

EMILY DICKINSON IN THE POSTPRINT ERA

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ABSTRACT

For over a century, the editing of Emily Dickinson has become one of the most controversial topics among literary scholars. In the 1890s, the first editions of Dickinson's poems established her as a major American poet of the nineteenth century, but those editions were also the first instigators of her mystification, they introduced Dickinson as a secluded woman and set the foundation for a large tradition of bibliographical criticism. It is not until the 1930s that certain poets started to take Dickinson seriously as a poet. In the 1950s, although the New Critical methodology opened a new era of Dickinson criticism, the tendency towards bibliographical criticism continued until 1970s. In the 1980s, R.W. Franklin's edition brought the reader closer to Dickinson's process of writing. This edition also highlights the relevance of materiality in Dickinson's work. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to compare and analyze various editions of Dickinson's poetry and to determine the degree to which material changes in the poems have affected the meaning of the poems and our understanding of the poet herself. This thesis is concerned about the importance of materiality in Dickinson's poetry and how her work has been reinterpreted in the postprint era

Keywords: Emily Dickinson, editing, materiality, poetry, postprint era

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EMILY DICKINSON IN THE POSTPRINT ERA

INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson published ten poems in her lifetime. They were published anonymously and were apparently “made public against her wishes.”¹ Since then, posthumous editions of her collected poems have filled the shelves of many American households. For over a century, the editing of Dickinson’s poetry has become one of the most controversial topics among literary scholars for several reasons. On the one hand, the earliest volumes of Dickinson’s poems established her as a major American poet of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, those three first editions reformatted her poems for print. Following the typographical conventions of the time, editors standardized punctuation and capitalization in her poems, and they supplied titles and omitted entire verses. Moreover, Dickinson’s poetry was not the only thing that had to conform to the canon; her image also had to agree with the stereotypical vision of the nineteenth-century “woman-poet” as “literally and figuratively confined.”² Throughout the years, new editions of her poems, new materials such as letters, and Dickinson’s original manuscripts extensively open new ways of understanding her life and poetry. For instance, some scholars would define Dickinson’s manuscripts as “visual productions,” containing aspects of both poetry and visual art.³ For this reason, the study of her manuscripts and all their material facts has increased in the past years. Indeed, the textual body of her work as well as certain manuscripts’ features help to convey meaning, and they are essential to understand Dickinson’s life and poetry. Without those manuscripts, the reader cannot know how editorial omissions and additions have affected meaning. For instance, the postmodern literary

¹ R.W. Franklin, “Introduction,” in *The Editing of Emily Dickinson* (University of Wisconsin, 1967), xv.

² Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, “Preface,” in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, first edition (Yale University Press, 1979), xi.

³ Susan Howe, “Preface,” in *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson’s Envelope Poems*, ed. Jen Bervin and Marta Werner (Christine Burgin: New Directions, 2013), 6.

critic Katherine Hayles writes about the relevance of this materiality in her book *Writing Machines*:

A critical practice that ignores materiality, or that reduces it to a narrow range of engagements, cuts itself off from the exuberant possibilities of all the unpredictable things that happen when we as embodied creatures interact with the rich physicality of the world. Literature was never only words, never merely immaterial verbal constructions. Literary texts, like us, have bodies, an actuality necessitating that their materialities and meanings are deeply interwoven into each other.⁴

This thesis is concerned about the importance of materiality in Emily Dickinson's work. Does materiality affect meaning? Did materiality also affect the vision of her persona? For the textual scholar Jerome McGann, Dickinson's poetry "was not written *for* a print medium, even though it was written *in* an age of print."⁵ Therefore, how can or should editors accommodate her poetry accurately in print? On the other hand, Hayles's *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era* points out that, although Western cultures have relied on print for the past centuries, we must acknowledge that "print-based humanities [have] move[d] into the digital era."⁶ Thus, the purpose of this paper is to compare and analyze various editions of Dickinson's poetry and to determine the degree to which material changes in the poems have affected the meaning of the poems and our understanding of the poet herself. Finally, by following the changes in editing of some of the poems that were published during her lifetime, we will be able to appreciate the importance of materiality in Dickinson's poetry and how her work has been reimagined or

⁴ Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 107.

⁵ Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 11.

⁶ Hayles, *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), vii.

reinterpreted in the postprint era. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this project, this thesis connects some traditional fields of research, such as literary criticism and history, with other emerging fields of study such as digital humanities.

This project is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1, “Publishing Emily Dickinson and the Creation of the Myth,” focuses on the three editions of Dickinson’s poems and the two volumes of her letters published by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson in the 1890s. Due to the editors’ uncertainty about the public acceptance of Dickinson’s original style, they accommodate Dickinson’s work to the typographical conventions of the time. Nevertheless, did they also “accommodate” the image of the poet to the social conventions of the time? If so, what were the stereotypes associated with the woman writer in the nineteenth century? In this chapter, we will also analyze Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* and Susan Howe’s *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*. In Chapter 2, “Editing Dickinson 1900s – 1940s,” this paper will focus on how “the division of the manuscripts in the nineteenth century led to editorial confusion in the [first half of the] twentieth century,”⁷ before Harvard University Press acquired the copyright of Dickinson’s manuscripts in 1950. Some of the primary sources in this section will be Martha Dickinson Bianchi’s *The Single Hound* (1914) and *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1924) and Millicent Todd Bingham’s *Bolts of Melody* (1945). In Chapter 3, “Johnson’s 1950s editions,” we will analyze the importance of manuscripts and the material changes in these new editions. What Franklin’s *The Editing of Emily Dickinson* assures is that all poems

⁷ Ibid., xvi.

were “edited from the manuscripts without alteration.”⁸ Although it is true that Johnson’s editions restored some of Dickinson’s unconventional punctuation and capitalization, he also altered the poems by imposing his own particular order, among other variations. In fact, Richard B. Sewall points out that Johnson’s variorum edition in 1955 opened a new era in Dickinson’s criticism, and that a great deal of essays were written during or since that year. In Chapter 4, “Changes in Materiality in Franklin’s *The Manuscript Books*,” it is Dickinson’s original manuscripts that are made available for the first time, which represents a turning point in Dickinson’s criticism, not only towards the significance of her work and its connection to materiality, but also in approaching her life and character. Although several scholars, such as Austin Warren, considered that Johnson produced “what has long been desired—a carefully edited and annotated complete text of Emily Dickinson’s poems;”⁹ Franklin’s manuscripts revealed that there were multiple meanings hidden not only behind her words, but also in Dickinson’s use of space and punctuation. Some of the secondary sources selected in this section are Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson*, Adrienne Rich’s *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith’s *Open Me Carefully*, and Marta Werner’s *Open Folios*. In Chapter 5, “Emily Dickinson and Materiality in the twenty-first century,” we will examine new alternatives for editing not only her letters and poems, but also fragments and her enveloped poems. Some of the sources considered in this section are Ben Jervin and Marta Werner’s *The Gorgeous Nothings*, Werner’s *Radical Scatters*, Jerome Charyn’s *A Loaded Gun*, and Cristanne Miller’s *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*. In Gilber and Gubar’s words, “Werner’s pioneering diplomatic transcriptions were the first to accurately reflect Dickinson’s manuscripts typographically in book

⁸ Ibid., xvii.

⁹ Austin Warren, *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Richard B. Sewall (Prentice-Hall: University of Michigan, 1963), 101.

form,”¹⁰ opinion which is also shared by other scholars, including Howe and Charyn. Has Werner then succeeded in representing Dickinson’s poetry accurately in print? Whether yes or no, this question will lead to the last section of this project, “Historiography of a Poem.” In this section, I will look closely at some of the poems that were published during Dickinson’s lifetime, and analyze their evolution, in terms of editing and materiality, from first editions to modern ones. Moreover, this section will examine not only printing editions of Dickinson’s poetry, but also other “not print-based” proposals that have recently been carried out in digital environments. The writings of the postmodern literary critic Katherine Hayles and the visual theorist Johanna Drucker are part of the reading material for this last section, as I hope to answer the question, is there a place for Emily Dickinson in the postprint era?

¹⁰Gilber and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Yale University Press, 1979), 11.

CHAPTER 1: PUBLISHING EMILY DICKINSON AND THE CREATION OF THE MYTH

Emily Dickinson dutifully pursued poetry throughout her life and wrote around 1,800 poems and at least 1,150 letters. Upon her death in 1886, Dickinson left a substantial number of manuscripts organized into booklets that Dickinson scholars call fascicles,¹¹ as well as other materials such as prose fragments, drafts, envelopes, and “scraps.” The fascicles, as Millicent Todd Bingham describes, are written “in ink on sheets of letter paper measuring five by eight inches. When she had filled five or six double sheets, she would make two pin-holes in the left margin and insert a piece of string.”¹² It is uncertain what Dickinson’s intentions were in relation to her fascicles; some accounts suggest that she told her sister Lavinia to destroy them after her death. Nevertheless, what we know is that Lavinia chose to save the material and publish it. Lavinia first gave Susan Dickinson (her sister-in-law) the task of editing Dickinson’s poems to print. However, Susan was moving slowly, trying to organize the vast amount of work, and, after four years, Lavinia “demanded that the fascicle poems be returned for another editor,”¹³ Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

Born in 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson led a financially privileged life in a well-respected family in a Calvinist community. Her poetry, in Wendy Martin’s words, expresses Dickinson’s struggle “with her faith, with her father, with mortality, and with the challenges of being a woman and a poet.”¹⁴ On

¹¹ Cristanne Miller, “Introduction,” in *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 1.

¹² Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham, “Introduction,” in *Bolts of Melody: New Poems by Emily Dickinson* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), ix.

¹³ Martha Nell Smith, “Susan and Emily Dickinson: their lives, in letters,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

¹⁴ Wendy Martin, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

April 15, 1862, when Emily Dickinson was thirty-one years old, she sent the editor Thomas W. Higginson four of her poems, inquiring as to whether “her verses breathed.”¹⁵ Although she did not openly attempt to publish, the letter to Higginson, at least, might suggest an ambivalence toward it. Due to the “unusual” features of Dickinson’s poetry (her famous dashes, the unconventional capitalization, the insertion of alternate words), Higginson judged the poems as “not for publication,” at least as they stood. Nevertheless, implied in Dickinson’s second letter to him, Higginson was curious about her new and revolutionary poetry. After exchanging a couple more letters and a few more poems, Dickinson’s third letter insinuates her choice of remaining unpublished:

I smile when you suggest that I delay “to publish” – that being
Foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin.
If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her – if she did not,
The longest day would pass me on the chase – and the approbation
Of my Dog, would forsake me – then. My Barefoot-Rank is better.
You think my gait “spasmodic.” I am in danger, Sir.
You think me “uncontrolled.” I have no tribunal. . . .
The Sailor cannot see the North, but knows the Needle can.¹⁶

Beginning four years after Dickinson’s death, the first editions of *Poems* by Emily Dickinson, published in 1890, 1891, and 1896 respectively, were released. However, due to Loomis Todd and Higginson’s apprehension “about the willingness of the public to accept the poems as they stood,”¹⁷ they were “forced” to arrange Dickinson’s verse form and punctuation, among other modifications. For instance, the poem “Safe in their alabaster chambers,” edited in *BOOK IV – TIME AND ETERNITY*, reads:

¹⁵ Thomas H. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), v.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

SAFE in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning and untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the resurrection,
Rafter of satin, and roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine;
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear;
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence, –
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

Grand go the years in the crescent above them;
Worlds scoop their arcs, and firmaments row,
Diadems drop and Doges surrender,
Soundless as dots on a disk of snow.¹⁸

As R.W. Franklin's *The Editing of Emily Dickinson* assures, editors "changed the unorthodox punctuation and altered readings in an effort to gain public acceptance for the poems."¹⁹ That is to say, they altered Dickinson's work to fit the typographical conventions of the time (i.e., Victorian verse). Indeed, upon Dickinson's death, her publication created a turbulent battle for control over her manuscripts and their appearance in print. In "The Emily Dickinson Wars," Betsy Erkkila highlights how Todd and Higginson appealed "to the popular literary taste of the time," and popular audiences.²⁰ Certainly, the first edition of *Poems* was remarkably successful, as it sold around 10,000 copies. However, as Jerome McGann's *Black Riders* suggests, Todd and Higginson gave titles to the poems and ordered them into groups with "Victorian ethico-religious readings: Life, Love, Nature, Time and Eternity." Still, in 1993, when

¹⁸ Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson, *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), 8.

¹⁹ R. W. Franklin, "Introduction," in *The Editing of Emily Dickinson* (University of Wisconsin, 1967), xv.

²⁰ Betsy Erkkila, "The Emily Dickinson Wars," in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

McGann's book was written, those first editions represented "an important and still influential frame for reading Dickinson's writing."²¹ Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that editors also "accommodate" the image of the poet to the social conventions of the time.

In fact, the first volumes of Dickinson's poems and letters, edited by Todd and Higginson in the 1890s, introduced Dickinson as a secluded woman in white and, therefore, they were the first instigators of her mystification. For instance, in Higginson's preface of *Poems* (1890), he defines Dickinson as "a recluse by temperament and habit." Since then, the myth of Emily Dickinson as the "recluse of Amherst" has created many popular legends sustained by historical, and literary studies.²² Those popular legends emphasized the static image of Dickinson as a young woman in white, virginal and fragile; they also portrayed her as an agoraphobic and eccentric spinster who was socially and culturally isolated. In Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, the authors express their surprise at the coherence of imagery and theme "in the works of writers who were often historically, and psychologically distant from each other," and how those women artists were "literally and figuratively confined" in a patriarchal society.²³ In their book, one of the arguments that the authors make is what they consider the major problem of the woman poet in literary tradition: what Suzanne Juhasz calls the "double bind." According to Juhasz, the "double bind" is "the impossibility of self-assertion for a woman" and "the necessity of self-assertion for a poet."²⁴ Although the nineteenth century might be considered the first period in which female writing ceases to be in some sense "unusual," it is the absence of

²¹ Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 26.

²² Todd and Higginson, "Preface," in *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), xi.

²³ Gilbert and Gubar, "Preface," in *The Madwoman* (Yale University Press, 1979), xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 584.

women poets that needs further explanation. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest, “from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century the poet had a privileged, almost magical role in most European societies, and ‘he’ had a quasi-priestly role after Romantic thinkers had appropriated the vocabulary of theology for the realm of aesthetics.”²⁵ Certainly, in Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, the philosopher points out that “the art of *speech*,” which includes rhetoric and poetry, is one of the three kinds of fine art, “the *orator* [poet] announces a serious business, and for the purpose of entertaining his audience conducts it as if it were a mere *play* with ideas.”²⁶ For Kant, poetry can be considered as the highest form of art, related to the divine, and poets are seen as priests. Therefore, since poets are priests, can women be poets? In nineteenth-century America, a woman could not be a poet, what a woman could be was a “ladypoet,” a term that has been used pejoratively by biographers and critics. It is true that women were not discouraged from writing verse, but it was seen more as an “elegant hobby” than a profession. Indeed, the term “ladypoet” does not stress the womanhood but the “ladyhood” of women poets which relates to “the social dependency, the matrimonial respectability or vulnerable virginity” associated with femininity.²⁷ Thus, the problem in asserting their own identity as poets while dealing with their role as women (or submissive wives) in a patriarchal society becomes a key element for understanding not only their art, but also their choices in life. For Gilbert and Gubar, while some women poets of the time such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti solved this “double bind” of the woman poet and distanced themselves from their anxieties by inserting “madwomen” in their poetry, Emily Dickinson herself became a

²⁵ Ibid., 546.

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Aesthetic Judgement,” in *Contemplating Music: Source Readings in the Aesthetics of Music*, vol. 1, ed. Ruth Katz and Carl Dahlhaus (Pendragon, 1987), 306.

²⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman* (Yale University Press, 1979), 558.

“madwoman.”²⁸ Since then, critics and biographers concentrated more on her neurosis and seclusion rather than her poetic work. During the 1890s, Dickinson was consumed and marketed in a way that reveals, as Erkkila points out, “editorial practice, and literary taste at a crucial moment in the simultaneous emergence of aestheticism and mass culture, literary modernism and the culture of consumption,”²⁹ which will enormously influence the different approaches when studying Dickinson’s life and work during the first decades of the twentieth century.

²⁸ Ibid., 583.

²⁹ Erkkila, “The Emily Dickinson Wars,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

CHAPTER 2: EDITING DICKINSON 1910s-1940s

After the editions of Dickinson's poems and letters in the 1890s, the manuscripts were split between Mabel Loomis Todd, Lavinia Dickinson, and Susan Dickinson, creating, as Erkkilä proclaims, "a war between the houses."³⁰ In 1914, Martha Dickinson Bianchi (her niece) published *The Single Hound*, a collection of poems that Emily Dickinson wrote to Susan during her lifetime relationship, from girlhood until death. In the preface, Martha Dickinson acknowledges (with a sarcastic humor) the mysticism surrounding Dickinson's daily practices: "I am told she [Dickinson] is taught in colleges as a rare strange being; a weird recluse, eating her heart out in morbid and unhappy longing, or a victim of unsatisfied passion, (...) but to her niece and nephews she was of fairy lineage," Dickinson was someone who talked to them as if they were adults and kept their secrets.³¹ Dickinson's niece also published several editions of poems and letters during the 1920s. Nevertheless, it is the lack of attention to Dickinson's work from poets and critics during this time that is worth mentioning. Indeed, what Christopher Benfey's "Emily Dickinson and the American South" declares is the fact that Dickinson was scarcely alluded to and rarely included in literary histories and anthologies of the time. For instance, in the 1920s, Alfred Kazin points out in *On Native Grounds*, "the emergence of our modern American Literature after a period of dark ignorance and repressive Victorian gentility was regarded as the world's eighth wonder, a proof that America had at last 'come of age'."³² However, Dickinson was not included in this "emergence," neither in T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound's manifestos. Besides, the notion of female fulfillment (an idea that will be more deeply analyze later in this chapter) again appears as a "handicap"

³⁰ Erkkilä, "The Emily Dickinson Wars," in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12.

³¹ Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime* (Boston: Little Brown, 1914), vi.

³² Christopher Benfey, "Emily Dickinson and the American South," in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33.

when talking about American women poets in general, and Dickinson in particular. For instance, William Carlos Williams declares *In the American Grain* (1925):

It is the women above all – there never have been women, save pioneer Katies; not one in flower save some moonflower Poe may have seen, or an unripe child. Poets? Where? They are the test. But a true woman in flower, never. Emily Dickinson, starving of passion in her father's garden, is the very nearest we have ever seen – starving.

Never a woman [i.e., a heterosexually “fulfilled” woman]: never a poet. That's an axiom. Never a poet saw sun here.³³

On the other hand, there were also other voices, such as the poet Conrad Aiken who in 1924 claimed Dickinson's significance in American Literature. Aiken edited (for British readers) a selection of Dickinson's poems, and in his preface (which might be considered one of the firsts major essays on Dickinson's work), he defines her as “the most perfect flower of New England Transcendentalism.”³⁴ During the 1930s, Dickinson became, as Erkkila's essay points out, “a cultural icon among several modernists, including most notably Amy Lowell, Conrad Aiken, Hart Crane, Yvor Winters, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate, whose 1932 article “New England Culture and Emily Dickinson,” begins by setting Dickinson as a New Critical embodiment of, what they called, “a poetry of ideas.”³⁵ Besides, what Tate asserts in his essay is that Dickinson's poetry “has not been widely read,” and also that she became a “hermit” by “deliberate and conscious choice,” and “her life was one of the

³³ Ibid., 34.

³⁴ Ibid., 33.

³⁵ Erkkila, “The Emily Dickinson Wars,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

richest and deepest ever lived on this continent.”³⁶ Once again, we face a contradiction involving Dickinson criticism. While some poets and critics diminished her status as a woman poet, others recast her as an icon; while some insisted on her isolation and eccentricity, others suggested that Dickinson’s life was “deliberately” chosen and filled. What Tate believes to be the problem is “the failure of the scholars to feel more than biographical curiosity about her.”³⁷ Even within New Criticism, it was difficult for critics to separate the poet from the poem.

In 1945, Mabel Loomis Todd and her daughter Millicent Todd Bingham published *Bolts of Melody*, one of the last editions before Harvard University Press got possession of Dickinson’s manuscripts. In its introduction, both Mark Van Doren and Millicent Todd emphasize the complexity of the editor’s “decision-making” process because, as Millicent Todd affirms, “an editor cannot indulge in the ‘luxury of doubt.’ He is forced to choose.”³⁸ Besides, due to so many decisions and choices, the editor almost becomes “a poet himself.”³⁹ In this respect, is it reasonable to place practically on the same level the person who edits with the person who creates the work of art? Is it truly necessary that the editor becomes the poet when editing poetry? Either way, in this edition Millicent Todd highlights her struggle when “standardizing” Dickinson’s poetry. On the one hand, Todd talks about the fascicles containing the revised poems, and many which Dickinson “apparently considered finished” because, from her point of view, “they were far from ready for the printer;”⁴⁰ for example, the poem

³⁶ Benfey, “Emily Dickinson and the American South,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35.

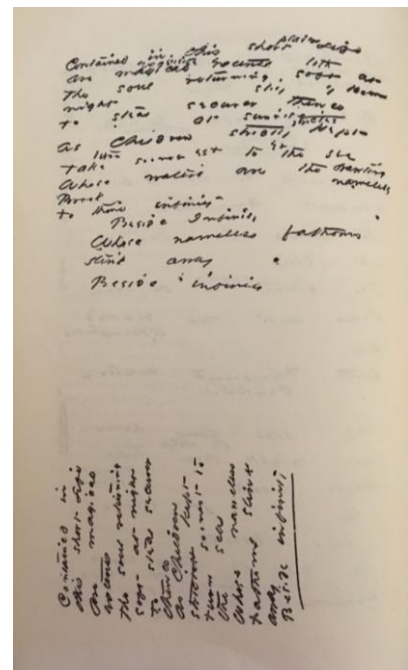
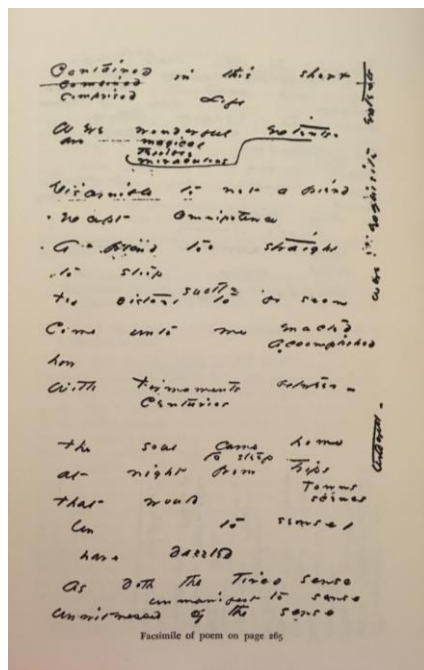
³⁷ Allen Tate, *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Richard B. Sewall (Prentice-Hall: University of Michigan, 1963), 17.

³⁸ Loomis Todd and Todd Bingham, “Introduction,” in *Bolts of Melody* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), x.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, v.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

“Contained in this short life.” Todd’s introduction includes the following images of three different versions of the poem in Dickinson’s facsimile:



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However, it is in the contents where the reader finds the “standardized” version of the poem:

CONTAINED in this short life
Are magical extents –
The soul returning soft at night
To steal securer thence
As children strictest kept
Turn soonest to the sea
Whose nameless fathoms slink away
Beside infinity.

Contained in this short life
Are terrible extents
Discernible to not a friend
Except omnipotence –
A friend too straight to scoop,
Too distant to be seen;
“Come unto me,” enacted how,
With firmaments between?⁴²

⁴¹ Loomis Todd and Todd Bingham, “Introduction,” in *Bolts of Melody* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), xiii.

⁴² Loomis Todd and Todd Bingham, *Bolts of Melody* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), 265.

Todd also comments on how the “dashes,” in some poems, seem an essential part of the text, preventing the words from “falling apart.” Furthermore, in relation to Dickinson’s “special” spelling, Todd points out that “certain spellings had special meanings for Emily. But the something special evaporates in print.”⁴³ What is exactly the thing that “evaporates”? The “body” of the text, its visual traits as material verbal constructions, which are as much part of the meaning as the words themselves. At last, Millicent Todd mentions the many envelopes, “scraps,” and fragments that her mother laid aside for the “next generation,” and she comes to the conclusion that “to select the poems for a definitive edition of the works of Emily Dickinson will be easier in 50 years than it is now.”⁴⁴ Certainly, there is no evidence to suggest that in the 1990s Dickinson’s work was “easier” to edit; nevertheless, in Chapter 5, it is the importance of those envelopes and fragments in Dickinson’s editing during the twenty-first century that I will focus on, and the “refusal” to believe that any Dickinson edition might be “definitive,” because her writing has neither a beginning nor an end.

⁴³ Loomis Todd and Todd Bingham, “Introduction,” in *Bolts of Melody* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), xi.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

CHAPTER 3 – THOMAS JOHNSON’S EDITIONS IN THE 1950s

In 1950, Harvard University obtained the copyrights of both portions of the manuscripts and made them available to the editor Thomas W. Johnson. As Franklin states in *The Editing of Emily Dickinson*, “Mr. Johnson’s purpose was to publish all the poems -edited from the manuscripts, not reprinted from other sources- and to present them literally, as written, without alternation however well-intentioned.”⁴⁵ For instance, returning to “Safe in their alabaster chambers,” Johnson’s edition presents two versions of the poem:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers, Untouched by Morning – And untouched by Noon – Lie the meek members of the Resurrection – Rafter of Satin, and Roof of Stone –	Safe in their Alabaster Chambers – Untouched by Morning And untouched by Noon – Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection – Rafter of Satin, And Roof of Stone.
Grand go the Years – in the Crescent – above them – Worlds scoop their Arcs – And Firmaments – row – Diadems – drop – and Doges – surrender – Soundless as dots – on a Disc of Snow – <i>version of 1861</i>	Light laughs the breeze In her Castle above them – Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear, Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence – Ah, what sagacity perished here! <i>version of 1859</i>

Some scholars agree with the fact that although Johnson restored “the poet’s idiosyncratic spelling, punctuation (the famous dashes), and word variants to her poems,”⁴⁶ he also established his “criteria” for poetic order. As McGann states, “Neither Johnson nor Todd and Higginson come close to reproducing Dickinson’s own arrangement for her poems.”⁴⁷ However, McGann also emphasizes that Johnson is “indispensable for anyone wanting to understand either Dickinson’s writing or its relation to the historical development of the language of culture during the past two hundred years.”⁴⁸ What McGann underlines here is the importance of the historical

⁴⁵ Franklin, “Introduction,” in *The Editing of Emily Dickinson* (University of Wisconsin, 1967), xvii.

⁴⁶ Susan Howe, “These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values”, in *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 134.

⁴⁷ McGann, *Black Riders*, 26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

context for writing and reading. For instance, in the late 1950s, American poetry took a “confessional” shift by returning to the “first-person singular,” as Benfey points out, “the autobiographical turn that dominated American poetry in the late 1950s and early 1960s made Dickinson’s poetry, with its forceful, ‘I’- dominated voice, particularly audible.”⁴⁹ Additionally, Johnson’s editions reaffirmed the New Critical methodology, focusing on close reading and the “self-enclosed” aesthetic of poems. In 1958, after the publication of the volumes of Dickinson’s poems and letters, Johnson declares, “with the publication of these letters, the task of editing the poetry and prose of Emily Dickinson, undertaken in the spring of 1950, is brought to its conclusion.”⁵⁰ However, in the following section, we will see how Johnson and other editors and critics continue with the “ongoing” tendency “to banish or repress the social location and formation of Dickinson’s work,”⁵¹ as well as to emphasize her reclusion.

To a greater extent, from the 1940s to the 1970s, most of Dickinson’s poetic criticism still focused on her psychological issues rather than her work. For instance, in F.O. Matthiessen’s classic literary history *American Renaissance* (1941), Dickinson is mentioned in a short paragraph that argues that the “compressed form” of her poems “resulted from her need to resolve conflicts,” which the author does not specify.⁵² In the 1950s, the critic R.P. Blackmur argues that Dickinson “was neither a professional poet nor an amateur; she was a private poet who wrote indefatigably as some women cook or knit.”⁵³ In 1963, Richard B. Sewall published *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*. In this collection, Sewall points out that only one critical essay was

⁴⁹ Benfey, “Emily Dickinson and the American South,” 43.

⁵⁰ Marta Werner, *Emily Dickinson’s Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* (University of Michigan Press, 1995), 13.

⁵¹ Erkkila, “The Emily Dickinson Wars,” 16.

⁵² Eliot Weinberger, “Preface,” in *My Emily Dickinson* by Susan Howe (New York: New Directions Books, 1985), ix.

⁵³ Sewall, *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essay* (Prentice-Hall: University of Michigan, 1963), 119.

published before 1930 because “the preoccupation till then had been largely biographical and the criticism fragmentary.”⁵⁴ What Sewall also suggests is that Dickinson’s eccentricities and sentimentalities would fall into perspective as years passed, proving that she was “a poet of great strength, courage, and singleness of purpose.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in 1971, John Cody’s *After Great Pain*, centers its attention once more on Dickinson’s “psychological calamities, decades of frustration, isolation, and loneliness.”⁵⁶ The following section will examine how scholars have fiercely looked for the causes of Dickinson’s seclusion; nevertheless, Thomas Johnson was sure about one of its consequences. Certainly, the editor doubted whether Dickinson was aware of the American Civil War, as he states in the “Introduction” to *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* in 1958:

Since Emily Dickinson’s full maturity as a dedicated artist occurred during the span of the Civil War, the most convulsive era of the nation’s history, one of course turns to the letters of 1861 – 1865, and the years that follow, for her interpretations of events. But the fact is that she did not live in history and held no view of it past or current.⁵⁷

Once again, Dickinson’s image as a “madwoman” secluded in her room unaware of “the most convulsive” current events of her time is prioritized over her work. Nevertheless, the late-1960s will bring a new focus for feminist criticism of Dickinson’s life and work coming from Adrienne Rich first, and Susan Howe among others. Certainly, Howe’s vision questions the idea of Dickinson as an “isolated neurotic,” and Howe’s Dickinson “is fully aware of events, including the Civil War, in

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁶ John Cody, “Epilogue,” in *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 499.

⁵⁷ Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 132.

the world outside.”⁵⁸ For instance, the letter that Dickinson wrote to T.W. Higginson in 1863 after reading in the Springfield Republican that he no longer led his regiment in South Carolina:

February 1863

Dear friend,

I did not deem that Planetary forces annulled – but suffered an exchange of Territory, or World –

I should have liked to see you, before you became improbable. War
Feels to me an oblique place – Should there be other Summers, would
you perhaps come?⁵⁹

In accordance with Howe, Jay Leyda’s *The Years of Hours of Emily Dickinson*, published in 1960 and one of the first editions to examine Dickinson’s late fragments, also points out her awareness of the world:

She was no more and no less alone than many other artists, no more and no less isolated, or insulated, from the world. The most casual leafing through the chronology will reveal an extraordinary large circle of acquaintances, friends, correspondents.⁶⁰

Indeed, isolation or seclusion does not only refer to the confinement of a person in a physical space; it is also related to “social isolation,” and Dickinson’s letters reflect exactly the opposite: she was an active member within her family and community. However, what biographers and scholars have frequently tried to discern is the motive of her seclusion as well as that of her inspiration; for Johnson, whose editions will serve as the “standard” editions for generations of students, teachers, and scholars, the

⁵⁸ Howe, “Introduction,” in *My Emily Dickinson*, xi.

⁵⁹ Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, 129.

⁶⁰ Jay Leyda, “Introduction,” in *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), xx.

locus of Dickinson's genius is not inside herself, but in "the spectral heteronormative figure of the 'Master'," and once again, the notion of "woman fulfillment."⁶¹

In opposition to Johnson's criticism, Adrienne Rich's influential essay "Vesuvius at Home: the Power of Emily Dickinson" published in 1975, which might be considered a turning point within Dickinson's criticism, points out that "much energy has been invested in trying to identify a concrete, flesh-and-blood male lover whom Dickinson is supposed to have renounced, and to the loss of whom can be traced the secret of her seclusion and the vein of much of her poetry."⁶² Even in the 1970s, many critics and biographers, for instance John Cody, believed in "the incompatibility between womanly fulfillment and passionate art," and how the art of a woman poet mostly arises from "romantic" feelings "either in response to a real romance or as compensation for a missing one."⁶³ Due to this fact, critics became obsessed with searching for this muse figure in the form of a male lover which was considered to be central for understanding Dickinson's life and poetry. As Franklin states in *The Master Letters*:

Although there is no evidence the [Master] letters were ever posted (none of the surviving documents would have been in suitable condition), they indicate a long relationship, geographically apart, in which correspondence would have been the primary means of communication."⁶⁴

On the contrary, Adrienne Rich acknowledges that Emily Dickinson converted into metaphor both men and women in her life; therefore, "it is far too limiting to trace that

⁶¹ Erkkila, "The Emily Dickinson Wars," 16.

⁶² Adrienne Rich, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: Norton & Company, 1979), 165.

⁶³ Gilber and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 543.

⁶⁴ Howe, *The Birthmark*, 140.

‘He’ to some specific lover.”⁶⁵ Rich’s essay starts with the problematic: why is still difficult to take Dickinson’s work seriously? For instance, in the late 1970s, *The Belle of Amherst*, a later televised Broadway play, based on Dickinson’s popular poems, and on the “mystified” account of her life and eccentric character, continue to “merchandise” Dickinson’s image. In her essay, Rich shows how “all criticism of this poet’s work suffers from the literary and historical silence and secrecy surrounding intense woman-to-woman relationships – a central element in Dickinson’s life and art; and by the assumption that she was asexual or heterosexually ‘sublimated’.”⁶⁶ When considering relationships between women in America during the nineteenth and twentieth century, Rich points out:

The historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has shown that there was far less taboo on intense, even passionate and sensual, relationships between women in the American nineteenth-century “female world of love and ritual,” as she terms it, than there was later in the twentieth century. A marriage did not dilute the strength of a female relationship.⁶⁷

According to the many sources Smith-Rosenberg has examined, the figure of the nineteenth century “close woman friend” might be considerably more significant than the one of the husband. Either way, to understand the reasons why certain scholars, not only during the nineteenth century but also during the twentieth, have reinforced the myth of the secluded and virginal woman in white, the relationship between Dickinson and her sister-in-law Susan Huntington must be considered. In *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson’s Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson* by Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, the authors reinforce the importance of the two women’s correspondence, which lasted for four decades, to comprehend “Dickinson’s

⁶⁵ Rich, “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson,” 161.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

life, creative process, and poetry.” For the authors, “these intimate letters tell the story of a passionate and sustained attachment between Dickinson and the beloved friend who was her central source of inspiration, love, and intellectual poetic discourse.”⁶⁸ Indeed, editors of the time – particularly Mabel Loomis Todd – excluded the figure of Susan from commentary about the poems because her “crucial position as primary audience for Emily’s poetry became an inconvenient and irrelevant piece of information that did not jibe with the popular image of a nineteenth-century poetess.”⁶⁹ For instance, in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* published by Loomis Todd in 1894, Susan is not even mentioned. Another example is Richard Sewall’s famous biography, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* in 1974. Although there is a chapter called “Susan and Emily,” Sewall diminishes the significance of the materials for being “few and ambiguous.” He talks about only “dozens of notes,” “a few comments by observers,” and “a few poems that mention Sue by name.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in 1981, Franklin’s *The Manuscripts Books* made Dickinson’s manuscripts available for the first time.

At the same time, a new wave of criticism challenged most of the previous conceptions about Dickinson’s life and poetry, paying special attention to Dickinson’s materiality. For instance, Susan Howe and Martha Nell Smith will focus on Dickinson’s original manuscripts, looking for her “visual intentionality,” as well as the relevance of Dickinson’s relationship to her sister-in-law, to understand Dickinson’s writing practices.

⁶⁸ Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, “Introduction,” in *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson’s Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson* (Paris Press, 1998), xi.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁷⁰ Richard Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Harvard University Press, 1974), 197.

CHAPTER 4: CHANGES IN MATERIALITY IN FRANKLIN'S *THE MANUSCRIPT BOOKS OF EMILY DICKINSON*

In 1981, Emily Dickinson's original manuscripts were included in *The Manuscripts Books* published by Ralph W. Franklin. The editor describes the fascicles as "artistic gatherings," which are "intrarelated by theme, imagery, emotional movement."⁷¹ Although Franklin considers that Johnson's editions are essential, he also suggests that the fascicle structure gets obscured by presenting them chronologically. Franklin also noticed how, in the fascicles, alternate readings and word choices became abundant after 1861:

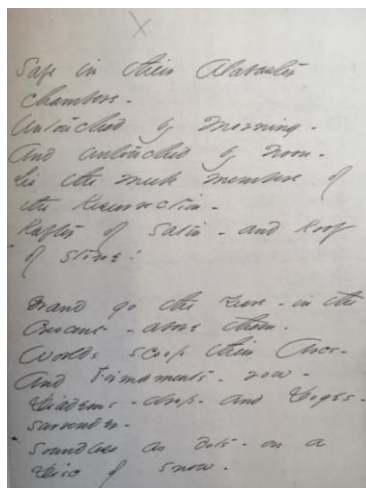
What started out as a comprehensive record of completed poems, serving as a source for additional copies, broadened to include intermediate stages and became in a sense a continuing workshop where, in producing a new copy for friends or in reading among the poems, she [Dickinson] would enter the specific poetic process again.⁷²

In McGann's words, "Franklin's facsimile edition puts the reader in closer touch with Dickinson's original scene of writing."⁷³ For instance, the facsimile of the two versions of "Safe in their alabaster chambers:"

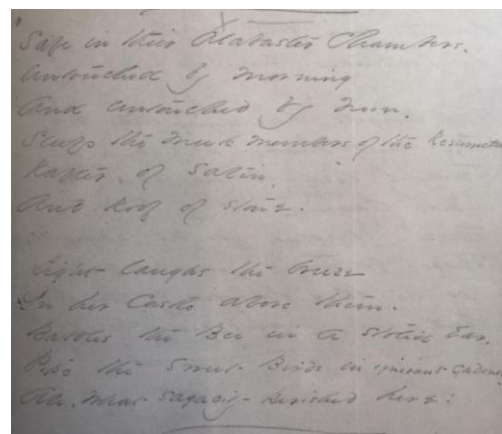
⁷¹ R. W. Franklin, "Preface," in *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Harvard University Press, 1981), ix.

⁷² *Ibid.*, x.

⁷³ McGann, *Black Riders*, 41.



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What Franklin states in the preface is how Dickinson's poems "resist translation into the conventions of print."⁷⁶ In contrast to Johnson's editions, Susan Howe points out that Franklin's shows the same words but different line breaks. The words were spread all over the page, and many poems provide word-choices as an integral part of the text, creating a "balance between poetry and visual art."⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the editor didn't include transcriptions. In *The Manuscripts*, Franklin frames Dickinson's poetic activity until approximately 1864, when she ceases to revise and handcraft her fascicles. Nevertheless, in *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios* by Marta Werner, the author disagrees with the fact that Dickinson's activity ended at the same time as her handcrafted booklets:

Emily Dickinson did not stop writing in 1864; rather, she stopped writing *books*. In the final decade of her life, sometimes called the "late prolific period," Dickinson abandoned even the minimal bibliographical apparatus of the fascicles, along with their dialectical structure, to explore a language as

⁷⁴ Franklin, *The Manuscript Books*, 193.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁶ Franklin, "Preface," in *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Harvard University Press, 1981), xi.

⁷⁷ Susan Howe, "Preface," in *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems* (Christine Burgin: New Directions, 2013), 6.

free in practice as in theory and to induce the unbinding of the scriptural economy.⁷⁸

In the 1870s and 1880s, Werner points out that Dickinson's folios lie "scattered," freed from any account of order. In her later writings, Dickinson willingly experiments with free form, and the relationship between message and medium. In 1993, it is this relationship that McGann deeply explores in his book *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*. For McGann, in the late nineteenth century, during the "Renaissance of Printing," "the physical presentation of texts was a fundamental feature of their expressiveness," which means that they should look "handsome or attractive," and easy to read.⁷⁹ McGann also clarifies that the "free form" associated with "modernism's experimental advance beyond its nineteenth-century precursors," partially emerges from William Morris (and some of his contemporaries, including Dickinson), and their experimentation with poetic material features.⁸⁰ Indeed, some scholars would define Dickinson's manuscripts as "visual productions," containing aspects of both poetry and visual art.⁸¹ In Dickinson's poetry, content and form "steep" into each other; they interact completely. However, as W.B. Yeats' perspective at the beginning of the twentieth century suggests, there is a gap between the poet and the execution of the poem: "in a social environment dominated by typographical media and publishing institutions, poets no longer stand in the same relation to their work," and poets had to accommodate their work "to persons and institutions whose interests were primarily commercial."⁸² At the end of the century, McGann suggests that the gap has become an "institutionalized" gulf, although he also

⁷⁸ Werner, *Open Folios*, 3.

⁷⁹ McGann, *Black Riders*, 76.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 81

⁸¹ Howe, "Preface," in *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems* (Christine Burgin: New Directions, 2013), 6.

⁸² McGann, *Black Riders*, 45.

assures that some American postmodernist poets, such as Susan Howe, have challenged standardized modes of publication in favor of emphasizing the scene and the materialities of writing:

Much of the best recent American poetry gains its strength by having disconnected itself from highly capitalized means and modes of production (by which I mean large university presses and trade publishers). Poets who work in those venues are far more alienated from their work – for instance, from its material features and its audience distribution – than are the writers (for instance) who appear through contemporary small presses like Roof, Burning Deck, The Figures, or Jargon.⁸³

In line with McGann, when talking about Dickinson specifically, Howe suggests the “domestication” of Dickinson’s life and poetry by editorial control, “the editing of her poems and letters has been controlled by gentlemen of the old school and by Harvard University Press since the 1950s,”⁸⁴ and some of those scholars have diminished her reputation as a woman poet by centering their best efforts on her life rather than her work. Why, by the 1980s, did biographers and critics continue, to a certain extent, dismissing this great American poet? Maybe because, as Howe points out, “a poet-scholar in full possession of her voice won’t fit the legend of deprivation and emotional disturbance embellished and enlarged on over the years.”⁸⁵ Indeed, in the 1890s, the image of the “madwoman” was highly marketable, and it perfectly applied to popular audiences. And in the 1920s, 1950s, 1980s... But time does not stop, and the emergence of new movements, opinions, and perspectives brings new answers to previous questions, creating, at the same time, new questions waiting to be

⁸³ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁴ Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 170.

⁸⁵ Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, 24.

answered. As mentioned in Chapter 1, many sources insinuate Dickinson's desire that, at her death, her sister Lavinia destroy her poems. Whether this happened or not, Martha Nell Smith's "Susan and Emily Dickinson: their lives in letters" brings into scene a new possibility, a letter from Dickinson to Susan, in spring 1886:

...Do you remem –
ber what whis –
pered to
"Horatio"?⁸⁶

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he whispered to Horatio "report me and my cause aright" and "tell my story."⁸⁷ For instance, accounts of the time suggest that Loomis Todd refused Higginson's recommendation to use Susan's obituary of Dickinson as an introduction for *Poems* (1890). In her obituary, Susan pointed out that "[Dickinson] kept her own company but was certainly 'not disappointed with the world.'"⁸⁸ Would this introduction have changed in any way the conditions surrounding Dickinson's editions and criticism? Probably not. Although it is highly evident that Dickinson criticism, from the very beginning, has been deeply influenced and inflected with biography, what Nell Smith points out is the significance of revising the story of the relationship between the two women for understanding Dickinson's writing process. For Adrienne Rich, Dickinson "chose" her seclusion knowing what she "needed." In addition, it was "no hermetic retreat, but a seclusion which included a wide range of people, of reading and correspondence."⁸⁹ Although biographers and critics are gradually changing their approach to the poet's life and poetry, Rich suggests that Dickinson's greatness as a poet should be more acknowledged in the future, "for

⁸⁶ Nell Smith, "Susan and Emily Dickinson: Their Lives, in Letters," in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁹ Rich, "Vesuvius at home," 160.

‘Whom’ did she decline the invitations of other lives? The writing of poetry.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Dickinson lived a somewhat isolated life, but the meaning historically applied to that isolation deserves to be interrogated. Poetry was her religion and her “fulfillment,” and as Dickinson would say, “a life worth living could be found within the mind and against the grain of external circumstance.”⁹¹ And the story transmitted by means of her poetical work keeps on evolving at the beginning of the twentieth century, and this story is still as much a part of the poetry as is the “original” poem. Sometimes you need to move backwards in order to move forward. During the 1960s, although Jay Leyda (while working as an archivist at Amherst College) was one of the first scholars to inquire into Dickinson’s late fragments, Jerome Charyn’s *A Loaded Gun: Emily Dickinson for the 21st Century* suggests that Leyda “couldn’t intuit the relationship of the fragments to the rest of the work,” and that it took almost 40 years for Marta Werner to “reexamine the fragments.”⁹² Thus, it is the importance of those fragments, as well as Dickinson’s envelope poems, and the increase of attention in Dickinson’s encoded materiality during the beginning of the twenty-first century that we will examine in the next chapter. For Werner, “today editing Emily Dickinson’s late writings paradoxically involves unediting them, constellating these works not as still points of meaning or as incorruptible texts but, rather, as *events* and phenomena of freedom.”⁹³ In this freedom, Dickinson manipulates the textual space in a way that it becomes elastic and bendable like her enveloped poems. Indeed, Dickinson’s late writings reimagine the boundaries between verbal and visual interdependence.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 171.

⁹¹ Ibid., 178.

⁹² Jerome Charyn, *A Loaded Gun: Emily Dickinson for the 21st Century* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2016), 157.

⁹³ Werner, *Open Folios*, 5.

CHAPTER 5: EMILY DICKINSON AND MATERIALITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In 2002, the postmodern literary critic Katherine Hayles started one of her chapters in *Writing Machines* by asking, “why have we not heard about materiality?”⁹⁴ Traditionally, literary studies and critics have perceived literature as “immaterial verbal constructions.” The stress was placed on the content, and not the form. However, this focus has been gradually changing in the last decades for several reasons. Certain scholars focus on the idea that the seeds of the “materialist poetic” were provided by early modernism. Others center their attention in the avant-garde phase of modernism. For Hayles, another reason lies in the new field of “electronic textuality,” which provides clear evidence that “we can no longer afford to ignore the material basis of literary production.”⁹⁵ Thus, this materiality is no longer ignored in Dickinson’s work. This materiality has become visible and, nowadays, it might be considered the basis of Dickinson’s editing and criticism. Dickinson’s fragments, envelopes, and “scraps” (once considered “incomplete” works of art far from ready to publication) have increasingly become central in this new century. Forty years after Jay Leyda examined Dickinson’s late fragments, Marta Werner reexamined them in *Radical Scatters*, an electronic editing of Dickinson’s late fragments. For instance, on Werner’s website, these late fragments are organized by document catalog number, rather than image or first line, and they can be visualized in their facsimile form, transcription, or even encoding. Indeed, it could be argued that the reproduction of electronic literature affects the ways in which we, as readers, perceive that literature, in which this literature is transmitted and understood. When talking about Werner’s transcriptions, Charyn points out that “these fragments could not become *visible* until

⁹⁴ Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

a brand-new century, when our notions of stability have changed, and we are all nomads in a sense.”⁹⁶ From Werner’s point of view, it is this “homelessness” that brings the reader closer to Dickinson’s scene of writing, “a poetics of exile, of the margin, is our rejoinder.”⁹⁷ This homelessness, as Charyn assures in line with Werner, is “not only the condition of the poet’s fugitive fragments but of Dickinson herself, a nomad within her father’s house, and within the nineteenth century.”⁹⁸ Again, contradiction surrounds Dickinson when her most “private” writings are open and available to everybody. Indeed, anyone but the writer herself was meant to see these “radical scatters,” which would not have been available without Dickinson’s own archive.

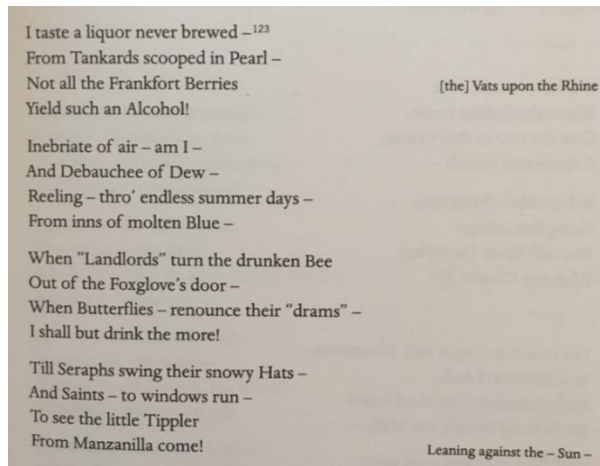
In 2016, a new edition of Dickinson’s poems was released, Christanne Miller’s *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*. This edition aimed to provide readers “legible access to the full complexity of Dickinson’s work and her working process.”⁹⁹ Certainly, this is the first edition of poems that shows Dickinson’s own ordering of her forty booklets, as well as the poet’s alternative word-choices with the poems on the same page, as you can see in the following image of the poem “I taste a liquor never brewed:”

⁹⁶ Charyn, *A Loaded Gun*, 158.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 158

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158

⁹⁹ Cristanne Miller, “Introduction,” in *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them* (Harvard University Press, 2016), vii.



Miller's edition also acknowledges past scholars and editors, giving special attention to the ones that focused on the materiality of the manuscripts, such as Susan Howe, Martha Nell Smith, and Marta Werner, among others. Besides, Miller also encourages readers to look at the original manuscripts themselves (for appreciating their intrinsic value) by directing them to the diversity of online resources containing images of the original documents, like the Dickinson Electronic Archive, Emily Dickinson's Correspondences, and the Emily Dickinson Archive.

In the 2010s, it is Dickinson's "work-in-progress" that is highly emphasized. A fragment doesn't need "completion" to become a poetic work; neither does a poem. In accordance with Werner, Dickinson's poems, letters, and fragments lack beginnings or endings. They communicate between each other, when a line from a fragment reappears in the body of a letter, or a poem, or another fragment. Her poetry is timeless, and it describes moments, instances, sensations...They are here, nowhere, and everywhere. What Dickinson's writings offer to the reader is a glance of something that a "finished" poem lacks: a glimpse of Dickinson's writing process:

This poet was not a *finisher*; everything she wrote was always involved in its own entangled process and growth, like one of her perennials, and she moved

with such a nimble violence between poetry and prose, until their lashing rhythms were almost identical.¹⁰⁰

When is a letter a poem? Or a poem a letter? And what about letter-poems? In fact, Werner insists that Dickinson's early determination of remaining unpublished (and away from "authorship") allowed her to fully experiment and to put into motion a work wandering outside beginning or end. And experimentation that also Marta Werner (a textual scholar) and Jen Bervin (a visual artist) set into motion when they published *Emily Dickinson: The Gorgeous Nothings* in 2013, a collection of the facsimiles (with transcriptions) of Dickinson's envelope writings. This edition might be considered a work of art in itself, and it also focuses its attention on a new Dickinson. In its preface, Howe points out that Franklin's updated edition of *The Collected Poems* (1998),

Continued to ignore the visual and acoustic aspects of the manuscripts that are particularly obvious in the late fragments and drafts. For almost twenty years few poets and fewer scholars, after seeing the originals, have dared to show us the ways in which what we thought we saw was not really what was there.¹⁰¹

In Bervin's introduction to *The Gorgeous Nothings*, she suggests that Dickinson's work "might best be described as epistolary," and the importance that the poet gave to "the ritual act of opening a letter."¹⁰² Certainly, the poet sent approximately three hundred poems in letters to some of her correspondents; and those fragments, in those enveloped poems, are much more than that. According to Bervin, those fragments might be considered Dickinson's "small fabric," as she describes them in a letter to Susan Dickinson in 1882: "excuse Emily and her Atoms, - The 'North Star' is of small fabric, but it denotes much —." Then, when Dickinson says "small," it doesn't mean

¹⁰⁰ Charyn, 164.

¹⁰¹ Howe, "Preface," in *The Gorgeous Nothings*, 6.

¹⁰² Ben Jervin, "Introduction," in *The Gorgeous Nothings*, 9

less; it means “fabric, Atoms, the North Star.”¹⁰³ All is connected and separated at the same time; Dickinson’s “gorgeous nothings” are actually full of meaning, and not at all. It is this “meaning-nothing” dichotomy that McGann’s *Black Riders* also refers to:

These are nothings possessed of hidden yet valuable somethings—somethings that appear, for instance, through the words ‘No/ One listens to poetry.’ In those words poetry’s late twentieth-century desuetude turns into a revelation—a mimesis, even—of a general condition of our time, where spectacular societies have created populations of watchers and listeners who in seeing do not see, and hearing do not hear.¹⁰⁴

Might Dickinson’s “nothingness” be the driving force in her manuscripts? Are we really “seeing” and “hearing” her this time? Although Bervin insists on the fact that editors should accommodate their typographical conventions to Dickinson’s work (and not the other way around), she also emphasizes that Dickinson’s expansive use of white space might trouble “even a visually minded transcription.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, have Werner and Jervin succeeded in representing Dickinson’s poetry accurately in print? If they haven’t, they have probably gotten closer than anyone else.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁴ McGann, *Black Riders*, 116.

¹⁰⁵ Bervin, “Introduction,” in *The Gorgeous Nothings*, 12.

CHAPTER 6: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF A POEM¹⁰⁶

1. Published in Dickinson's Lifetime

The May-Wine.
I taste a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not Frankfort berries yield the sense
Such a delicious whirl.
Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew;—
Reeling through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.
When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the Fox-glove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more;
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Come staggering toward the sun.

The Republican.
ORIGINAL POETRY.
The Sleeping.
Safe in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning,
And untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
Rafters of satin, and roof of stone.
Light laughs the breeze
In her castle above them,
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear,
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadences:
Ah! what sagacity perished here!
Polk Hill, June, 1881.

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, agonized clear.

2. Editions 1890s

XX.
XX.
I TASTE a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol!
Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.
When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more!
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!

IV.
SAFE in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning and untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the resurrection,
Rafters of satin, and roof of stone.
Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine;
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear;
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence, —
Ah, what sagacity perished here!
Grand go the years in the crescent above them;
Worlds scoop their arcs, and firmaments row,
Diadems drop and Doges surrender,
Soundless as dots on a disk of snow.

I.
SUCCESS.
[Published in "A Masque of Poets" at the request of
"H. H.," the author's fellow-townswoman and friend.]
SUCCESS is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.
Not one of all the purple host
Who took the flag to-day
Can tell the definition,
So clear, of victory,
As he, defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Break, agonized and clear.

3. Editions 1910s – 1940s

XX
I TASTE a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol!
Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.
When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more!
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!

IV.
SAFE in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning and untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the resurrection,
Rafters of satin, and roof of stone.
Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine;
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear;
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence, —
Ah, what sagacity perished here!
Grand go the years in the crescent above them;
Worlds scoop their arcs, and firmaments row,
Diadems drop and Doges surrender,
Soundless as dots on a disk of snow.

13
1.
SUCCESS is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.
Not one of all the purple host
Who took the flag to-day
Can tell the definition,
So clear, of victory,
As he, defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Break, agonized and clear.

¹⁰⁶ Comments about the images provided on next page.

1. Published in Dickinson's Lifetime

- 1861 May 4th. – “I taste a liquor never brewed” was published as “The May-Wine” in *Springfield Daily Republican*.
- 1862 March 1st. – “Safe in their alabaster chambers” was published as “The Sleeping” in *Springfield Daily Republican*.
- 1878. – “Success is counted sweetest” was published as “Success” in *A Masque of Poets*, edited by George Parsons Lathrop, which is an anthology of the poet Helen Hunt Jackson.

2. Editions 1890s

- In *Poems by Emily Dickinson* published by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas W. Higginson in 1890, 1891 and 1896, the poems are divided in four books: Life, Love, Nature, and Time and Eternity.
- BOOK I. – LIFE, “I taste a liquor never brewed,” poem XX.
- BOOK IV. – TIME AND ETERNITY, “Safe in their alabaster chambers,” poem IV.
- BOOK I. – LIFE, “Success,” poem I.
- The poems were standardized following the typographical conventions of the Victorian verse: capitalization of first words in each verse, regular punctuation instead of dashes, and arrangement of the poems’ original metric.

3. Editions 1910s – 1940s

- The poems in these editions are organized and edited as in the 1890s’ editions.
- “I taste a liquor never brewed” published in *The Complete Poems* (1927), edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi
- “Safe in their alabaster chambers” published in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1937), edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson.
- “Success is counted sweetest” published in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1937), edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson.

4. Johnson's editions 1950s

214

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!

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
Out of the Foxglove's door –
When Butterflies – renounce their "drams" –
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –
And Saints – to windows run –
To see the little Tippler
From Manzanilla come!

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

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

Success – is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed –
To Comprehend a Nectar –
Requires sorest need –
Not one of all the Purple Host
Who took the Flag – today –
Can tell the Definition – so clear – of Victory –
As He – defeated – dying –
On whose forbidden ear –
The distant strains of Triumph
Burst – agonized – and Clear!

version of 1861

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

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

version of 1859

5. Franklin's editions 1980s

214

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!

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
Out of the Foxglove's door –
When Butterflies – renounce their "drams" –
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –
And Saints – to windows run –
To see the little Tippler
From Manzanilla come!

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

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

Success is counted sweetest
By those who never succeed.
To comprehend a Nectar
Requires sorest need.
Not one of all the Purple Host
Who took the Flag – today –
Can tell the Definition
So clear of Victory –
As He – defeated – dying –
On whose forbidden ear –
The distant strains of Triumph
Burst – agonized – and Clear!

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

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

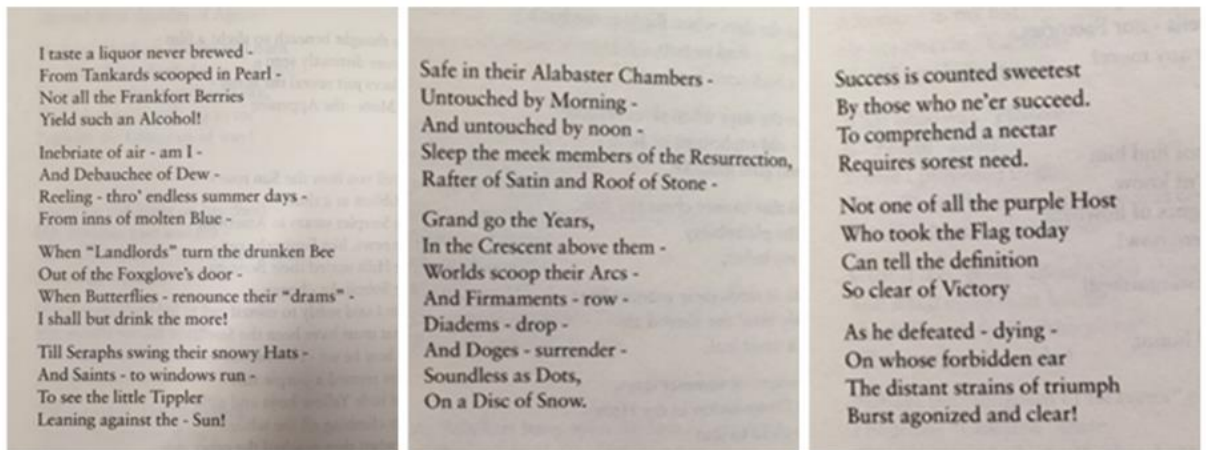
4. Johnson's editions 1950s

- In these editions, poems are organized chronologically. They are edited from the manuscripts (not copied from other sources), and Johnson restores Dickinson's spelling and punctuation (i.e. capitalization and dashes). He also includes word-choices, and alternative readings and versions of the poems.
- Poems vol.1 (1850-1862), "I taste a liquor never brewed," poem 214.
- Poems vol.1 (1850-1862), "Safe in their alabaster chambers," poem 216. Johnson includes two versions of this poem: the one that appeared in the *Springfield Daily Republican* in 1862, and a second version of the poem sent to Susan Dickinson in a letter.
- Poems vol.1 (1850-1862), "Success is counted sweetest," poem 67.

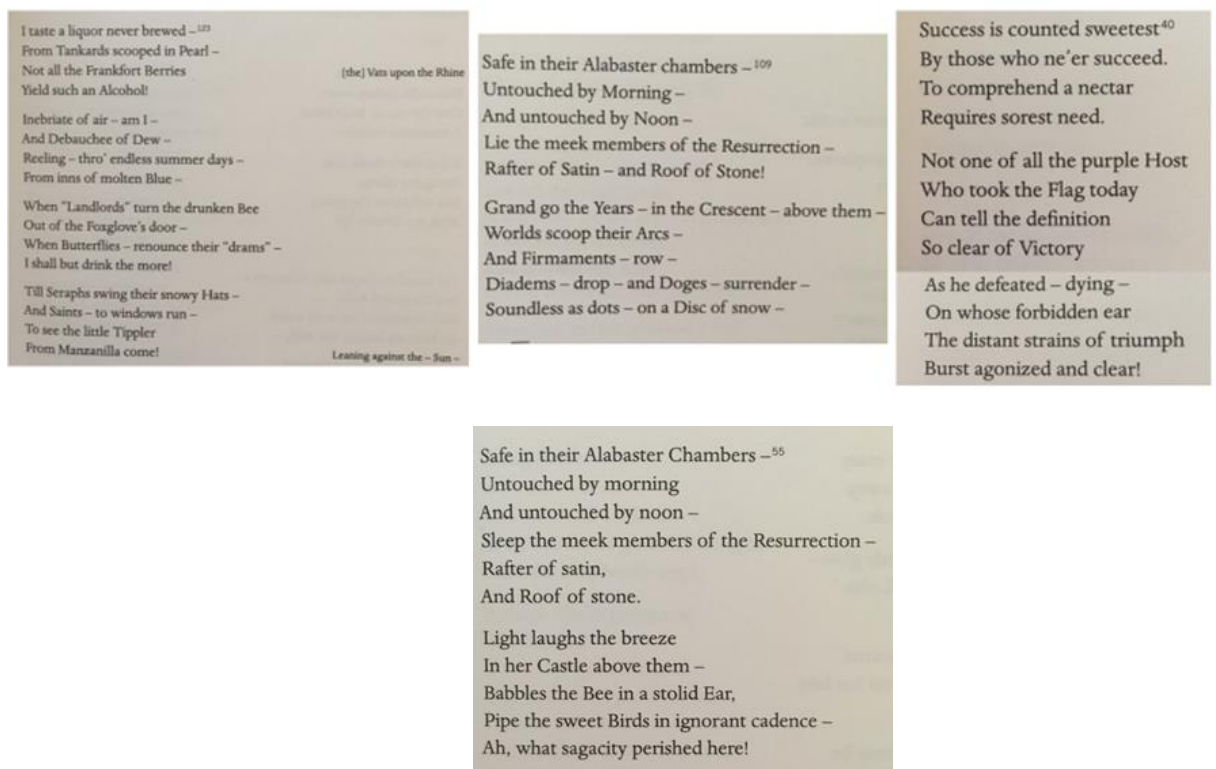
5. Franklin's editions 1980s

- In *The Manuscript Books*, Franklin published Dickinson's original manuscripts, and the order of the forty fascicles was restored. The reader can appreciate Dickinson's unusual punctuation and capitalization, and uncommon line breaks and stanza divisions. Besides, many poems provide word-choices and alternate readings as an integral part of the text.
- Fascicle 12, H 72, "I taste a liquor never brewed," poem 214.
- Fascicle 6, "Safe in their alabaster chambers," poem 216.
- Fascicle 10, "Safe in their alabaster chambers," poem 216.
- Fascicle 5, "Success is counted sweetest," poem 67.

6. Franklin's reading edition (1999)



7. Miller's edition (2016)



6. Franklin's reading edition (1999)

- Franklin published a variorum edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* in 1998, and based on it, a year later, he published a reading edition of the poems. In this edition, Franklin points out that he follows Dickinson's own practice by selecting the latest versions of the poems, "adopting revisions and alternative readings for which she indicated a choice and deferring to her custom in presentation and usage."¹⁰⁷
- 1861. – "I taste a liquor never brewed," poem 207.
- 1859. – "Safe in their alabaster chambers," poem 124.
- 1859. – "Success is counted sweetest," poem 112.

7. Miller's edition (2016)

- This edition presents Dickinson's own order of her four fascicles, and it aims to provide readers access to the poet's working process. This is the first edition where Dickinson's alternative word-choices appear on the same page with the poems.
- Fascicle twelve, sheet one (c. early 1861). – "I taste a liquor never brewed."
- Fascicle six, sheet three (c. late 1859). – "Safe in their alabaster chambers."
- Fascicle ten, sheet four (c. second half of 1861). – "Safe in their alabaster chambers."
- Fascicle five, sheet one (c. summer 1859). – "Success is counted sweetest."

¹⁰⁷ R. W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* (London: Belknap Press, 1999), 11.

CONCLUSION

For over a century, the editing of Emily Dickinson has become one of the most controversial topics among literary scholars. In the 1890s, the first editions of her poems had great success and popularity among readers, but they garnered little critical attention. They accommodate Dickinson's poems to the typographical conventions of the time, aiming to gain public acceptance by reordering the poems, and standardize Dickinson's spelling, punctuation, and meter. Editors were concerned about the edition of beautiful and "easy" readable editions, and they ignored the visual aspects of Dickinson's manuscripts, and all the material facts which, nowadays, are considered essential for understanding Dickinson's writing process and practices. Furthermore, those early editions presented Dickinson as a secluded and eccentric woman and set the foundation for a large tradition of biographical criticism. It is not until the 1930s that poets such as Conrad Aiken or Allen Tate started to take Dickinson seriously as a poet.

In the 1950s, Johnson's variorum edition and the New Critical methodology textually opened a new era of Dickinson criticism. Nevertheless, even within New Criticism, there was still a kind of inseparability between Dickinson's life and work. Although numerous critical essays were written during or since the mid-1950s, the best scholarly efforts kept focusing on Dickinson's psychological issues until the 1970s. Nevertheless, the 1960s also brought a new focus to Dickinson criticism. In terms of materiality, Jay Leyda was one of the first scholars who examined Dickinson's late writings and fragments, which reimagine the boundaries between message and medium, showing Dickinson's experimentation with the textual space. In terms of biography, Adrienne Rich's influential essay in 1975 represented a turning point in the traditional ways of portraying Dickinson's life. What Rich suggests is that

Dickinson “chose” her reclusion, as many other writers did before her, knowing what she needed. Besides, her reclusion was not a hermetic retreat but included a certain number of people and correspondence. Dickinson’s fulfillment was poetry, and her work was always “in process.” In the 1980s, Franklin’s edition brought the reader closer to Dickinson’s process of writing. Many poems provided word-choices as an integral part of the text, creating multiple readings of the poems. They are “visual productions,” the term that Susan Howe uses to describe the link between poetry and visual art in Dickinson’s manuscripts. In line with Rich, Howe also suggests that Dickinson is fully aware of the events surrounding her, and in full possession of her voice.

In the twenty-first century, the material bases of Dickinson’s literary production were no longer ignored. Marta Werner reexamined Dickinson’s late fragments and connected them to Dickinson’s “complete” works, suggesting that fragments don’t need to be “complete” to become a poetic work. In other words, Werner pointed out that Dickinson’s poems and fragments lack beginnings or endings, and her writing was always a “work-in-process.” Indeed, Dickinson was not a finisher, and her choice of remaining unpublished permitted the poet to fully experiment in her writing; and she fully did. And it took over a century to acknowledge Dickinson’s visual aspects and to accommodate typographical conventions to Dickinson’s work, and not the other way around.

As far as I am concerned, editorial strategies and scholarly criticism of Dickinson will continue evolving in the future. The times will keep changing and opening new meanings when looking at Dickinson’s work. Indeed, possibility is one of the most salient themes in Dickinson’s poetry and, in my opinion, a century of Dickinson’s edition practices have brought to us a great deal of possibilities. Criticism

is not “complete” yet and it will never be complete because there is no sense of completion in a work with no beginnings or endings. Dickinson’s world is still full of possibilities waiting to be discovered.

There is certainly a place for Emily Dickinson in the postprint era.

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