not tell the Date of Mine –
 It feels so old a pain –

I wonder if it hurts to live –
 10 And if They have to try –
 And whether – could They choose between –
 It would not be – to die –

I note that Some – gone patient long –
 At length, renew their smile –

15 An imitation of a Light
 That has so little Oil⁴ –

I wonder if when Years have piled –
 Some Thousands – on the Harm –
 That hurt them early – such a lapse
 20 Could give them any Balm⁵ –

Or would they go on aching still
 Through Centuries of Nerve –
 Enlightened to a larger Pain –
 In Contrast with the Love –

25 The Grieved – are many – I am told –
 There is the various Cause –
 Death – is but one – and comes but once –
 And only nails the eyes –

There's Grief of Want – and Grief of Cold –
 30 A sort they call "Despair" –
 There's Banishment from native Eyes –
 In sight of Native Air –

And though I may not guess the kind –
 Correctly – yet to me
 35 A piercing Comfort it affords
 In passing Calvary⁶ –

To note the fashions – of the Cross –
 And how they're mostly worn –
 Still fascinated to presume
 40 That Some – are like My Own –
 —1863

¹ *Milliner* Maker of hats and other clothing accessories (in this context, to measure for mourning garments).

² *the Man ... Appalling Trade* I.e., the undertaker.

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 561; in Franklin as Poem 550; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 27, pages 280–81. There are few transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem, though there are several with its capitalization. Franklin reads "eyes" in line 2, while both Franklin and Miller read "my own" in the poem's final line; in all those cases the present reading agrees with that of Johnson. Johnson, however, includes a dash between "my" and "own" in the final line, a point at which no punctuation is apparent in the manuscript. Dickinson provides one variant phrase: "With analytic eyes" in line 2.

⁴ *so little Oil* Reference to an oil lamp in which the fuel is running low.

⁵ *Balm* Soothing ointment.

⁶ *Calvary* Site where Jesus was crucified.

[*Much Madness is divinest Sense* —]¹

Much Madness is divinest Sense —
 To a discerning Eye —
 Much Sense — the starkest Madness —
 'Tis the Majority
 5 In this, as all, prevail —
 Assent — and you are sane —
 Demur — you're straightway dangerous —
 And handled with a Chain —
 —1863

[*I started Early — Took my Dog* —]²

I started Early — Took my Dog —
 And visited the Sea —
 The Mermaids in the Basement
 Came out to look at me —
 5 And Frigates — in the Upper Floor
 Extended Hempen³ Hands —
 Presuming Me to be a Mouse —
 Aground — upon the Sands —
 But no Man moved Me — till the Tide
 10 Went past my simple Shoe —

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 435; in Franklin as Poem 620; and in Miller as the fourth poem in Sheet 3 of Fascicle 29, page 304. Johnson and Franklin read "All" rather than "all" in line 5; a comparison of Dickinson's rendering in line 6 of a capital "A" followed by lower case letters (in "Assent") lends support to Miller's reading of the "a" in "all" as lower case.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 520; in Franklin as Poem 656; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 30, pages 311–12. The present text follows Johnson in emending all three of the obvious misspellings in the manuscript: "opon" in line 8, and again in line 19; and "Ancle" in line 19. Franklin leaves all three uncorrected, while Miller emends "opon" but not "Ancle." The present text is in agreement with Johnson, Franklin, and Miller regarding the punctuation of the poem. The mark in the middle of line 11 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma, and the mark at the end of line 4 could plausibly be read as a period.

³ *Hempen* Hemp fiber was and is commonly used to make ropes; in the nineteenth century it was also (somewhat less commonly) used to make ships' sails.

And past my Apron — and my Belt
 And past my Boddice — too —

And made as He would eat me up —
 As wholly as a Dew
 15 Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve —
 And then — I started — too —

And He — He followed — close behind —
 I felt His Silver Heel
 Upon my Ankle — Then my Shoes
 20 Would overflow with Pearl —

Until We met the Solid Town —
 No One He seemed to know —
 And bowing — with a Mighty look —
 At me — The Sea withdrew —
 —1863

[*That I did always love*]⁴

That I did always love
 I bring thee Proof
 That till I loved
 I never lived — Enough —

5 That I shall love always⁵ —
 I argue thee
 That love is life —
 And life hath Immortality —

This — dost thou doubt — Sweet —
 10 Then have I
 Nothing to show
 But Calvary⁶
 —1863

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 549; in Franklin as Poem 652; and in Miller as the last poem in Sheet 6 of Fascicle 31, page 329. The present text is in complete agreement with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller. Dickinson provides three variant phrases in the fascicle manuscript: "did not live" for "never lived" in line 4; "offer" for "argue" in line 6; and "be" for "is" in line 7.

⁵ *always* Always.

⁶ *Calvary* Site of Jesus' crucifixion.

[*What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –*]¹

What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –
 These Gentlewomen are –
 One would as soon assault a Plush –
 Or violate a Star –

5 Such Dimity² Convictions –
 A Horror so refined
 Of freckled Human Nature –
 Of Deity – Ashamed –

It's such a common – Glory –
 10 A Fisherman's – Degree –
 Redemption – Brittle Lady –
 Be so – ashamed of Thee.
 —1863

[*My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –*]³

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
 In Corners – till a Day
 The Owner passed – identified –
 And carried Me away –

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 401; in Franklin as Poem 675; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 1 of “Unbound Sheets,” page 418. Johnson and Miller read “Ashamed” as lower case both in line 8 and in line 12; Franklin reads the word as capitalized in line 8 but lowercase in line 12. Johnson, Franklin, and Miller all read a dash rather than a period at the end of the poem.

² *Dimity* Lightweight cotton.

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 754; in Franklin as Poem 764; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 34, pages 354–55. The present transcription of the fascicle manuscript is with two exceptions in agreement with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller: Franklin spells “it's” in line 12 just as the word appears in Dickinson's manuscript, whereas other editors correct the error; Franklin and Miller both omit the mark that appears between “Eider” and “Duck” in line 15, whereas (like Johnson) the present editors transcribe it as a hyphen. There are a few other possible transcription issues with the punctuation of the poem; the marks at the end of lines 14 and 19 could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas, while the mark at the end of line 22 could very plausibly be read as a period. Dickinson provides four alternative readings in the manuscript: “the” for “in” in line 5; “Low” for “Deep” in line 16; “harm” for “stir” in line 18; and “art” for “power” in line 23.

5 And now We roam in Sovreign Woods –
 And now We hunt the Doe –
 And every time I speak for Him –
 The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light
 10 Upon the Valley glow –
 It is as a Vesuvian⁴ face
 Had let its pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –
 I guard My Master's Head –
 15 'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's⁵
 Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –
 None stir the second time –
 On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –
 20 Or an emphatic Thumb –

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 –
 —1863

⁴ *Vesuvian* The southern Italian volcano Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, killing well over one thousand people, primarily in the city of Pompeii.

⁵ *Eider-Duck* Genus of sea ducks, whose feathers are commonly used to stuff quilts and pillows.

[*“Nature” is what We see —*]¹

“Nature” is what We see —
 The Hill — the Afternoon —
 Squirrel — Eclipse — the Bumble bee —
 Nay — Nature is Heaven —

5 Nature is what We hear —
 The Bobolink² — the Sea —
 Thunder — the Cricket —
 Nay — Nature is Harmony —

“Nature” is what We know —
 10 Yet have no art to say —
 So impotent Our Wisdom is
 To Her Sincerity —
 —1863

[*I could bring You Jewels — had I a mind to —*]³

I could bring You Jewels — had I a mind to —
 But You have enough — of those —
 I could bring You Odors from St Domingo⁴ —

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 668; in Franklin as Poem 721; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 2 of Fascicle 35, page 361. Johnson transcribes from a variant that Dickinson sent to Susan Dickinson; it differs in several small particulars and two large ones: the poem is not divided into stanzas, and “Simplicity” is substituted for “Sincerity” in the final line. The present text follows Franklin and Miller in transcribing from the fascicle manuscript version, and is in agreement with their readings.

² *Bobolink* Species of blackbird native to the Americas.

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 697; in Franklin as Poem 726; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 4 of Fascicle 35, page 364. The present text is in complete accord with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller; it may be worth noting, however, that the mark at the end of line 5 could plausibly be read as a period.

⁴ *Odors* I.e., fragrant ointments or perfumes; *St Domingo* While “Santo Domingo” is the name of the capital city of the Dominican Republic, it is more likely that Dickinson means to refer to the newly independent Haiti, which had been known as Saint Domingue under the French colonial regime. The Haitian Revolution of the late-eighteenth century had been led by a coalition of free and enslaved black Haitians, resulting in the abolition of slavery and the expulsion of most white colonials from the country. To many white Americans in the nineteenth century, “Domingo” remained shorthand both for Haiti itself and for the violence of revolution (though the success of the Haitian Revolution also remained an inspiration to many black abolitionists).

Colors — from Vera Cruz⁵ —

5 Berries⁶ of the Bahamas — have I —
 But this little Blaze
 Flickering to itself — in the Meadow —
 Suits Me — more than those —

Never a Fellow matched this Topaz —
 10 And his Emerald Swing —
 Dower⁷ itself — for Bobadillo⁸ —
 Better — Could I bring?
 —1863

[*Publication — is the Auction*]⁹

Publication — is the Auction
 Of the Mind of Man —
 Poverty — be justifying
 For so foul a thing

5 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 —
 10 Then — to Him Who bear
 It’s Corporeal illustration — Sell
 The Royal Air —

⁵ *Colors* I.e., pigments or dyes; *Vera Cruz* State in Mexico, located on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

⁶ *Berries* Here likely referring to melons, which botanically speaking are a type of berry.

⁷ *Dower* Dowry; money brought by a bride into her marriage.

⁸ *Bobadillo* Francisco de Bobadilla, Spanish-born governor of the colony of Saint Domingue (1499–1502).

⁹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 709; in Franklin as Poem 788; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 5 of Fascicle 37, pages 386–87. The present text is in complete accord with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller; it may be noted, however, that the mark at the end of line 7 could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma.

In the Parcel – Be the Merchant
 Of the Heavenly Grace –
 15 But reduce no Human Spirit
 To Disgrace of Price –
 —1863

[*Truth – is as old as God –*]¹

Truth – is as old as God –
 His Twin identity
 And will endure as long as He
 A Co-Eternity –
 5 And perish on the Day
 Himself is borne away
 From Mansion of the Universe
 A lifeless Deity.
 —1864, 1865

[*I never saw a Moor –*]²

I never saw a Moor –
 I never saw the Sea –
 Yet know I how the Heather looks
 And what a Billow³ be.
 5 I never spoke with God
 Nor visited in Heaven –
 Yet certain am I of the spot
 As if the Checks⁴ were given –
 —1864

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 836; in Franklin as Poem 795; and in Miller under “Unbound Sheets,” page 447. The version here is that which Dickinson retained, and is believed to date from 1865; the transcription here is entirely in accord with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller. Dickinson sent a variant to Josiah Holland in 1864; the latter is more heavily punctuated, with a dash (or, arguably, a right-slanting comma) after “identity,” a comma after “perish,” and dashes after “He” and “Universe.”

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1052; in Franklin as Poem 800; and in Miller under “Loose Poems,” page 532. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller.

³ *Billow* Wave.

⁴ *Checks* Train tickets.

[*Color – Caste – Denomination –*]⁵

Color – Caste – Denomination –
 These – are Time’s Affair –
 Death’s diviner Classifying
 Does not know they are –

5 As in sleep – All Hue forgotten –
 Tenets – put behind –
 Death’s large – Democratic fingers
 Rub away the Brand.⁶

If Circassian⁷ – He is careless –
 10 If He put away
 Chrysalis of Blonde – or Umber –
 Equal Butterfly –

They emerge from His Obscuring –
 What Death – knows so well –
 15 Our minuter intuitions –
 Deem unplausible
 —1864

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 970; in Franklin as Poem 836; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 6 of Fascicle 40, page 412. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller except in one particular; we read the mark at the end of line 8 as a period rather than a dash. (It may also be worth noting that the mark at the end of the first line could plausibly be read as a right-slanting comma.) Dickinson provides one variant word choice in the manuscript: “incredible” for “unplausible” in the final line.

⁶ *Brand* Physical identifying mark, possibly with reference to a brand burned into the skin of an enslaved person.

⁷ *Circassian* Of Circassia, a region in the North Caucasus in what is now southwestern Russia.

[*She rose to His Requirement – dropt*]¹

She rose to His Requirement – dropt
 The Playthings of Her Life
 To take the honorable Work
 Of Woman, and of Wife –

- 5 If ought² She missed in Her new Day,
 Of Amplitude, or Awe –
 Or first Prospective – Or the Gold
 In using, wear away,

- It lay unmentioned – as the Sea
 10 Develope Pearl, and Weed,
 But Only to Himself – be known
 The Fathoms they abide –
 —1864

[*The Poets light but Lamps –*]³

The Poets light but Lamps –
 Themselves – go out –
 The Wicks they stimulate
 If vital Light

- 5 Inhere as do the Suns –
 Each Age a Lens
 Disseminating their
 Circumference –
 —1865

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 732; in Franklin as Poem 857; and in Miller as part of Fascicle 38, Sheet 4, page 393–94. The present transcription of the manuscript is in agreement with those of Franklin and Miller—though it may be noted that the marks at the end of line 6 and after “unmentioned” in line 9 could plausibly be read as right-slanting commas.

The poem was published under the title “The Wife” in Todd and Higginson’s *Poems* (1890); in that version “Develops” is substituted for “Develope” in line 10 and “is” for “be” in line 11.

² *ought* Aught.

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 883; in Franklin as Poem 930; and in Miller under “Unbound Sheets,” as the first poem on Sheet 15, page 436. The present transcription of the manuscript is in agreement with those of Franklin and Miller; Johnson reads the mark at the end of line 3 as a dash, but it seems more plausible to read it as the crossing of the final “t” in “stimulate.”

[*A Man may make a Remark –*]⁴

A Man may make a Remark –
 In itself – a quiet thing
 That may furnish the Fuse unto a Spark
 In dormant nature – lain –

- 5 Let us divide – with skill –
 Let us discourse – with care –
 Powder exists in Charcoal –
 Before it exists in Fire.
 —1865

[*Banish Air from Air –*]⁵

- Banish Air from Air –
 Divide Light if you dare –
 They’ll meet
 While Cubes in a Drop
 5 Or Pellets of Shape
 Fit.
 Films⁶ cannot annul
 Odors return whole
 Force Flame
 10 And with a Blonde push
 Over your impotence
 Flits Steam.
 —1865

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 952; in Franklin as Poem 913; and in Miller under “Unbound Sheets,” page 430. Except in taking the small mark at the end of the final line to be a period (as does Johnson) rather than a dash, the present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller. Dickinson provides alternative readings in every line except the fourth.

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 854; in Franklin as Poem 963; and in Miller under “Unbound Sheets,” pages 446–47. Editors differ over the transcription of the mark after “Fit”; Franklin and Miller transcribe it as a dash rather than a period.

⁶ *Films* In the sense of thin coverings.

[*As imperceptibly as Grief*]¹

- As imperceptibly as Grief
 The Summer lapsed away –
 Too imperceptible at last
 To feel like *Perfidy*² –
- 5 A Quietness distilled –
 As Twilight long begun –
 Or Nature – spending with Herself
 Sequestered Afternoon –
- Sobriety inhered
 10 Though gaudy influence
 The Maple lent unto the Road
 And graphic Consequence
- Invested sombre place –
 As suddenly be worn
 15 By sober Individual
 A Homogeneous Gown –
- Departed was the Bird –
 And scarcely had the Hill
 A flower to help His straightened face
 20 In stress of Burial –
- The Winds came closer up –
 The Cricket spoke so clear
 Presumption was – His Ancestors
 Inherited the Floor –
- 25 The Dusk drew earlier in –
 The Morning foreign shone –
 The courteous – but harrowing Grace
 Of Guest who would be gone –

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1540; in Franklin as Poem 935; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 16 of “Unbound Sheets,” page 437. A variant version includes only the first eight and the final eight lines, without any stanza breaks. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller—though it may be noted that the marks following “distilled” in line 5, “begun” in line 6, “courteous” in line 27, and “Keel” in line 30 could all plausibly be read as forward-slanting commas. Dickinson provides one alternative in the manuscript—“into” for “Unto” in the final line.

² *Perfidy* Treachery.

- And thus, without a Wing
 30 Or Service of a Keel –
 Our Summer made Her light Escape
 Unto the Beautiful –
 —c. 1865

[*The Heart has narrow Banks*]³

- The Heart has narrow Banks
 It measures like the Sea
 In mighty – unremitting Bass
 And Blue monotony
- 5 Till Hurricane bisect
 And as itself discerns
 Its insufficient Area
 The Heart convulsive learns
- That Calm is but a Wall
 10 Of Unattempted Gauze
 An instant’s Push demolishes
 A Questioning – dissolves.
 —c. 1865

³ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 928; in Franklin as Poem 960; and in Miller as the second poem of Sheet 21 in “Unbound Sheets,” page 445. The present text, like those of Miller and Johnson, emends “It’s” to “Its” in line 7. We agree with both Miller and Franklin in reading “monotony” in line 4 as lower case and “Unattempted” in line 10 as upper case (whereas Johnson reads the words as “Monotony” and “unattempted”). Dickinson provides one variant word choice in the manuscript—“paces” for “measures” in line 2.

[*Could I but ride indefinite*]¹

Could I but ride indefinite
As doth the Meadow Bee
And visit only where I liked
And no one visit me

5 And flirt all Day with Buttercups
And marry whom I may
And dwell a little everywhere
Or better, run away

With no Police to follow
10 Or chase Him if He do
Till He should jump Peninsulas
To get away from me –

I said “But just to be a Bee”
Upon a Raft of Air
15 And row in Nowhere all Day long
And anchor “off the Bar”

What Liberty! So Captives deem
Who tight in Dungeons are.
—c. 1865



The illustration is of a buttercup (from Dickinson’s herbarium—see ### above).

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 661; in Franklin as Poem 1056; and in Miller as the first poem in Sheet 43 under “Unbound Sheets,” page 474. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller except in one particular; like Miller, we emend “Opon” to “Upon” in line 14.

[*As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies*]²

As the Starved Maelstrom³ laps the Navies
As the Vulture teased
Forces the Broods⁴ in lonely Valleys
As the Tiger eased

5 By but a Crumb of Blood, fasts Scarlet
Till he meet a Man
Dainty adorned with Veins and Tissues
And partakes – his Tongue

Cooled by the Morsel for a moment
10 Grows a fiercer thing
Till he esteem his Dates and Cocoa
A Nutrition mean

I, of a finer Famine
Deem my Supper dry
15 For but a Berry of Domingo⁵
And a Torrid⁶ Eye.
—1865

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 872; in Franklin as Poem 1064; and in Miller as the second poem in Sheet 45, under “Unbound Sheets,” page 477. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller except in two particulars; we side with Franklin and Miller in retaining Dickinson’s archaic variant spelling of “tease,” and with Johnson in reading the mark at the end of the poem as a period rather than a dash (though either reading is certainly defensible).

³ *Maelstrom* Whirlpool.

⁴ *Forces* I.e., overpowers; *Broods* Young birds.

⁵ *Berry* In this context, a melon; *Domingo* Possibly a reference to Saint Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic, but more likely to Saint Domingue, the colonial name of Haiti prior to the 1791 Haitian Revolution, which had been led by free and enslaved black Haitians. Throughout the nineteenth century, “Domingo” remained common shorthand (especially to white Americans) both for Haiti itself and for the violence of revolution.

⁶ *Torrid* Hot; also possibly a reference to the torrid zone, another name for the Tropics.

[*A narrow Fellow in the Grass*]

This poem was first published on 14 February 1866, in the *Springfield Republican*, a newspaper edited by Dickinson's friend Samuel Bowles. Dickinson did not submit the poem for publication, however; it has been plausibly conjectured that Susan Dickinson passed along to Bowles a now-lost manuscript copy which Dickinson had given her. A facsimile of the 1865 manuscript page appears overleaf, followed by a transcription. Next appears the 1866 published version; on the following page appears a transcription of the 1872 manuscript version.

This is the only known instance in which Dickinson complained of any of the specifics relating to the publication of one of her poems; in a 17 March 1866 letter to Higginson she commented as follows on the publication of the poem in the *Springfield Republican* (it is presumed that she enclosed a clipping of the newspaper's printed version with her letter):

Lest you meet my Snake and suppose I deceive it
was robbed of me—defeated too of the third line
by the punctuation. The third and fourth were
one—I had told you I did not print—I feared you
might think me ostensible.¹ If I still entreat you to
teach me, are you much displeased?

As is often the case with Dickinson's letters, it is difficult to be entirely clear of her meaning here. She does not want Higginson to think that she has deceived him—presumably in her protestations that she has not sought to have her work printed; she assures him that this poem was stolen from her. She asserts too that her intentions were “defeated” by the punctuation of the third line in the newspaper version, which retains the dash in the middle of the line but adds a question mark at the end of the line—whereas in the 1865 manuscript Dickinson has no punctuation. (Interestingly, Dickinson herself includes a question mark in her 1872 manuscript version—but in the middle of the line, not at its end.) On that point her complaint seems clear—but what does she mean by “The third and fourth were one”? Could she mean that the third and fourth [lines of the poem] were [intended to be set out as] one [line]? That would mean a line like this—

You may have met Him – did you not His notice
sudden is –

which seems highly implausible. The alternative is that she means that the third and fourth [lines of the poem] were [wrongly made into] one [by the newspaper editors], when Dickinson herself had intended them to be separate lines—in other words, that Dickinson had intended the first stanza to have five lines. That appears to be how she writes the stanza in the 1872 version she sent to Susan Dickinson, in which she capitalizes the first letter of Did. With Dickinson it is frequently difficult to be sure of her intentions regarding line breaks, given that she so often capitalized words in the middle of lines, but in the 1872 version it seems clear that there would have been ample room on the page for Dickinson to write the word “Did,” after “him?” if she had intended “You may have met him? Did you not?” to form just one line. But here again, it is impossible to be entirely sure of Dickinson's intentions.

¹ *ostensible* Seeking visibility; ostentatious.

88-13

A narrow T-ellum in
the Grass

Occasionally rides -

You may have met him -

Did you not -

His notice sudden is -

The Grass divides as
with a Comb.

A spotted shaft is
seen -

And then it closes
at your feet -

And opens further on -

He likes a Boggy

Acorn

A Floor too cool

for Corn

Let him a Boy, and

Barfoot -

[*A narrow Fellow in the Grass*]¹

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides –
You may have met Him – did you not
His notice sudden is –

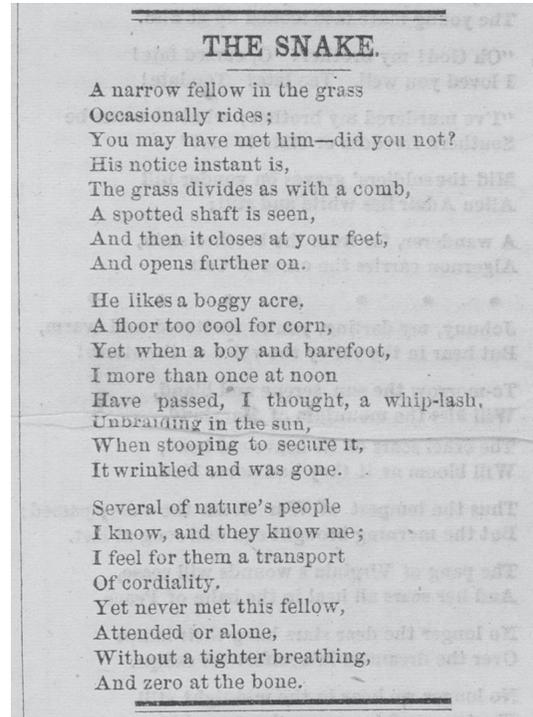
5 The Grass divides as with a Comb –
A spotted shaft is seen –
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on –

He likes a Boggy Acre
10 A Floor too cool for Corn
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot –
I more than once at Noon

Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
15 When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone –

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me –
I feel for them a transport²
20 Of cordiality –

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone –
—1865



¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 986; in Franklin as Poem 1096; and in Miller as part of Unbound Sheet 54, pages 489–90. There are two manuscript versions extant; the first dates from 1865, while the second is included in an 1872 letter to Susan Dickinson. Johnson and Miller transcribe from the 1865 version; the two differ only slightly (the first two lines of the third stanza are punctuated differently, with Miller reading a dash at the end of the first line and Johnson reading a dash at the end of the second line).

² *transport* Rush of emotion.

[*A narrow Fellow in the Grass*][*The Bustle in a House*]¹

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
 Occasionally rides –
 You may have met him?
 Did you not
 5 His notice instant is –

The Grass divides as with a Comb –
 A spotted Shaft is seen,
 And then it closes at your Feet
 And opens further on –

10 He likes a Boggy Acre –
 A Floor too cool for Corn –
 But when a Boy and Barefoot
 I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
 15 Unbraiding in the Sun
 When stooping to secure it
 It wrinkled
 And was gone –

Several of Nature's People
 20 I know and they know me
 I feel for them a transport
 Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow
 Attended or alone
 25 Without a tighter Breathing
 And Zero at the Bone.
 —1872

The Bustle in a House
 The Morning after Death
 Is solemnest of industries
 Enacted upon Earth –

5 The Sweeping up the Heart
 And putting Love away
 We shall not want to use again
 Until Eternity –
 —1865

[*A Spider sewed at Night*]²

A Spider sewed at Night
 Without a Light
 Upon an Arc of White –

If Ruff it was of Dame
 5 Or Shroud of Gnome
 Himself himself inform –

Of Immortality
 His strategy
 Was physiognomy³ –
 —1868

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1078; in Franklin as Poem 1108; and in Miller as the third poem in Sheet 57, under “Unbound Sheets,” page 494. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller except in one particular; we side with Franklin and Miller in reading the mark at the end of the poem as a dash rather than (as Johnson reads it) a period.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1138; in Franklin as Poem 1163; and in Miller under “Poems Not Retained,” page 705–06. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller except in one particular; like Miller, we emend “Opon” to “Upon” in line 3. The dashes in the manuscript sent to Susan Dickinson very much resemble commas.

³ *physiognomy* Study of a person's facial features to determine his or her character.

372
 Tell all the truth
 but - tell it slant -
 Success in Circuit
 Lies
 Too bright - for our
 good
 infirm delight
 the Truth's superb
 surprise
 As Lightning to
 the Children eased
 with explanation kind
 the Truth must
 baffle gradually
 Or even moderately
 blind -

The manuscript of "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" (Amherst College, Amherst - Amherst Manuscript # 372 - Tell all the truth but tell it slant - asc:12240 - p. 1). Dickinson's handwriting varied considerably both from one manuscript to another and over time.

[*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant*—]¹

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise
 5 As Lightning to the Children eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind –
 —1872

[*To pile like Thunder to its close*]²

To pile like Thunder to its close
 Then crumble grand away
 While Everything created hid
 This – would be Poetry –
 5 Or Love – the two coeval³ come –
 We both and neither prove –
 Experience either and consume –
 For None see God and live –
 —c. 1875

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1129; in Franklin as Poem 1263; and in Miller under “Loose Poems,” pages 563–64. The present transcription of the manuscript is in complete agreement with those of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller. Dickinson provides two variant word choices in the manuscript: “bold” for “bright” in line 3, and “moderately” for “gradually” in line 7.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1247; in Franklin as Poem 1353; and in Miller under “Poems Not Retained,” page 713. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Franklin and Miller except in one particular; like Miller, we emend “it’s” to “its” in line 1.

³ *coeval* Of contemporaneous duration or existence.

[*Apparently with no surprise*]⁴

Apparently with no surprise
 To any happy Flower
 The Frost beheads it at its play –
 In accidental power –
 5 The blonde Assassin passes on –
 The Sun proceeds unmoved
 To measure off another Day
 For an Approving God –
 —c. 1884

[*A Word made Flesh is seldom*]⁵

A Word made Flesh⁶ is seldom
 And tremblingly partook
 Nor then perhaps reported
 But have I not mistook
 5 Each one of us has tasted
 With ecstasies of stealth
 The very food debated
 To our specific strength –
 A Word that breathes distinctly
 10 Has not the power to die
 Cohesive as the Spirit
 It may expire if He –

⁴ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1624; in Franklin as Poem 1668; and in Miller under “Loose Poems,” page 654. The present text is in agreement with the transcriptions of Johnson, Franklin, and Miller except in two particulars; like Johnson and Miller, we emend “it’s” to “its” in line 3, and like Franklin and Miller we read the mark at the end of the poem as a dash rather than a period. Todd and Higginson edited the poem for *Poems* (1890), giving it the title “Death and Life.”

⁵ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1651; in Franklin as Poem 1715; and in Miller under “Poems Transcribed by Others,” page 671. No Dickinson manuscript appears to have survived, and the date of composition is not known; a transcription by Susan Dickinson has survived, and the poem appears in *Poems: Third Series* (1896). Johnson reads the manuscript as having three stanzas rather than two (with a stanza break after “He –”).

⁶ *A Word made Flesh* See John 1.1–14: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”

“Made Flesh and dwelt among us”
 Could condescension be
 15 Like this consent of Language
 This loved Philology
 —DATE OF COMPOSITION UNKNOWN (FIRST PUBLISHED
 1896)

[*My life closed twice before its close;*]¹

My life closed twice before its close;
 It yet remains to see
 If Immortality unveil
 A third event to me,
 5 So huge, so hopeless to conceive
 As these that twice befell.

Parting is all we know of heaven,
 And all we need of hell.
 —DATE OF COMPOSITION UNKNOWN (FIRST PUBLISHED
 1896)

[*To make a prairie it takes a clover and one
 bee,*]²

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
 One clover, and a bee,
 And revery.
 The revery alone will do,
 5 If bees are few.
 —DATE OF COMPOSITION UNKNOWN (FIRST PUBLISHED
 1896)

IN CONTEXT

The Reception of Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century

It has often been assumed that the early reception of Dickinson’s poetry was largely unfavorable, or that most reviewers were, at best, uncomfortable with her idiosyncratic style and grammar. In fact, early reviews of *Poems* (1890)—including those by such highly respected critics as Robert Bridges and William Dean Howells—were almost unanimously positive and even laudatory, praising the originality, sensitivity, and force of Dickinson’s verse, while often remarking on her reclusiveness and apparent reluctance to publish during her lifetime. Many reviewers took seriously Higginson’s claim (in his preface to the volume) that Dickinson’s poems were “more suggestive of the poetry of William Blake,” the English Romantic poet and visual artist, “than of anything to be elsewhere found.” In December 1890, two contributors to the *Critic*, a literary journal based in New York, selected *Poems* as one of “The Best Five Books of the Decade.” The volume, indeed, created something of a sensation in the literary world, and by the spring of 1891 was in its sixth printing.

One significant exception to the widespread praise accorded Dickinson was prominent Scottish writer Andrew Lang (1844–1912), who published two highly unfavorable reviews of Dickinson in January 1891; Lang’s complaints centered largely on Dickinson’s disregard for rhyme as well as on what he calls the “nonsense” of her ideas. While Lang was not quite alone in his disapproval, he was very much in the minority.

¹ This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1732; in Franklin as Poem 1773; and in Miller under “Poems Transcribed by Others,” page 686. No Dickinson manuscript appears to have survived; a transcription by Mabel Todd has survived, and the poem appears in *Poems: Third Series* (1896). Franklin retains the spelling “it’s” in line 1.

² This poem appears in Johnson as Poem 1755; in Franklin as Poem 1779; and in Miller under “Poems Transcribed by Others,” page 688. No Dickinson manuscript appears to have survived; a transcription by Mabel Todd has survived, and the poem appears in *Poems: Third Series* (1896).

from Alexander Young, "Boston Letter," *Critic* (11 October 1890)

The volume of "Poems" by the late Emily Dickinson, which Roberts Bros. are to publish next month and which is edited by two of her friends, Mabel Loomis Todd and T.W. Higginson, is of a quality so fine that the wonder is that she had hardly given anything to the world in her lifetime. Having read the advance-sheets I can bear witness to the originality and strength of these poems, their union of profound insight into nature and life with a remarkable vividness of description. They are compact with thought and imagination and have a quaint directness that is emphasized by the neglect of the attractions of form which some of them betray. But the rough diamonds in the collection have a value beyond that of many polished gems of poetry. ...

from Anonymous, "From the Book Store," *St. Joseph Daily News* (22 November 1890)

The poems are edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Col. T.W. Higginson, and are beautifully bound ... In white with silver lilies on the cover, the volume put up in a white embossed box. They are poems of such extraordinary intensity, insight and vividness, and an almost equally startling disregard of poetic laws, that the reader will find himself pursuing almost a new language, and perhaps speculating curiously as to what results would have been insured had the author subjected herself to careful study of poetic ideals—had she learned to chip and polish the marble. It might be that such work as hers would lose in strength rather than gain in melody by such revision.

from Anonymous, "New Books," *Boston Post* (27 November 1890)

The editors¹ tell us that the author (who died four years ago at the age of fifty-six) was "a recluse by ... temperament and habit"—a refined and gentle woman, who wrote these verses with absolutely no thought of publication, but simply to give expression to her deepest feeling. They are, therefore, introspective with outlooks on Life, Love and Nature, which are most unreal as to their externals but deeply true in essentials.

Those who like philosophy in verse will easily find it here, but they will probably overlook what is a finer thing—the original fancy which compresses striking images into a few words, or catches a strange melody in most irregular measures. One of these delicate fancies is the poem to "The Bee":

Like trains of cars on tracks of plush
I hear the level bee;
A jar across the flower goes,
Their velvet masonry
Withstands, until the sweet assault
Their chivalry consumes,
While he, victorious, tilts away,
To vanquish other blooms.

Then, in a vein entirely different from her other verses, is the vivid picture of "some lonely houses, off the road, a robber'd like the look of—" which is a bit of poetic melodrama that Poe would have liked.

The love poems are written in the attitude of a worshipper and not of a lover—and the exaggeration is often of a kind that is saved from being absurd by its sincerity. It is not passion, but fervid loyalty that is depicted—and the chill of intellectual monasticism is in it. There are, however, one or two of the love poems that are more human and feminine in feeling, of which we may quote what is perhaps the best:

¹ *The editors* I.e., Todd and Higginson.

I'm wife; I've finished that,
 That other state;
 I'm Czar; I'm woman now;
 It's safer so.
 How odd the girl's life looks
 Behind this soft eclipse;
 I think the earth seems so
 To those in heaven now.
 This being comfort then,
 That other kind was pain:
 But why compare?
 I'm wife! stop there!

The volume will delight thoughtful people as the poetic expression of a rare and shy intelligence.

from Kinsley Twining and William Hayes Ward, "Poems by Emily Dickinson," *Independent* (11 December 1890)

Whatever may be said as to the merits or demerits of these poems, they bear the stamp of original genius. Making allowance for a certain Emersonian diction,¹ there is nothing like these poems in the language, unless Mr. Higginson's fancy that they resemble William Blake will hold. "H.H."² was the poet's chosen and admiring friend, so far as we know the only literary intimate she had; but we detect no traces of "H.H." in these poems. If there are such they wholly fade in the torrent of original passion which could move in no channel but its own. It would be extravagant to say that they are written in a language of their own; but so far as technical execution is concerned, the author invented her poetic idiom. In her eager passion for direct expression, her thought crowds on in fierce impatience of the restraints and limitations of grammar or rhyme. The poetic substance comes to her mind in broad masses, like a painting of the French school,³ and takes form on her canvas without the minutiae of pen and pencil details. The poems do not take effect on the reader at once; and if they captivate him at all, will do so slowly. Speaking for all but the hopeless conventional ones, we should say they are sure to win him at last. The poems, though numerous, are desultory and brief. They make no attempt at long flight or sustained power. They shoot up high into the sky and drop thence a few notes of uncommon melody, and the song ends, sometimes broken, generally too soon. Mr. Higginson, in his fascinating Preface, calls them flashes; but they are flashes that combine into visions. The portrait he draws of the author and his picture of her life is tender, beautiful and strong as a poem; but it was a life which needed for its interpretation to be seen through these poems. In them the witchery of genius throws its charm and its fascination over what without it would strike the eye as bare singularity. Never did a Puritan maiden weave her bower in such silence and solitude as this lady of Amherst chose for herself. Stranger yet was the passion that swept her breast. . . .

¹ *Emersonian diction* Many of the early reviews of Dickinson's poems drew comparisons to the poetry of Emerson—which at the time was both frequently praised for its suggestive power and sometimes disparaged for its lack of clarity.

² *H.H.* Helen Hunt Jackson (1830–85), a poet and former classmate of Dickinson's.

³ *the French school* Reference to the budding Impressionist movement, which originated in France in the 1870s. Impressionists' paintings were characterized by sketchy brushstrokes and a rejection of conventional subject matter; many of the movement's artists were known for completing paintings very quickly and without preliminary sketches.

from William Dean Howells,¹ "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (January 1891)

Few of the poems in the book are long, but none of the short, quick impulses of intense feeling or poignant thought can be called fragments. They are each a compassed whole, a sharply finished point, and there is evidence, circumstantial and direct, that the author spared no pains in the perfect expression of her ideals. Nothing, for example, could be added that would say more than she has said in four lines:

Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn
 Indicative that suns go down;
 The notice to the startled grass
 That darkness is about to pass.

Occasionally, the outside of the poem, so to speak, is left so rough, so rude, that the art seems to have faltered. But there is apparent to reflection the fact that the artist meant just this harsh exterior to remain, and that no grace of smoothness could have imparted her intention as it does. It is the soul of an abrupt, exalted New England woman that speaks in such brokenness. ...

If nothing else had come out of our life but this strange poetry we should feel that in the work of Emily Dickinson America, or New England rather, had made a distinctive addition to the literature of the world, and could not be left out of any record of it; and the interesting and important thing is that this poetry is as characteristic of our life as our business enterprise, our political turmoil, our demagogism, our millionarism. ...

from Anonymous, *Springfield Weekly Republican* (23 January 1891)

It is true that there has been a remarkable response to this wonderful spiritual verse of Emily ... Dickinson, but it has been accompanied by a vexatious display of the current feebleness of vision among professed critics,² who complain of the ragged lines and imperfect rhymes—as if one should complain that every leaf of the rose is not a perfect geometrical figure, or that the rainbow is not definitely bounded by straight chalk marks. ...

from Andrew Lang, "A Literary Causerie," *Speaker* (31 January 1891)

Though few people care for poetry, and though a new poet has to wait long for his laurels³ in England, in America both singers and the love of song seem much more popular. America has lately lost two great lyrists—lost them before their very names were heard of in our country. One was Miss Emily Dickinson, whose remains Mr. Howells has applauded, and has found to be in themselves a justification of America's literary existence. These poems have reached a third edition: but while the term "edition" now means 100 copies, and now 10,000, this fact tells us very little. Judging Miss Dickinson's work by Mr. Howells' specimens, her muse was *super grammaticum*,⁴ and was wholly reckless of rhyme. ...⁵

¹ *William Dean Howells* Prominent American novelist and critic (1837–1920).

² *professed critics* The *Springfield Weekly Republican* (in which several of Dickinson's poems had appeared in the 1860s) appears to have been taking aim at one critic in particular—Andrew Lang, whose long review of Dickinson's *Poems* appeared under the heading "The Newest Poet" in the London *Daily News*, 2 January 1891. (A second piece by Lang on Dickinson, which appeared in the January 1891 issue of the *Speaker*, is excerpted below.)

³ *laurels* Wreath of bay laurel leaves, a traditional symbol of literary merit.

⁴ *super grammaticum* Latin: above grammar.

⁵ Lang proceeds to quote from the poem beginning, "I died for beauty."

... Aristotle¹ says that the ultimate Democracy is remarkable for the license it permits to women and to children. Miss Dickinson, like Mrs. Browning,² though she was not learned like Mrs. Browning, took great license with rhymes. Possibly the poetry of Democracy will abound more and more in these liberties. But then the question will arise, Is it poetry at all? For poetry, too, has its laws, and if they are absolutely neglected, poetry will die. This may be of no great moment, as there is plenty of old poetry in stock, but still one must urge that lawless poetry is skimble-skamble stuff, with no right to exist. ... What did the corpse mean by “failing for beauty”? Did it die because it was not pretty? Or did it die for love of the beauty of some other person? And, if the dead bodies could go on conversing for a considerable time, why did they relapse into silence when the moss “had reached their lips, and covered up their names”? Moss does not, in fact, grow inside graves, and how could any development of moss on the tombstone affect these conversational corpses? A poem may be nonsense and yet may be charming, like Mr. William Morris’s³ “Blue Closet,” which has the inconsequence of a dream. But a poem like the poem of the dead bodies is unrhymed nonsense....



The daguerreotype reproduced in the introduction to Dickinson is the only verified photograph of Emily Dickinson known to exist. The original daguerreotype was taken by William C. North between about 1846 and 1848, when the poet was a teenager; it appears that neither Dickinson nor her family were ever satisfied with it as a likeness, and Dickinson was reluctant to share it with outsiders throughout her life. That daguerreotype was retouched by artist Laura Coombs Hills after Dickinson’s death upon the request of her sister, Lavinia Dickinson; the resulting image is reproduced here. It was used extensively in the twentieth century, including in Martha Dickinson Bianchi’s *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1924) and in several mid-century biographies of Dickinson.

¹ *Aristotle* Ancient Greek philosopher (384–322 BCE).

² *Mrs. Browning* English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61), who was admired by Dickinson.

³ *Mr. William Morris* English writer and textile designer (1834–96).