

**Reading the Fascicles of  
Emily Dickinson  
Dwelling in Possibilities**

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## Owning the Gold: The Surge of Fascicle 21

<u>F</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>Fr</u>	
1	609	440	I—Years had been—from / Home—
2	610	441	You'll find—it when you / try to die—
3	611	442	I see thee better—in the Dark—
4	447	443	Could—I do more— for Thee—
5	612	444	It would have starved a Gnat—
6	613	445	They shut me up in Prose—
7	448	446	This was a Poet—/ It is That
8	614	447	In falling Timbers buried—
9	449	448	I died for Beauty—but / was scarce
10	450	449	Dreams—are well—but / Waking's better
11	451	450	The Outer—from the Inner
**12	174	172	At last—to be identified—
13	452	451	The Malay—took the Pearl—
14	453	452	Love—thou art high—

(another sheet for completion of J453, Fr452)

15	615	453	Our journey had advanced—
16	616	454	I rose—because He sank—
17	454	455	It was given to me by the Gods—

(another sheet for completion of J454, Fr455)

\*\*Poem repeated from Fascicle 8

Without discounting other possibilities for interpretation, this chapter begins with a contextualizing of the poems that surround those paired poems in Fascicle 21, compiled in that annus mirabilis 1862. As the two poems in its center suggest, Fascicle 21 revolves around images of the working poet. This chapter explores the larger context for those two poems, showing how way leads on to (and sometimes contrasts with) way and how it may reveal networks of possibilities for interpreting the aesthetics those paired poems imply. If the paired poems indicate an aesthetic stance, the entire fascicle reflects the "business" of the working poet. The fascicle begins with a poem that states this subject. "My Business—just a Life / I left—" declares the terror-stricken persona of the opening poem, "I—Years had been—from / Home—" (J609, Fr440). Reading this poem in isolation bewilders one. Whose eyes might "Stare vacant into mine— / And ask my Business there—" By the time we reach the paired poems, numbers six and seven in the sequence, we have grounds for an educated guess. These eyes belong to the inhabitants of the house of prose, those who might catch and closet the applicant at the door, still timid in this first poem in the sequence. Remembering my own cautionary warnings not to limit any poem or fascicle to a single story, let me posit that, although there is no consistent narrative, there seems to be a surge of movement in this fascicle from the speaker as returning victim of some psychic shock, so frightened even to knock that, not unlike Munch's figured screamer, she flies from the door, to the confident speaker of the last poem ("It was given to me by / the Gods—" [J454, Fr455]), who crows, "The Difference—made me / bold—" This chapter, then, demonstrates, I hope, the rewards of reading contextually.

From the fascicle's first poem on the speaker finds herself positioned in relation to doors, closed or unclosed, as in this first, almost Kafkaesque, sad story. "Doors," repeated three times in the first poem, are emblematic of oppositional figures in the fascicle: enclosure inside or exclusion from a house of prose, on the one hand, or open gates to multiple possibilities on the other. As the paired poems discussed in the previous chapter suggest, it is the poet's "business" to dis/close the doors. It is serious business. Along with its marketplace meaning, the word "Business" appears in Dickinson's lexicon (her 1828 *Webster's* dictionary) in variants that would make it impossible to think of the poet as one who writes verses as others make antimacassars.<sup>1</sup> Here are some of those secondary, but no doubt significant, meanings to the poet who tells us in Fascicle 8, the one that, significantly, shares a poem with Fascicle 21, that her "business" is "to find" (J178, Fr175) and also that her "business" is valuable and "so dear" (J179, Fr176):

3. That which engages the care and attention. 'You are so much the business of our souls.' Dryden. 4. Serious . . . important occupation, in distinction from

trivial affairs. 'It should be the main business of life to serve God and obey his commands.' 5. Concern; right of action . . . 'What business has a man with the disputes of others?' 6. A point; a matter of question; something to be examined . . . 'Fitness to govern is a perplexed business.' Bacon.

In the first poem of the fascicle the speaker and the evidently small-minded doorkeeper are on different cognitive, ethical planes. For the doorkeeper with his or her "vacant" stare ("stolid" in the 1872 version as—implicitly—in this), "my business" signifies only the market/pragmatic primary meaning. On the other hand, the speaker, who has faced "Danger and the Dead" (which sums up the subject of other poems in the fascicle), rejects this small-minded enclosedness. What might remain in the house of prose she left is too "awful" in both senses for the poet who thinks of her business of life in the largest sense as something of great importance.

She is worried that life in that house she left might be "*still* dwelling there": limited, claustrophobic, flat, turgid, stale, sour, and leaden—not yet *de/stilled*. She "fumbles at her nerves." That's serious, too. In the next fascicle (22) Dickinson tells us that God "fumbles at your soul," which is to say not only at her "organ of sensation and motion" but also at her "strength, fortitude, firmness of mind, courage and authority"—all synonyms for "soul" in Dickinson's lexicon. That strength fails her. In a synaesthiac manner she looks ("scanned the Windows o'er") and hears nothing ("The Silence—like an Ocean / rolled— / And broke against my Ear—"). The silence of that prosy house and the vacancy of the doorkeeper's face, the nothingness there, causes the speaker to hold her ears as "like a Thief / [she] Stole [Fled]—gasp— from the House." This speaker has long to go before she discovers the birdlike freedom from the physical captivity she seems to fear in the first poem.

Having just alluded to her courage (failed in the first poem) of facing "Danger—and the Dead," she places across from those lines the first words of the second poem, words of advice from one who has "faced" the grave:

You'll find it when you  
try to die  
The easier to let go—  
For recollecting such as went—  
You could not spare—you know— (J610, Fr441)

This speaker, perhaps the same as that in the fascicle's first, also mentally occupies a distant time. These memories of loved ones are so old that their marble names have been covered with moss, an image that recurs almost verbatim in "I died for Beauty" later in the fascicle. Were the speaker as vacant

as the doorkeeper of the first poem, a dweller in prose, these names might have been “superseded” with those of more recent friends. “Supersede” does not mean simply to replace; it is “literally, to set above; hence to make void . . . or useless by superior power”; it is also “to come or be placed in [to sit in—*super-sede*] the room of.” This speaker seems acutely aware of its range of meaning as she observes that as

this World—sets  
 further back—  
 as Dying—say it does—  
 The former love—distincter  
 grows—  
 And supersedes the first—

Whatever panic causes the speaker of the first poem to fear opening a door to the past is either answered by a new speaker or changed to a new time perspective, for the speaker of the second privileges that past; he or she views death as the synthesis of old and new, a reunion with the long-dead and a future of new relationships. To insist on life with “newer names,” not to hold on but rather to let go, is “too Tawdry Grace”; the new names are just “toys / we bought—to ease their / place.” The odd junction of words, reinforced by rhyme, reminds the reader of Dickinson’s revisions of “Grace.” Although the child of Edward Dickinson and student of Mary Lyon often uses the word, a word hinted at in the central poem’s “Amazing sense,” attended by its Puritan theological baggage,<sup>2</sup> just as often she conveys its secular sense: The summer day has “a shimmering grace” (“A something in a summer’s Day” [J122, Fr104, F5]), for example. In the setting of Fascicle 21’s second poem, the tawdry grace of new toys “bought to ease their [empty] place” suggests the deep dichotomy of the entire fascicle: that between the temporal, the tawdry of the new, on the one hand, and, on the other, the graven grace of the ancient and venerable—old names grown “distincter,” both because of their intrinsic worth and because of the love invested in them by those who remember, especially those like poets who can make permanent that remembrance.

Such love needs no tawdry (“fine and showy in colors without taste or elegance,” says her lexicon, adding, “without grace”) light, for, continues the speaker (or answers another), “I see thee better—in the Dark” (J611, Fr442). So the third poem of the sequence begins. Dickinson has left a generous half page between her elegy for the long-dead, the reverence for whom obliterates the need for tawdry new “toys,” and the fascicle’s third poem. The gap, like the empty space in the speaker’s life (of which she has just spoken), seems anything but accidental. As does a “rest” in music, it replicates and calls to

mind the absent friends of the second poem. Absence is presence, in other words, a phrase Shurr uses (1983, 85) in a literal autobiographical sense in relation to the fascicle's third poem. If the second poem's focus was the dead, that of the third is the dark moss-covered marble crypt itself. Here "the former love" of the second poem "distincter / grows." Now the speaker declares that her love or the power of her imagination illuminates, replaces, and makes habitable the darkness as well as or better than the three disparate metaphors she uses.

First, her love is a prism. The three-sided glass Dickinson's dictionary describes sifts, intensifies, and rearranges colors as the imagination might act on that which comes within its planes. In Dickinson's words, the prism, like love, is superior to "Violet," a word full of Dickinsonian possibilities.<sup>3</sup>

Second, it is like a Miner's Lamp, suggesting that the dark is both a grave and a mine, a place for extracting the kind of riches she speaks of later in the fascicle. Riches in mines, as poems from poets, accrue with time and are condensed and layered in the geological process that parallels the distillation of roses to attar. Such a geological link is suggested in the speaker's reference to "the years / That hunch themselves between—," an image that simultaneously suggests the long, long time that literally hunches slabs of marble into strange shapes and often into beauty as love and insight deepen through years, not through reason and logic, but—to use another meaning—through hunches, intuition, and the insight in the dark. The long time recurs in "At last! to be identified," a later, small, significant poem in the fascicle. Similarly, the dark recurs in the fascicle's eighth and ninth poems, and it is equally essential to the creative process. So says Wendy Barker in her study of *The Lunacy of Light* (1987).

Finally, in a third metaphor, the speaker calls her love "ruddy" with the light of a "surpassing Sun," suggesting the vividness of a summer's noon. Imagined or self-created continual "Meridian," that last line in the third poem, spills over into the next page, where it almost becomes a title for the four lines that bridge the radiant, relieved darkness of the grave or mine in the third poem and the fifth. Between them is this little verse that, isolated, seems to have nothing at all to do with the dark of death (present in both third and fifth poems). Here is the fourth poem, complete in its four lines:

Could—I do more—for Thee—  
 Wert thou a Bumble Bee—  
 Since for the Queen, have I—  
 Nought but Boquet? (J447, Fr443)

One way to read these lines is as part of the "love relationship" suggested in the third poem. Of course, in the context of this fascicle, one in which the

self-conscious writer offers an aesthetic statement, the "Boquet" might also be a cluster of poems.

Lest the reader relax with that easy figure, almost a truism, she is jolted to attention with the strange imagery of the fifth poem, "It would have starved a Gnat—" (J612, Fr444). It is a leap from the Bumble Bee to this strange creature: a bug with clawlike, leechlike, and weirdly dragonlike qualities. The lyric poet has yielded to the metaphysical: Barrett-Browning collides with Donne. Riffing back through the fascicle, the reader discovers that the gnat image is not inappropriate. The speaker has parallels to the first poem's constricted, pained, and alienated child returning home. What "would have starved a Gnat," says this speaker, would be "to live so small as I," suggesting the little girl who soon shows up in the closet in the poem chapter 1 discusses. If the mood of the first poem in this sequence was panic, the mood of this fifth poem is bitterly resentful at the pinnances offered. If in the first poem the speaker had the ability to fly away—albeit gasping—in this one she lacks that privilege. She lacks even the ability to manage her own death: She lacks "the Art / Opon the Window Pane / To gad my little Being out— / And not begin—again—."

Even the proximity of such an oddly disquieting poem with the two central, famous paired poems is de/stilling and unsettling as the notion that the speaker would prefer to be a Bumble Bee capable of receiving a Bouquet or a bug capable of squashing out his life than someone forced into the closet of prose. So go the fourth, fifth, and sixth poems of this fascicle. Contemplations on a gnat thus provide an introduction to the pair of poems in which Dickinson discusses her art. The little poem has been read as a solipsistic reflection on a frustrated suicide,<sup>4</sup> Yes, but it is also an intriguing link to the Little Girl in the next poem, shut up in Prose. That, in Dickinson's aesthetic world, is to live "Small."

And so, the two poems with which I began in chapter 1 follow, picking up some of the imagery in the preceding poems and introducing other images that continue, in that dazzling zigzag way (Stonum 1990), to reflect the values she places on her art—and herself as artist. In "This was a Poet," Dickinson has said that in distilling attar the "poet arrests the flux of our perishable existence" and thus "achieves the ontological status of being exterior to time like the 'Artist in the City of Kooroo'" (Kher 1974, 118). She has implied that the "Lyric is immortal . . . it is complex and completed in and of itself, transcending mortal limits. . . . Thus it withstands, stands adjacent to the very temporal scheme out of which it has been lifted" (Cameron 1979, 197). Seen in that light, the progression is a natural one to "In falling Timbers buried—" (J614, Fr447). In this, the eighth poem, the speaker takes the point of view of a spectator at a disaster in which a man is literally "Exterior to Time."

Whether Dickinson witnessed or read of such an accident<sup>5</sup> is less important than the way she merges with both spectator and victim. The poem borrows from and extends the "This was a Poet's" suggestion of "Negative Capability," the notion of the poet as so "unconscious" of self and so "Exterior—to Time" that he or she may be imprinted or impressed with others. Dickinson's staccato, breathless, irregular lines replicate the panic of victim, would-be-rescuer and story-telling bystander in much the same way that on the previous page's matched set she had snapped out and thus conveyed the impatience of the trapped child. Also, as with "They shut me up," the shifting angle of vision follows a similar pattern: The first stanza of both begins with the claustrophobic consciousness of the one buried alive; the second stanza in both poems moves to those outside who cannot know the true situation of the one within. Both poems are framed in subjunctive language ("Could themselves have peeped" in the sixth poem and "Could He—know—they sought / Him—Could they—know—He breathed—" in the eighth). And both poems end with an overview from beyond the living or literal death. The poet/bird/star looks down and laughs at captivity in the earlier poem; in this one the speaker finishes the story of the man in the Horrid Sand Partition by agreeing with the notion that death is "Reward of Anguish." The phrase, set within Dickinson's quotation marks, suggests that its speaker regards the assurance as a cultural commonplace, but one she shares as we just read in the yearning of the gnat to "gad" its being out. Finally, the speaker sums up "In Falling Timbers" with a stanza that links the eighth to the fascicle's earlier poems:

Many Things—are fruitless—  
 'Tis a Baffling Earth—  
 But there is no Gratitude  
 Like the Grace—of Death—

As grisly in mood as the opening premise of the poem may be compared with those that precede it, "In falling Timbers buried—" is tightly linked to other poems in the fascicle: It conveys the panic of the first ("I—Years had been"), the fascination with death of the second ("You'll find—it when you try to die"), the privileging of darkness of the third ("I see thee better—in the Dark"), the deprivation of life and desire for death of the fifth ("It would have starved a Gnat"), and the structure and movement of the sixth poem ("They shut me up in Prose"). Both sixth and eighth poems occupy the west side of the opened book. "In falling Timbers" also has a paired poem, an antithesis (which contains a synthesis) to its thesis. Both "answers" to the poems with which they are paired ("They shut me up" and "This was a Poet"; "In falling Timbers" and "I died for Beauty") are quieter and more meditative in tone



than the first. They move from the particular situation to a universal declaration. In this the speaker carefully prepares for the shift, as she says that "Things" on this "Baffling Earth" are fruitless and as she moves through the "Grace of Death." And there is that word "Grace," suggested in the sixth poem's "amazing sense." In this, the eighth, "In falling Timbers," the "Grace of Death," the wished-for condition of the gnat in the fifth poem is "Reward" or—in the variant—"Recompense."

"I died for Beauty—but / was scarce / Adjusted in the tomb" (J449, Fr448), ninth in the series, takes the proleptic viewpoint of the dead—not necessarily the buried-alive victim of the fallen timber but the poet capable of wearing the pain and panic of others, one who, as the fascicle's first poem says, had "Consternation compassed" (in another version, "Danger—and the Dead"). As "Falling Timbers" imitates through sound effects and broken rhythm the experience it conveys, "I died for Beauty" recreates the restored order through its absolutely even (but not monotonous) Common Meter.<sup>6</sup> Both, too, reflect the influence of Keats, the first ("In falling Timbers") in its high drama, the second ("I died for Beauty"), in its resolution, which is Dickinson's own "Ode on the Grecian Urn."<sup>7</sup>

Her rephrasing of Keats also makes the take on "Beauty" and "Truth" suited for inclusion in the fascicle in this space. First published in a form wrenched from Dickinson's own, the poem has elicited critical discussion that ignored Dickinson's own lineation and setting.<sup>8</sup> Returned to its place, "I died for Beauty" is more than doubly interesting and witty. On the west side of the page the victim is buried unceremoniously, the spades working furiously to extract him; on the right, the speaker is "Adjusted in the tomb." On the left, the victim and rescuer are unable to communicate ("Neither could be heard"); on the right, the two dead talk "between the Rooms" as "Brethren." They talk "until the moss had reached / our lips— / And covered up our names," which is the image she had used in the fascicle's second poem. Of Dickinson's four uses of "moss," two are in this fascicle. In "I died for Beauty," as in Shakespeare's meditations on the mutability of life, the survival of art in which the dead is perpetually alive mitigates the horror. Dickinson's speaker thus accepts the absolute fact of death with a serenity that belies Wolff's view that this and other proleptic poems present "single isolated nightmare[s]" (1986, 235). Dickinson, in fact, stops short of saying that Truth and Beauty conjoined will not live on in some form.

The fascicle's ninth poem, far from being an "isolated nightmare," in fact, has a restfulness to its dreamlike quality. Such a reading is made more obvious by noting that Dickinson follows it with "Dreams are well—but / Waking's better—" (J450, Fr449), which accommodates the movement of the fascicle mood from the panic of the frightened persona of the first poem, a speaker outside the door, to the triumph of the bold speaker of the fascicle's

final poem. Largely ignored, the poem makes sense in its fascicle setting. For one thing, we hear a direct echo from Kames. Ponder notes the connection between this, "the state into which good writers put readers so that the reader will be so totally occupied with the images passing before him that he will not pause to reflect on them" (1990, 88) to Keats, to Ann Radcliffe, and to Hawthorne; whether the phrase came to Dickinson through one of them or from her own school-day reading of Kames, the words *are* those of Kames and remind us again that this fascicle implies an aesthetic statement. For another thing, this, the tenth poem, contains one particular phrase that resonates as the fascicle closes. The entire poem is a natural, not wrenching, extension of the fascicle's more famous "I died for Beauty," which ends with the soporific lines I have just quoted. Having lulled the reader to a "pleasant sleep" as Truth and Beauty, compartmentalized but communicative, talk themselves to sleep between the rooms, Dickinson wakes the reader with the tenth poem's sharply trochaic "Dreams are well—but Waking's better."

In the context of this fascicle Dickinson asserts that there are two species of dreams and two concomitant conditions of waking: the dreams of sleep that stop with the workaday world of morn and dreams linked to imagination, second sight, mystery, and insight. Such dreams contribute to what, in the next poem, Dickinson calls the "central mood" of the "inner" life. From these dreams one wakes not into the glare of morning but rather into the dark world of midnight, the world privileged, as Wendy Barker (1987) persuasively describes, by the poet, especially by the woman poet.<sup>9</sup> The dark provides the infinite possibilities inherent in "Dreaming—of the Dawn." It is sweeter [than that of] the robins who "gladden" the tree with musical announcements that a literal dawn approaches.

It is a "Solid Dawn . . . Leading to no Day" that the poet confronts. That Solid Dawn echoes in "Gold in Solid Bars" of the last poem. This fascicle contains two of Dickinson's only twelve uses of that adjective, defined in her dictionary (and reminding the reader of the definitions of "business" I quoted earlier) as "hard, firm, compact; not hollow; full of matter; sound not weak; real, valid, true, just, not empty or fallacious, grave, profound, not light." Better than either the invalid, hollow, weak, fallacious workaday morning (a house of prose?) and better, too, than the empty, meaningless dreams that lead to those mornings, this Dawn confronts a spacious mystery, not specious revelations of ordinary day. It draws on the Inner life to shape its Outer, as Dickinson says in the next poem.

Dreams that are formed in Solid Dawns leading to no [ordinary, prosy] day are part of the inner life that is the subject of the eleventh poem, "The Outer—from the / Inner" (J451, Fr450). This poem's speaker uses a series of five increasingly riddling metaphors, each leading to the repeated poem of self-identification. First, power is disguised (as frequently for Dickinson) in

what appears to be a barefoot boy as the speaker considers the hidden identity of the "Duke or Dwarf." Second, she switches to the mobile metaphor of wheel rim and axis, the outer with its more obvious ability to transport ("and fling a dust") dependent entirely on the second, less evident, hub. Third, she speaks of the brush on canvas, regulated not by the hand only but also by something deeper than the hand that the speaker calls "the inner Brand."

With its multiple meanings, "Brand" leads the reader to the next page, for in the marketplace the word "brand" implies an immediately perceived form of identification. That common usage in Dickinson's own day does not diminish the possibilities for considering the meanings in her 1828 Webster's, which likens the brand both to lightning and to a stigma signifying infamy (Dimmesdale again). Fourth, the speaker shifts the canvas from that on a painter's easel to the human physiognomy, the "fine—Arterial Canvas" on a cheek or brow. Without completing her metaphor—she has done that on the first line—she moves to the fifth and most puzzling comparison: "The Star's whole secret— / in the Lake— / Eyes were not meant—to know."<sup>10</sup> Of all the comments on this "oriental" poem (Mary Cender Miller 1988), Kher's comparison of the entire poem to Thoreau's Walden Pond, in which "the whole external world is also internal" (1974, 40), is particularly helpful, especially in light of a fascicle, which, like Thoreau's meditations on the pond, surrounds the subject of aesthetic creativity.

Kher's linkage to Thoreau helps to un-riddle the last two befuddling lines, lines that Dickinson placed on the next page so that they form an inscription to the significant "At last—to be identified—." In these lines, which simultaneously summarize one poem and introduce the next, Dickinson seems to say what Thoreau says in his own compressed and complex observation on the stream he goes a-fishing in (time) with its bottom "pebbly with stars," from which one may drink deep but still not know "the first letter of the alphabet." As does Thoreau's *Walden*, Dickinson's eleventh poem touches on the limitations of knowledge, as well as on the mysterious, unfathomable riches within the lake—or the poet's creative imagination—which can at least explore the secrets of the stars.

If the Eyes of others were not meant to know any more than what is reflected in the lake or on the canvas or in the fascicle, what little of the hidden depths that are revealed leads the speaker to plead for or to claim "At last—to be identified—" (J174, Fr172). I return to this poem because this is the one that is repeated from Fascicle 8, a repetition that tests the case for contextuality. In the context of Fascicle 21 self-identity is the secret of the star in the lake. It is the brand. It is the inner life that shapes the outer. The secret, we might say, is that the speaker is or will be or was a poet. Although the word "poet" does not exist on the page, the placement of "At last" in the fascicle clarifies at least this probability.

The two burial poems and the two poems privileging dreams, darkness, and depth prepare the reader for "At last," the "repeated" poem: "At last—to be identified— / At last—the Lamps open / your side— / The rest of Life—to see" and so forth. The poem seems to cap these dialogues of the emerging poet with herself and also contains seeds of the final poems. Its opening phrase, "At last," repeated in an identical chirography in the second line, appears two poems hence in "Love—thou art high—" (J453, Fr452), and the following poems explore the value of what is only partly revealed. From awakening at midnight ("Dreams are Well"), the speaker has now moved "Past Midnight—past the / Morning Star." Although Dickinson's imagined world is full of stars (two columns of listings in Rosenbaum's *Concordance* [1964]), the reader pays particular attention to this stellar reference. At the top of this page of the fascicle, Dickinson has placed "The Star's whole secret— / in the Lake— / Eyes were not meant—to know," which is the end of the previous poem ("The Outer—from the / Inner"). Below that spillover line and below the horizontal line that is the editor's mark of separation between poems is "At last"; the words "Morning Star" are placed on their own line, echoing "the star's whole secret" of the last poem above it. Both phrases are another *Walden* echo: "The sun is but a morning star," Thoreau's last lines in that volume. Tradition pigeonholes this poem as one of Dickinson's proleptic visions. Read thus, the audience for the speaker seems to move beyond the graves in which Truth and Beauty chat, beyond even waking at midnight as in "Dreams—are well." He or she (two critics connect the speaker with an absent lover) moves into a place illuminated by lamps that obviate Sunrise.<sup>11</sup>

One need not discard the idea of a proleptic insight by noting that in view of the surrounding poems it seems more likely that "your side" and "our feet" are rhetorical strategies to involve the living reader in the speaker's drama of self-identification. She has just teased the reader to wonder about the star's whole secret, and then, carefully centering the poem on the page, she repeats (with fewer than the usual differences in repeated poems) the poem that fits for other reasons its placement in Fascicle 8. In the next chapter of this study, a reading of that fascicle, the difference setting makes is, I hope, confirmed. There it fits the more exuberant tone and the image clusters of wild transformations. In this, its new setting, in a fascicle concerned with the serious business of poetry, the same poem conveys not so much an explosion of gravity (as it seems to convey in Fascicle 8) as an exhausted sense of deep, well-grounded satisfaction.

Partly the impression of satisfaction results from such small chirographic differences noticeable only to the reader of the manuscripts. The longer lines and the greater frequency of exclamation points of the earlier version lighten it, lend wings to the excitement of the traveler through time and space. The version of "At last" in Fascicle 21 is more splintered, as was, increasingly,

Dickinson's mode as her hand and eyes aged so that "your side," "Morning star," and "Leagues there were" (the latter word not underscored as in the earlier version and thus without the sense of relief of a completed journey) are obviously intensified. But the greater difference is the shift in interpretation the poet's chosen placement conveys: The Morning star, for example, echoes the star's secret, and the weary sense of almost infinite leagues traveled sets up the weary narrative of the next poem, "The Malay—took the Pearl—" (J452, Fr451).

Keats, Thoreau, Sigourney, and Barrett Browning have turned up as shadows in Fascicle 21's earlier poems about poets and poetry. Now, with the fascicle's thirteenth poem, add Robert Browning. Jack Capps's (1966) identification of "Paracelsus" as one source—for all its differences—helps to unlock the mysteries of this poem. Again, Dickinson shades "The Malay" and uses the borrowed drama of deceit and treachery to heighten the contrast she has been making throughout the fascicle between the stolidity of the house of prose and the power of the poet to transcend and escape from that house. Here Dickinson's version of Browning is a story of missed opportunity, wherein a terse version of James's Strether regrets a lack of blood and impulse and courage to live. It is as Weisbuch reads it, an antiallegory leading "to a forceful moral: that nothing will come to the man who waits in selfish fear" (1972, 58). Courage is the issue of the poem as it is of the entire fascicle from the moment the quaking speaker flees from the wooden door in the first poem. If the fascicle is read as a narrative (again, a dangerous practice but tempting here), "The Malay" poses a problem: The speaker seems just to have reached a full acceptance of self and empowerment to penetrate the secret in the lake, when she or he seems to lose courage.

Even reading the fascicle as a narrative also suggests a rationale for this "Malay" poem in this place; after all, Hamlet screws up his courage several times in his drama, then falters and bemoans himself as a "Rogue and peasant slave." But the point is that the fascicle is not a single-voiced narrative so much as it is a matrix of images. Considered thus, the poem fits. On the left, or west, side of the open book the speaker imagines a secret-holding (and partly revealing) lake; on the right, or east, just opposite these lines, Dickinson's speaker says, "I feared the Sea—too / much." On the left, she iterates that line with the homonym as she hopes for "the rest of life—to see." These lines are directly opposite "Praying that I might be worthy—the Destiny— / the Swarthy fellow swam— / And bore my Jewel—Home." On the left (in "At last"), the speaker travels "Past Midnight—past the morning star— / Past Sunrise—Ah! What Leagues there were"; on the right, the speaker describes the "Swarthy fellow's" journey "Home to the Hut! What—lot / Had I—the Jewel—got / Borne on a Dusky Breast." The thirteenth poem continues with its own story, but the compiler of her own publication has suc-

ceeded in raising our awareness of the intertextuality of apparently disparate poems. Such artistry is reinforced by the courage, the courage lacked by the thirteenth poem's Earl.

In the fourteenth poem, "Love—thou art high—" (J453, Fr452), the Earl becomes "Ducal—at last" as the speaker rewrites Barrett Browning's "How do I love thee" in her own more richly resonating and more realistic lines. "Ducal—at last" recalls the Duke within the Dwarf of the eleventh poem as well as the opening of the repeated twelfth poem ("At last—to be identified!"). This is the first of four poems to which Dickinson gives a full page or two, isolating each from its neighbor by white space—in one case by a whole page of unoccupied paper. Although she had written some two dozen poems that she had not yet copied into a known fascicle,<sup>12</sup> Dickinson left space around the poems that follow her statement of artistic identity. The gaps that remain, the wider-than-usual spaces around the text, act as subliminal emphasis to the spatial imagery of all of the poems of this fascicle from the closed closets of the early poems to the wide and high distance of those final poems. As have some of the earlier poems in the fascicle, "Love—thou art high—" (J453, Fr452) has attracted much source-hunting and autobiographical commentary.<sup>13</sup> However, reading it in its fascicle context multiplies the poem's possibilities beyond that of a love poem.

In its context the fourteenth poem is a natural extension of the thirteenth. "The Malay—took the Pearl" is a monologue of regret; the Earl, who did not dive into the sea, failed at wooing. "Love—thou art high," which answers with another saga of failed wooing, emphasizes yet again the fathoms the wooer must cover high and low to reach the object of love. The fascicle's thirteenth poem ended with the declaration that in "the Negro's" sensibility his (the presumably white speaker's) failure or success was "alike to Him One." The speaker of the fourteenth ("Love—thou art high—") suggests that "were there two / instead of One," the couple might "reach the Sun." The speaker likens that potential union to a Rower and Yacht. He does not "fear the sea" as did the speaker of the thirteenth ("The Malay"). By the end of the first two verses of this "love" description the resonances from earlier poems in the fascicle have widened the poem's possibilities. This speaker aims not only to reach a kind of Everest peak (her Chimborazo) but also to fathom the depths—or at least to cope with them, to cross them with the power of love. Together metaphorically, the lover and speaker will form the Rower and Yacht. This speaker is at some place in the journey only imagined by the speaker of the (duplicated) twelfth poem.

The final stanza of the poem imagines Love or the object of it as "veiled." This fascicle is full of secrets: that which is beyond the wood door of the first poem; those that are revealed in the dark in the third poem; that of the little girl shut up in prose in the sixth; the man buried alive in the eighth; and—

not least—the secret in the lake in the eleventh poem. The “veil” also has to do with imagination.<sup>14</sup> That which is veiled seems further linked to the question of identity that recurs throughout the fascicle. Dickinson’s dictionary makes a distinction between “veil” or “disguise” and “vail” (her spelling in “Love—thou art high—”) or “withheld from view as the vail of the temple; concealed.” This veiled/vailed love makes bliss (“joy, alacrity, exultation, the highest state of blessedness”) an oddity, excluding the lover from that which the speaker (and God) calls “Eternity”—Love’s other name, its “nickname” (“a name of reproach,” says her Webster’s, “an opprobrious appellation”).

No simple love poem, “Love—thou art high” focuses on the speaker’s desire for the highest, the deepest, the most inscrutable, a desire for something that is so overwhelming that its opprobrious name is Eternity and yet so problematical that it causes some who glimpse it to smile and alter—and prattle (like a child)—and die. The object so described in terms of distance, difficulty, and sometimes dubious effect remains unidentified throughout the long (for Dickinson) poem save in these gaps and spaces. In fact, Dickinson has left an entire leaf empty, the back of this completed poem. In a previous footnote appeared many possible candidates for space-fillers had Dickinson wished to fill the space. However, as if the space represents great distance, she follows that poem with a conclusion of the quest begun in Fascicle 21’s fourteenth poem.

The echo is this: The voice describing Love ends the fourteenth poem with her differentiation between two states of blessedness: “Bliss—were an Oddity— / Without thee— / Nicknamed of God— / Eternity.” The next voice bridges the gap of a page and a half with a “little quest romance” (Hartman 1970, 349).

Our journey had advanced—  
 Our feet were almost come  
 To that odd Fork in Being’s  
 Road—  
 Eternity—by Term (J615, Fr453)

In Dickinson’s extensive exploration of “The Flood Subject” she speaks often of “Eternity.” The coincidence of its recurrence, however, is heightened by the fact that in both the fourteenth and fifteenth poems (“Love—thou art high” and “Our journey had advanced”) the meaning of “eternity” is hedged: In the fourteenth it is “nicknamed”; in the fifteenth the nickname is “Eternity—by Term.” “Term” doubles for nickname or brand—that other word from this fascicle—with a length of time, a long terminal length, perhaps like the period of imprisonment in the closet of the little girl. More remarkable is the coincidence of “oddity” and “odd”; these are not words

Dickinson used frequently: "odd" only a dozen times, "oddity" only three. The word is subliminally underlined in the next verse with a near homophone: "Our pace took sudden awe." This in itself helps to unify the fascicle's effect; in its first poem the frightened speaker had "leaned upon the awe." Dickinson elsewhere uses "awe" as a variant for "dread," for "guile," and for "solemn." Awe is most often linked to death and to "Circumference," the "bride of awe" (J1620, Fr1636). In its longer form it is terrifying: "an awful Tempest" (J198, Fr224, F9), "the awful sea," (J506, Fr349, F17), and so forth. Dickinson's lexicon enlarges the possibilities still further by listing in addition to the expected "fear, awe, chastisement, and dread," the word "discipline." Whatever it is that requires reaching (the fourteenth poem) and that slows the pace (the fifteenth) requires and yields discipline.

In the next verse the pace slows to a stop as the speaker pauses between two branches of an "odd Fork." Unlike Frost's two roads, this fork lacks an option: "Retreat—was out of Hope," the traveler says, "Behind—a Sealed Route—." Behind the figure, in the poem's contextual web, is that latched door of the first poem and the dark partitions of the third, sixth, and eighth poems. Before the speaker are the mysterious "Cities" and, for the third time in this fascicle, "Eternity's" sign, now a "White Flag" beckoning "Before— / And God—at every Gate." The limitless vision dazzles the speaker and the reader.

To reach that "city" of consciousness, this questor (and companion: The journey is "ours" as well) must go through the "Forest of the Dead"—perhaps not the literal dead but the dead in life who in another poem inhabit the House of Prose. "The Forest of the Dead" seems a place from myth, not a Puritan graveyard but a Spenserian or Bunyanesque land of dream and enchantment. The journey through the forest iterates the weary impression of the repeated ("at last") twelfth poem. The confusion of the speaker, confronted with no easy options, recalls the "baffling" earth of the fascicle's eighth poem, even in its "odd fork." Dickinson's "fork," which may be imagined as a "jagged three-point lightning flash shape," is balanced by the next poem's "my soul grew straight." Such images as the forked road fit the spatial imagery of other poems in the fascicle in which reaches make a difference.

Such reaches and such journeys require discipline and conviction. In the fascicle's next-to-last poem, the sixteenth, the speaker has, through discipline, conviction, power, passion, and skill, attained her goal. She has risen even above the Chimborazoan heights of "Love": "I rose—because He sank—" (J616, Fr454), she says. As if the "fainting Prince" is the other, the "our" of the fifteenth poem, the speaker says she has brought him through along with herself and, as Stonum (1990) notes, has entered into a "directly reciprocal" relation with the object of love or idolatry. Secure in her self-identification and self-discipline, she has at hand the "balm." In the context of this fascicle what the speaker has that will soothe and strengthen the "fainting Prince"



may be quite different from that assumed by the Jungian reading of Gelpi (1966, 119) and the more specifically phallic reading (of the poem's last line) of Wolff (1986, 455).

Read in its fascicle, the poem seems a confirmation of the repeated poem's declaration of self-identification and a preparation for the final poem's resolution of Dickinson's twenty-first book. "I rose," says the speaker, reminding the reader of the frequent burial images early in the fascicle—most notably that of the closeted naughty child. The speaker continues by posing a reason: "Because he sank." Whether the speaker intends a deity, a Rochester-like human, or her own mysterious lover is of less interest in the "plot" (always with the caveat to watch such narratizing) of the fascicle than the fact that two poems before this the poet has hyperbolized the other, the "him" to whom she sings "hymns" to the heights of Chimborazo. Now she has grown straight of soul and strong enough to support him.

Within the context of this fascicle it is of more than passing interest that the manner of support has everything to do with the art of poetry. Four times the speaker describes how she "cheered" him, "met" him, and "lifted" him: "I sang firm—even Chants," she says first. From the first fascicle's "let us chant it softly" ("All these my banners be" [J22, Fr29]) to this poem, chanting and singing are metonymies for the activity of the poet. The poet is also, as Emerson's "Poet" (in which he links the poet with "a Chimborazo under the line") put it, the teller. In "I rose" the speaker next—and then again—says, "I told him," followed by images she has literally told in poems earlier in the fascicle.

"I told him Best must pass / through this low arch of / flesh—" recalls this fascicle's second poem with its insistence that those who died ultimately "superseded" lesser later figures who are "toys" in comparison. Memory creates life and light. The "low arch of Flesh" suggests the dark of death that the light of love illuminates as in the fascicle's third poem. "No Casque so brave / It spurn the Grave," continues the teller of the poem, and the reader remembers the small boxes of the fascicle's early poems. In her own day this spelling of "cask," Dickinson's more frequent spelling, was attached to literary collections. She repeats "I told him" and offers "Worlds I know / Where Emperors [Monarchs] grow / Who recollected us / If we were true," an image that evokes the Malay and the Earl and also the meeting of Truth and Beauty in the thirteenth and ninth poems. Finally, she says,

And so with thews of Hymn—  
 And sinew from within—  
 And ways I knew not that  
 I knew—till then—  
 I lifted Him—

The oft-noted possibilities of the Hymn/Him are accented subliminally by the rhyme "within," which reminds the fascicle reader of the careful discussion of the force within that is responsible for the magnitude and mood without in the fascicle's eleventh poem, "The Outer—from the Inner," and in which resides "the Secret in the Lake."

And then there is the language of strength—thews and sinew, both unusual for Dickinson. The meaning is obvious in the literal representation of one person supporting another. Dickinson's dictionary opens other possibilities for "thews" as well. Along with "brawn" it lists "manner, custom, habit" and "form of behavior." The habit or manner of Hymn-singing—imbedded within her from her childhood but transformed in her own poetry—is what she offers in order to "lift" the other of this poem.

Just below "thew" in her dictionary is an odd word that might have registered in Dickinson's subconsciousness in relation to this poem, to this fascicle, to the entire project: "Theurgy" is "the art of doing something which is the peculiar province of God to do; or the power or act of performing supernaturally things by invoking the names of God; magic." Perhaps it is magic that allows the little girl, Houdini-like, to rise out of the closet of prose. Certainly magic is the focus of the other fascicle in which Dickinson placed this fascicle's "At last to be identified!" That is the subject of the next chapter. For now, observe the way the first line of the final poem, "It was given to me / by the Gods" (J454, Fr455), seems to account for the miracle of power in the penultimate poem.

That opening line seems an answer to the implied question with which "I rose" ends. "Ways I knew not that—I knew—till then—" allows the poet/speaker to "lift Him" or "lift a hymn" as the preacher says. In this context the unspecified "it" of the final poem's first line is, as many have noted, obviously the gift of imagination or poetry.<sup>15</sup> Donna Dickenson is one of them, saying (not necessarily about this poem): "That Dickinson regarded herself as a poet among poets, even in her isolation, is clear" (1985, 112–13). Dickenson cites as evidence Emily Dickinson's "habit of jousting with established versifiers in her poem" (113). Proof is in the discipline of Dickinson's life that Dickenson lists, beginning with the fascicles themselves. These books, Dickenson believes, "she had revised and ordered into a sequence. . . . She had prepared her poems as a professional, but they were never accepted as a professional's work, and she was no longer there to defend them" (112). Further evidence of such professionalism is in her habit of sending poems, "reordering them, engaging in private competitions with established poets." Finally, concludes Dickenson, the poet "exhibited one unchallengeable sign of the professional: she kept on writing" (113).



## Being Bold: Fascicle 21's Finale

So she did. Why she did is answered in the final poem of this fascicle, "It was given to me by the Gods" (J454, Fr455). The poem does not cap, it crowns a book in which a speaker—whether the same or not—opened in a timorous voice with that frightened applicant at the "Home" within which dwelt those "stolid" or "vacant" faces. The applicant, you recall, had come for "business," a word heavily freighted in Dickinson's lexicon. The speaker(s) in Fascicle 21 merge: The grieving friend attempting to hold tight to the lost one; seeing him or her "better—in the Dark," wishing to "do more"; resisting the powerlessness "to fly" or "to gad [her] little Being out—"; finding the power to escape the prison/closet of Prose; discovering that the power granted on such display is to "Distill," "Arrest," and so forth; waking to a better day; being "identified" (to this one we return later); valuing the Pearl and the Love that is "high"; advancing in a journey; and rising to newfound strength. Such a summary of the first sixteen poems of Fascicle 21 is not intended to be as reductive as a single story. Each poem has other contexts as well, but read together, they form a pattern, not a linear story or an obvious picture, but a web of metaphors for the process of making and the meaning of poems. This awareness leads the reader to appreciate Dickinson's care as a self-conscious editor, one fully aware of her own creative power.

That is the point of the final poem of Fascicle 21, "It was given to me by / the Gods—" (J454, Fr455). In this staunchly self-assertive poem the poet of the sublime announces herself. I have dropped "the speaker" from this sentence because this poem—as do the two complementary prose/poetry definitions and the repeated "At last—to be identified"—verifies Gary Stonum's observation on the Dickinsonian sublime. The speaker of this fiercely proud poem uses what Stonum calls "that volatile and elusive pronoun, the 'I' of the romantic lyric" (1990, 142). In the context of Fascicle 21 the indeterminate "it" of the first declarative line seems clear; centered as it is by the mirrored poems "They shut me up in Prose" and "This was a poet," the fascicle surrounds notions of the nature of poetry and what it takes to be a poet: For one thing, the gods give it.

This is the second appearance of plural deities. In the fascicle's fifteenth poem, "Our Journey had advanced" (J615, Fr453), the "feet" that lead to the "odd Fork in Being's / Road—Eternity by term," end at the vision of "God—at every Gate." Far from resembling the grim and tricky anthropomorphic Old Testament God, the "Burglar! Banker—Father!" of another fascicle ("I never lost as much but twice" [J49, Fr39, F3]), these gods seem to be more like muses, lately sprung up in Amherst to bestow their "gifts," when, as the speaker says, "we are new and small" (a word, recall, essential to this fascicle with its gnat, its bee, its closeted little girl).

Although the poem's first line implies that poetry's source is a kind of serendipity, a negative capability in its most positive sense that allows whatever force or surge that gives birth to those thoughts to become poems, it continues with that other necessity of the poem. The spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling must be recollected in tranquility, not only remembered but reshaped, rearranged. The lump in the throat must find its thought. And it does as Dickinson protects the gift, handling it, molding it, refusing to let it go or—in another sense of the phrase—to debunk it: "I kept it in my Hand," she says; "I never put it down—." She dares to keep it—no longer fearing the sea but touching the transforming element and herself bearing the treasure home, reversing the narrative of Fascicle 21's thirteenth poem ("The Malay—took the Pearl"). Obsessively protective of the gift, the speaker continues: "I did not dare to Eat—or sleep," recalling the deprivation implied in "It would have starved a Gnat" from the fascicle's fifth poem.

Deprivation of food, however, is unimportant in the value system of the dowered child:

I heard such words as "Rich"—  
 When hurrying to school—  
 From lips at Corners of the streets—  
 And wrestled with a smile.

This poet stands apart from the "they"s who furnish the House of Prose, who do not recognize that the outer magnitude is dependent on the inner, on that which is "the secret in the lake / Eyes were not meant to know." The lips on street corners gossip and prattle; they do not carry on the truth/beauty dialogue between the grave's walls. On the last page of the fascicle Dickinson explains the reason for the inner delight that causes her to "wrestle with a smile":

Rich! 'Twas myself—was  
 rich—  
 To take the name of Gold—  
 And Gold to own—in solid  
 Bars—  
 The Difference—made me  
 bold.

The final stanza resonates against the poem's first. What was given to the speaker/poet by the gods has made her rich, different, and bold. We do not know whether this is the transformed speaker of the fascicle's first poem. Consider, however, the possibility that the frightened returnee to the house of stolid stares has become the bold speaker, conscious of her gifts, showing

the movement in mood within the fascicle from timorousness to temerity, from terror to trust.

The adjective "solid," more than any other, links this poem with the fascicle's first ("I—Years had been"). Subliminally it calls us back to that poem in which the speaker is afraid of the "vacant" (not solid) stare; in the later version of the poem the word, in fact, became "stolid." More important, it reminds us of the first speaker's desire to pursue her "business," her "life." Just as "business" was a heavily freighted word in Dickinson's lexicon and poetry, so is "solid" and for somewhat the same reasons. The word, which appears twelve times in all throughout Dickinson's oeuvre, two of those times in Fascicle 21, carries a broad range of meanings in that 1828 lexicon. Most may apply to poetry in general, but they ring particularly true for the business of bookmaking in which Dickinson is engaged: "not hollow; full of matter; real; sound, valid, true, just, not empty or fallacious." Such are the bars of gold, the poems of the speaker, who places opposite to "When we are new and small" those last lines of the fascicle: "The Difference—made me / bold."

Just so, secondary meanings of "difference" lead us backward through the fascicle to the central pair, the aesthetic statement. "Difference" is not only unlikeness but also "dispute; debate; contention; quarrel; controversy." The writer of Fascicle 21 began it by implying that the business of the poet is serious indeed, that it is something like a lover's quarrel with the world; in those central paired poems she expanded that sense that poetry de/stills, a/rests, unsettles us. Poetry, among other things, is a dialogic conversation with her forebears; not only the obvious—Keats, Carlyle, Emerson—but also the sober Kames. It is a contest between the poet's own plural inner voices, between the characters of her imagination, and between recreated literary figures. Most of all, it is a conversation with her readers. And it is potent. The potency and magic it holds is suggested throughout the fascicle in which Dickinson had already imbedded another version of "At last—to be identified—" (J174, Fr172). Why it is "another version" is the subject of chapter 3.

### Poems in Their Places

Those who say that one can find patterns in any random pairing or clustering have a point. Margaret Freeman's concoction of fictitious Fascicle 41 is sobering indeed. Most of what has appeared in this fascicle by way of themes and images appear throughout much if not most of the Dickinson oeuvre. Nevertheless, Dickinson's own selections bear scrutiny. She herself selected this context, and although both "They shut me up in Prose" and "This was a Poet" are among Dickinson's most interesting single lyrics, the pleasures of the text are multiplied by reading them in the proximity she herself arranged.

Contemporary readers with enough money to purchase *Books* (no small investment) may do what early readers could wonder, would R. P. Blackmur modify his "Prejudice" if he we are now to remove what he called in that 1937 essay "b labor" (1937). Listen to the discouraged opening to the essay that relegation of Dickinson to antimacassar makers: "The Dickinson's poems is the great obvious fact about them as the volume to volume—I will not say from edition to edition, for been edited—just as a kind of repetitious fragmentariness is ing fact of her sensibility" (Blake and Wells 1964, 201). To as Cristanne Miller, Martha Nell Smith, William Dore Cameron have other ways of expressing Dickinson's "sensibility" brate the (probably intentional) ambiguities, the intertextual plicities, the resistance to closure, and the modernity of Emerson's mind and prosody. Those who read her through her fascicle "last face," as Edith Wylder (1971) calls a manuscript, see more than what Blackmur (1937, 201) calls the "repetitious fragment" the scattered editions from 1890 to 1950 (and those that remain some of them still, alas, used in schoolrooms). They find possibilities in interrelated details and in details of diction, of imagery, of chirography, and of spatial placement of words and marks—that is to say of all that culminates in the "solid Gold own," of the fascicle's final poem.

As the essays in Fraistat's collection iterate, "when read sequentially [groupings] afford a pleasure and a significance not available if the lyrics separately" (Miner 1986, 21). Dickinson, her own time the only reader of the collections, may have assembled the pleasure Michael Riffaterre, the contemporary specialist describes in reading a single (French) poem: "As he progresses through the text, the reader remembers what he has just read and modifies his understanding of it in light of what he is now decoding. As he works from start to finish, he is reviewing, revising, comparing backward and forward—performing a structural decoding" (1978, 5–6). The Riffaterre is engaging in the same kind of somersaulting through a text as described, perhaps in relation to Barrett Browning: "Did you read her Poems backward because the plunge from the front of the volume sometimes (often have, many times) have—a something of the Mind—" (1983, 30). In a sense that is what I do as I invite readers to read backward at an earlier fascicle in which one of the crucial moments of the fascicle's focus on the nature of the poet, "At last to be identified by a different key.

Contemporary readers with enough money to purchase the *Manuscript Books* (no small investment) may do what early readers could not. How, we wonder, would R. P. Blackmur modify his "Prejudice" if he had been able as we are now to remove what he called in that 1937 essay "barriers to critical labor" (1937). Listen to the discouraged opening to the essay that ends with that relegation of Dickinson to antimacassar makers: "The disarray of Emily Dickinson's poems is the great obvious fact about them as they multiply from volume to volume—I will not say from edition to edition, for they have never been edited—just as a kind of repetitious fragmentariness is the characterizing fact of her sensibility" (Blake and Wells 1964, 201). Today readers such as Cristanne Miller, Martha Nell Smith, William Doreski, and Sharon Cameron have other ways of expressing Dickinson's "sensibility." They celebrate the (probably intentional) ambiguities, the intertextuality, the multiplicities, the resistance to closure, and the modernity of Emily Dickinson's mind and prosody. Those who read her through her fascicles, looking at "the last face," as Edith Wylder (1971) calls a manuscript, see something other than what Blackmur (1937, 201) calls the "repetitious fragmentariness" of the scattered editions from 1890 to 1950 (and those that rely on early texts, some of them still, alas, used in schoolrooms). They find patterns and possibilities in interrelated details and in details of diction, of image, of etymology, of chirography, and of spatial placement of words and punctuation marks—that is to say of all that culminates in the "solid Gold," the "gold to own," of the fascicle's final poem.

As the essays in Fraistat's collection iterate, "when read sequentially, [these groupings] afford a pleasure and a significance not available to one who reads the lyrics separately" (Miner 1986, 21). Dickinson, her own and for a long time the only reader of the collections, may have assembled her books with the pleasure Michael Riffaterre, the contemporary specialist in semiotics, describes in reading a single (French) poem: "As he progresses through the text, the reader remembers what he has just read and modifies his understanding of it in light of what he is now decoding. As he works forward from start to finish, he is reviewing, revising, comparing backwards. He is in effect performing a structural decoding" (1978, 5–6). The Riffaterrean reader is engaging in the same kind of somersaulting through a text that Dickinson described, perhaps in relation to Barrett Browning: "Did you ever read one of her Poems backward because the plunge from the front overturned you? I sometimes (often have, many times) have—a something overtakes the Mind—" (1983, 30). In a sense that is what I do as I invite my reader to look backward at an earlier fascicle in which one of the crucial poems from this fascicle's focus on the nature of the poet, "At last to be identified!" rings in a different key.