

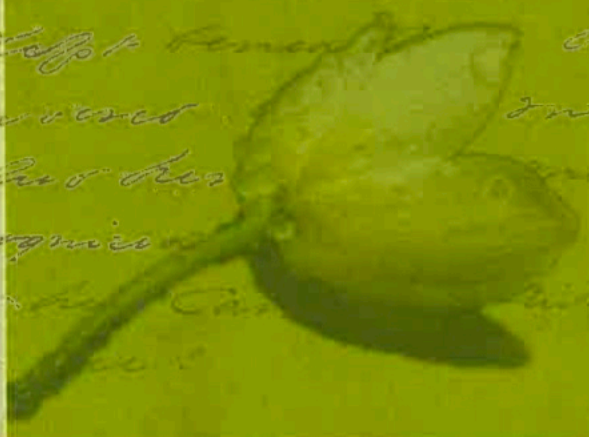


OHIO STATE

Dickinson's

Fascicles

A
Spectrum
of
Possibilities



Edited by Paul Crumbley

&

Eleanor Elson Heginbotham

*Like this to dance - like this to sing -
Drape upon that mystic green -
I ask, each new day, dawn.
I wait for you, for you to feel
Announce in this dear
And
As if I asked a common name
And on my morning, hand,
A stranger, from a kingdom
And I, surprised, dance -
As if I asked a name
And it, in the morning,
And of the world, its purple day,
And the world, its dawn!
She slept beneath
Remembrance
I touched her
She recognized
Put on the
And*

*The part of
With you
The voice
The base
The lips
Long year
Till you
Dance
Dance are
Entered
Dance -
Dance
Night
Larceny
Larceny
To dance
My figure
You are*

Magical Transformations

“Necromancy Sweet,” Texts, and Identity in Fascicle 8

ELEANOR ELSON HEGINBOTHAM

Not tucked under another poem, as are some of Emily Dickinson’s shorter poems within her fascicles, but spread out boldly in the middle of a page toward the end of Fascicle 8, one of Dickinson’s stranger poems grabs our attention. Written with clear large strokes (no variants) it declares its strange stridency with its exclamation points, its percussive sounds, and, primarily, the distressing prayer it offers. Indeed, it can cause the reader’s hair to stand at attention:

Ah! Necromancy Sweet!
 Ah! Wizard erudite!
 Teach me the skill,

That I instill the pain
 Surgeons assuage in vain,
 Nor Herb of all the plain
 Can heal! (Fr168)¹

Although every Dickinson reader knows that she dealt surprises with every poem, creating voices that swerve from delight and love of this life of haying and talking at fences (Fr582, F25) to despair, wishing that, like the Gnat, (s)he could “gad [her] little Being out – / And not begin – again –” (Fr444, F21), this poem seems to stand alone. Startled by its apparent cruelty, the reader wonders what happened to the dispenser of consoling letters and

nor will I, the little Heart's Ease,
Ever be induced to do:

Oh Necromancy + Sorcery!
Oh Wizard Evocate!
Teach me the Skill,

That I might the pains
Surgeons assuage in vain,
For none of all the pains
Can heal!

flowers, the poet who, in a far more famous poem, wished to "stop one Heart from breaking" (Fr982). This incantatory call for the dark side of magic or sorcery would be worth exploring whether it had been on the back of an envelope, in a letter to a friend (neither of which survives as a possibility), or as a stand-alone poem, but, in fact, it is in Fascicle 8, which has many other surprises for the attentive reader.²

Reading it in its fascicle setting demonstrates how context affects interpretation. There it takes its place as a penultimate climax in a grouping of poems privileging magic acts of all kinds. One business of this essay will be to show how Dickinson's placement in this twenty-poem sequence influences our understanding of it. Another—related—will be to explore how this poem and others in the fascicle reflect an interest of Dickinson's that is only recently becoming a subject of conversation and study: Dickinson's response to the rage in her own age for the occult. Finally, it will move both of those discussions—the fascicle context and the cultural context—into the realm of Dickinson's hermeneutics, her theology.

To take the first: the architecture or thematic impulses of Fascicle 8. In this remarkable gathering a gunshot transforms a deer into a high leaper and that into a suffering, struggling person; a sunset becomes a bloody battlefield that in turn morphs into a kitchen corner; flowers become poems; the pent-up force of a far-away volcano transforms itself through the poet into a reined-in, disciplined human stoic. These are not unexpected comparisons to the reader of Dickinson, or indeed of most poets. Poetry is, of course, based almost entirely on transformations. Metaphor, simile, synecdoche, metonymy, and other figures of speech transform one thing to another, often to startlingly different creatures, places, situations, ideas.³ One of the objections to the growing community of those who encourage reading a poem in its fascicle context is that whatever one says about one text ("necromancy") in one context (Fascicle 8) could just as easily be said about Dickinson's work as a whole. In other words, say they (some of them outstanding scholars within this volume): so what that there are many transformational metaphors within Fascicle 8? Such metaphors run throughout the oeuvre, throughout, in fact, all poetry from Anglo-Saxon ballads on. One of my answers is that such a truth does not keep us from talking about other groupings in terms of their particular shape and power, even if the grouping by, say, William Wordsworth or Sylvia Plath has much in common with other groupings by that poet or with other poets from time immemorial.

Let us agree that, while we cannot know Dickinson's intention when she made her little books any more than we can know her intention when she

wrote an individual lyric, we have the right—indeed, as the final poem in this sequence instructs us, the responsibility, to tease out—without insisting on our own—inferences. Unlike the groupings of most other poets, Dickinson's are unmediated by editors or printers. We are, as Suzanne Juhasz said when Ralph W. Franklin's *Manuscript Books* made doing so possible, looking "face to face with her *own* poems" (60).

That said, the magic implied and stated in the collection of poems we call Fascicle 8, the only one in which Dickinson calls on "Necromancy" for help,⁴ seems a particularly compressed complex of mutually reinforcing images of the power of a text to transform not only ideas into images and back again into ideas, but also to transform its reader and its writer. Keeping in mind the cautionary comments of Martha Nell Smith in her important essay in this volume, we might nevertheless more than provisionally accept the following: that Dickinson herself folded the five "cream, lightly ruled and embossed" stationery sheets, used the ink in her father's household to slash the marks below the slight oval design embossed on the paper, stacked the five folded sheets, and sewed them with something more like twine than like thread;⁵ that early editors Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson respected Dickinson's work enough to keep records of how it first appeared even when they removed poems from their original settings, even (see n. 5)—keeping the thread that bound them; and that Ralph W. Franklin's heroic accomplishment in reconstituting the books offers us probable if not incontrovertible certitude about Dickinson's work in creating her little manuscript books. Beyond that, we run into those old ogres of intentional fallacies. Of course, there is no way to know whether, if Dickinson declaimed this poem as neighbors reportedly occasionally heard her do, she might have recited—or shouted—"Ah! Necromancy Sweet!" in a dramatic interpretation of Macbeth's witches or soulfully or playfully or with sophisticated wit, sharply pointed at a community that privileged flowery, inspirational, religious literature by women poets with three names.

Questions of tone become somewhat less mysterious when exploring intertextualities between poems. Why did Dickinson place this strong poem with its odd term for a specific form of transformation, "Necromancy," in the context of the nineteen poems that surround it? This essay does *not* posit that Fascicle 8—or any other of the forty—is a coded narrative about a craze for magical appearances or that, essay like, it is driven by *a* theme in the normal Carlylean/Emersonian sense. Image clusters, changing speakers, even matters of punctuation and placement of poems on pages in dialogic relationships with each other: all of these are interesting to the fascicle

reader who is rewarded with more complex and open discoveries. We play with the surprises across as well as down the pages; we note refrains with variations. In short, reading Dickinson in her fascicle context—the only one she left other than the important context of poems which she slipped into letters—provides the attentive reader with the same appreciation he or she brings to the individual lyric, a term which is in itself a subject for debate as Virginia Jackson discusses it in her *Dickinson's Misery*.⁶ Reading the collections—fascicles or whatever we call them (see Ellen Hart's essay in this volume)—of eleven to twenty-nine of these smaller marvels—whatever we call *them*—we may increase our respect, often our amusement, at Dickinson's wit, her care, her openness to serendipity, and, of course, her emotional and intellectual intensity and originality.

Leaving aside the question of labels for the purpose of this discussion, reading Dickinson's individual works in the context of the little thread-bound volumes that Mabel Loomis Todd called "fascicles" confirms—playfully or not—what Allen Tate—playfully or not—said: "Cotton Mather would have burned her for a witch" (quoted in Blake and Wells 167). Tate's comment is not pejorative; Dickinson's witchcraft, her power, is brewed in the words she chooses, of course, but also in the arrangement of a poem on a page. What Louise Bogan said when the Johnson variorum appeared over half a century ago—that "to read Emily Dickinson in this new text, in which every idiosyncratic habit of spelling, punctuation, diction, and localism is reproduced, is to read her in a slightly different language" (96)—is exponentially more true when one pores over the reconstituted fascicles published in 1981 by Ralph Franklin. Along with all those delights just listed, there is at least one more potential discovery in reading the fascicles, one in hot contention: reading a poem in its fascicle placement may help the reader toward (though certainly never *all the way to*) a clearer understanding of what the words so carefully chosen by that wordsmith Dickinson may have meant when she copied them into the little book, the fascicle.⁷

An earlier version of this essay posits that one way to test the thesis that placement may disclose new possibilities for interpretation—is to read the poems that appear in more than one fascicle, in light of other poems in that grouping.⁸ The grouping itself becomes, as fascicle readers have noted, a long-link poem in itself, the twenty-first poem, if you will, of a twenty-poem cycle.⁹ Each grouping has what I have called its own "thumbprint," its swirl of images or themes or concerns that sets it apart from others. Thus, goes my argument, a poem that is "repeated," a word used with many caveats, becomes a different poem in tone and impact through its intersection with other poems in a different sequence. It happens that Fascicle 8 contains

not just one "repeated" poem ("At last, to be identified" [Fr172], a poem that Dickinson placed, in almost identical form, in a similar position, in Fascicle 21) but also the brief "Portraits are to daily faces" (Fr174), seventh in the series, which turns up again as "Pictures are to daily faces," seventeenth in this same series we call Fascicle 8. All three "repetitions"—one ("At last") expressing joy in self-identity, the other two ("Portraits/Pictures are") expressing faith in the enterprise of the artist—may somehow resonate against this call for magic—and for the power to "instill" pain.

Compiled about 1860, two years into her project of publishing her work in the form of these manuscript books,¹⁰ this fascicle interests me for that one fulcrum—Michael Riffaterre might almost call it a "hypogram"¹¹—around which, it seems to me, most of the entire little book revolves, "Necromancy." Although originally the word was reserved for the art of foretelling the future by communicating with the dead, a compelling longing in many of the poems, Dickinson here also seems to use its secondary but more general use, "magic, enchantment, sorcery." The magic she weaves through this fascicle is directly related to both "repeated" poems ("Portraits/pictures" and "At last, to be identified"), part of Dickinson's declaration of aesthetic intent.¹² Moreover, in fact, the magic is woven through most of the other poems in the sequence. Avoiding, I hope, temptations to overlay a narrative¹³ or an ideology on the book, I want only to suggest that Dickinson hints throughout Fascicle 8 that she was attuned to the practices if not the possibilities of the magic, the Spiritualism, the "Necromancy" of her day and that her awareness, wary or accepting, fed her poetic vocabulary. Indeed, she could not have been unaware of it, as Paul Crumbley has ably shown in *Winds of Will: Emily Dickinson and the Sovereignty of Democratic Thought* (107–32) and as Paula Bennett's essay in this collection notes. That vocabulary, especially in Fascicle 8, surrounds Dickinson's notions of the hallowedness of an artistic project, one achieved through pain, joy, study, labor, and surprises; one that transfigures the maker of the art; and one that, she hoped and we now know, would wander down the ages for our inferences. Let those inferences begin.

"Necromancy Sweet"?

The strange, almost sadistic seven-line single sentence, filling almost all of the left side of the open book, framed in Dickinson's characteristic horizontal lines, is fifteenth poem in a twenty-poem collection. "Ah! Necromancy – Sweet!" radiates backwards and forward through the series, informing the

reading of its surrounding poems and opening up interpretive possibilities. Challenging as this poem is, to my knowledge, it has not received much scholarly attention.¹⁴ Along with the many studies of Dickinson's religious interests, proclivities, and resistance, there are the related studies on Dickinson's poems of power, indeed of rage.¹⁵ Most agree with Richard Sewall and Cynthia Griffin Wolff that Emily Dickinson carried on a lifelong wrestling match with the tenets of her church and the faith she had not been able to proclaim aloud as a schoolgirl. Few, however, have remarked on what some in Dickinson's circle might have regarded as a bastard offspring of traditional faiths, one that took over the imagination and even the practices of thousands in Dickinson's day: Spiritualism with its related arts and crafts. As the brief recapitulation of this almost-deviant fad of her age and place will show (later in this essay), Dickinson's metaphoric invocation of "Necromancy" was not, perhaps, as strange in Dickinson's midcentury Anglo-American world as it may seem now. Furthermore, although Dickinson's specific call for necromancy's power is unique to this poem, the call reminds us of what is more familiar: the persistent yearnings of her speakers for communion with the dead. This longing runs through Dickinson's individual poems, her fascicles, her letters, and the various scraps she left behind. Crumbley's penetrating analysis of the conduit between theology and democracy provided by the poems with a spiritualist slant illustrates the point through over fifty of Dickinson's poems, none of them from the earlier part of her oeuvre (*Winds of Will* 215–16). Thus, it would be silly to hold up Fascicle 8 as her primary revelation of this societal phenomenon. However, to look closely at this *overt* use of a term linked with spiritualism in this fascicle setting seems a worthy project. The poem's context, its placement with other poems, almost all of which involve some sort of translation of matter or spirit, provides insight into her poetic practice and her awareness of a public phenomenon.

Read in its fascicle setting, "Ah, Necromancy Sweet" is part of a network of interconnecting images. This context makes the poem simultaneously broader (more universal) and more sharply pointed (situational) than it is standing alone. This fascicle repeats (with important variations) versions of magic and transformation, that change the *poet* ("At last, to be identified," eleventh poem, halfway through the fascicle) and the *poem* (as it "wanders down the latitudes") and the *reader* who heeds the poet's call to attend to "your *inference* therefrom" ("As if some little Arctic flower," twentieth and last poem in the sequence; the "inference" underline is Dickinson's). Along the way it provides some deliciously serendipitous—or are they?—witty surprises.

The anguished pain of a wounded deer opens the fascicle with a leap. In Fascicle 8's first poem, "A *wounded* Deer—leaps highest —" (Fr181), the "extasy of death," as the hunter tells it (several poems in Fascicle 8 are secondhand stories), propels the deer to a final height before "the Brake is still!" In her own word-leap the speaker moves from that death to the death of Christ—or at least to the typography suggesting it: "The *smitten* Rock that gushes! / The *trampled* Steel that springs!" The speaker literally underlines the Christian imagery ("smitten" and "trampled"), investing the deer with a holy aura before the poem takes another turn—from the animal to the sacred to the mortal, the universal. The poem ends aphoristically, "Mirth is the mail of Anguish — / In which it cautious Arm, / Lest Anybody spy the blood / And 'you're hurt' exclaim!"¹⁶ She will return to that image of reined-in emotion later in the fascicle, including the "Necromancy" poem, but first we turn the page to find more blood.

A "Nobody" rather than an "Anybody" (of the "Wounded Deer" poem) spies the blood in the poem that follows, "The Sun kept stooping — stooping — low! (Fr182). That poem, on the left of the opened fascicle, faces "I met a King this Afternoon" (Fr183), on the right. It takes a moment to register on that little bit of intertextuality—the "Nobody/Anybody" and the seeping blood that moves from the deer to the sunset. We are beguiled to read the poems only on their surface; when we turn the page, for example, we see two homely situations: the first (on the left), simply a (bloody) sunset over the hills, the other (on the right), a delighted glimpse of a freckled, barefoot boy and his two "ragged" friends riding in a horse-drawn wagon. However, both are just as much about a kind of magical transformation as is the wounded Deer / smitten Rock that gushes. Both actually use variants of the *word* "transformation": "On his side [the Sun's], what Transaction!" exults the speaker of the poem on the left of the opened fascicle; and the sight of the little wagon "then transported me!" says the speaker of that on the right. In the poem on the left the sunset deepens into "Armies — / So gay — So Brigadier"; on the right, the children in the wagon become "A King" and "Princes." The imagination of the poet plays with simple sights: imagination is the agent of transformation. That imagination lures the attentive reader to balance between the literal prosy setting with the suggestion of the existential dramas. Another turn of the page repeats in its own way the image cluster provided by the first three poems: on the left of the opened books are the last three quatrains of "I met a King," the top line on the page declaring, "And such a wagon!" Facing the line is the beginning of "To learn the Transport by the Pain" (Fr178). Such coincidences of language and images ("Wagon" and "Transport") may be accidental. Some critics of manuscript studies maintain that the fascicles are more scrapbook

than chapbook and that Dickinson used some words so often that their pairing or intimacy in a manuscript must be accidental.¹⁷ Nevertheless it is hard to imagine that the kind of fun such discoveries provide this reader did not also delight the writer, whatever her motivation and process for putting them there. Questions of intentionality are outside the scope of this essay—and outside the realm of our knowing,¹⁸ but we are invited to *see* what is on the pages, make our inferences, and be moved, delighted, and entertained.

What such coincidences have to do with "Necromancy" becomes clear as we move through the fascicle, turning to more revelations, more evidence that in their fascicle context, individual poems take on new possibilities of meaning(s) and the whole becomes bigger than the sum of its parts.¹⁹ "To learn the Transport," fourth poem in the sequence, connects in small ways to those around it as you see them on the pages: the "Barefoot Estate" at the end of the third poem is echoed, for example, in the "homesick, homesick feet" of the character in "To Learn." As the "ragged Princes" are "sovereigns" on their journey in the third poem, the pain in the fourth is "a sovereign Anguish"—and the lines are directly opposite each other. But, of course, there are much deeper interconnections. The pain and death in the first poem ("A wounded Deer") moves to a bloody sunset poem suggesting transformations in the natural and the spiritual world, and those merge to the child in a wagon morphed into a king in a coach. Where are they going? There's a provisional answer in the next ("To learn the Transport"), in which the "homesick feet" are going to a "foreign shore," where, waiting, are "the patient Laureates' / Whose voices – trained – below – / Ascend in ceaseless Carol." From this imagined other world these voices are "inaudible, indeed, / To us, the duller scholars / Of the Mysterious Bard!" Before moving to the next poems in the grouping, it is well to remember that the business of the Spiritualist, the Necromancer, is to call on those voices so that they *will* be audible below. Of course, that is as simplistic a reading as anything else; much more is happening on these pages, so we move on to three poems that, among much else, celebrate objects that might be metaphors for poems.

Reading the Flowers, the Letter, the Portrait: What Lives On

"If the foolish call them '*flowers*' –" (Fr179), begins the speaker of one of the most potentially rich and confusing poems in the gathering, the fifth poem of the fascicle, the first of its own little grouping, and the clever hid-

ing place of one of the most astonishing rewards for the careful reader of the fascicle. As are most of the poems in this fascicle, this one is another spoke around that hub of "Necromancy" and the less obvious but present shadow of Spiritualism, as this cluster of poems, particularly, invokes measures against extinction: art allows the dead to visit with the living. The magic occurs on many levels; one of those is in the textured preparation for this poem ("If the foolish") with those that led up to it. To begin with, the writer of the fascicle makes the distinction in this poem between the "foolish" and the "wiser" readers, reminding "wiser" readers of the fascicle of the "patient Laureate" of the previous page/poem ("To learn the Transport"); just so, the "beclouded Eyes" of the foolish (or the wiser or the Savans) call to mind the "Blind Men [who] learn the sun" in "To Learn."

Fun as are such linguistic links, they become deeper in the context of a larger picture. To see that larger picture we remember that in the first four poems Dickinson put "To learn the Transport by the Pain" as an echo of the first, her "wounded Deer"; that the "Sovereign Anguish" of "Transport" is likewise previewed in the "Transport[ed]" children/monarch in the third poem. Clearly, so far, there have been several versions of meditations on the truth of mortality—and the sadness of death. That "Necromancy" incantation is just around the corner with all its implications of magical transformations of the dead who come to life. With "If the foolish" she begins a new group, one that includes the "flowers" of the fifth poem, the "tawny" letter, retrieved from the Ebon box of the sixth poem, and the "Portrait" of the seventh. In them the compiler of the collection offers not just solace but a triumph over death, a kind of "Necromancy Sweet." And although "If the foolish call them '*flowers* –'" may be "about" (admittedly a reductive word) other things, Dickinson's floral poems, including importantly the last in this fascicle, seem so often metaphors for the products of her industry that it seems safe to say that the self-consciously literary language of this one clarifies the "them." The "foolish" may consider them pretty and decorative and perishable; the "Savans" may try to classify them, but "those who read the 'Revelations'" understand that they (poems) may be a kind of promised land, something metaphorically as precious as that denied Moses. The poem spills over onto the right-hand side of the turned page:

Low amid that glad Belles lettres
 Grant that we may stand –
 Stars, amid profound *Galaxies*
 At that grand 'Right Hand.'

Under the strong line Dickinson used to separate one lyric on a page from another is a poem as well known and oft anthologized as the previous few are not: "In Ebon Box, when years have flown" (Fr180). The "Belles lettres" of the Galaxies of some literary heaven, presided over by a God near whom the poet begs to stand, seems an introduction to this poem about what survives the dead, what speaks for the dead (a kind of "necromancy") through the dusty ages to the living. How great a miracle, how important its consequences are—the discovery of a text, a letter in this case, becomes all the more clear by *looking at* the pages on which the two poems appear, by, in the language of the first, "scanning" them, or in the language of the second, "conning" them. For there they are opposite each other,

on the left (from Fr179):

Could we stand with that Old 'Moses' –
 'Canaan' denied –
 Scan like him the stately landscape
 On the other side –

and on the right (from Fr180):

To hold a letter to the light –
 Grown Tawny – now, with time –
 To con the faded syllables
 That quickened us like Wine!

The written text held to the light is literally on these pages opposite the Promised Land; both are yearned for. The sight of the Promised Land, says the speaker of the poem on the left, would "deem superfluous / Many Sciences, / Not pursued by learned Angels / in scholastic skies!" It is hard to imagine a pairing that would imply more reverence about a letter. The speaker's wish to "scan" in the poem on the left, and, in the one on the right, to "con" the syllables, is the act of a reader and the wish of the writer for the reader. The poem on the right continues as the speaker brings a "flower" up from the Ebon Box with, again, the resonances of a something that outlasts death. And then the poem continues and concludes on the next page. Below the last verse of "The Ebon Box" is a puzzling little gem. It will appear, with one word changed, later in the fascicle, causing Sharon Cameron to call the doubling not so much a repetition but rather a refrain:

Portraits are to daily faces
 As an Evening West,
 To a fine – pedantic sunshine
 In a satin Vest! (Fr174)

To my knowledge Cameron alone has explored an answer to the question of why this poem that seems a simple contrast between the actual and the

virtual, the “real thing” in the Jamesian sense and the better, the representational, appears twice within nine pages.²⁰ It is, as she says, part of a “structural element” (*Choosing* 55). Later in her groundbreaking book Cameron says, “Thus we read connections, even equivalences, sometimes by appeal to proximity but sometimes by non-congruous associations” (116). What Cameron calls “the structural element,” the connection of which this poem, “repeated” later in the book as “Pictures are to daily faces,” is part of the pattern, as the speaker follows the written text held to the faded light in “The Ebon Box” with the tiny little meditation on the “Evening West.” Like the “tawny letter,” it is privileged to the bright light—the “pedantic sunshine”—perhaps the prosy world, the opposite of which is the lyric dark, subject of Wendy Barker’s study. We see clearer in that dark, as Dickinson reminds us elsewhere. In the sequence’s eighth poem, “Wait till the Majesty of Death” (Fr169), that dark, away from the “pedantic sunshine,” the reader learns what is found: death has transformed the “modest Clay” to a royal state, around which “Obsequious Angels” and “the Lord of Lords” not only await but “Receive [the dead] unblushingly!”

Especially because of the quotation marks and the adjectives, the tone of this poem is ambiguous. To my ears it is playful. This reading, influenced possibly by the “Necromancy” poem coming later in the sequence, resists readings by those who focus on Dickinson’s fascination with death, including such readings as John Cody’s (that the poet’s fascination with death propelled her inner life so much toward obsession that “she thirsted for details; it was important to learn just how the dying felt in the face of imminent dissociation” [Cody 268–69]). Cody calls this “her peculiar interest in mortality,” but, of course, it was not “peculiar” to her; all around her, as we will see, Spiritualists and those who went to them for solace and connection—thousands around her—were doing something similar. The Civil War, which had barely begun in the year ascribed by Ralph Franklin to this fascicle, would exponentially increase the interest in speaking with the spirit world and gaining wisdom from it, but Drew Gilpin Faust supplies some astonishing statistics for the decade during which Dickinson *was*, presumably, compiling the fascicle. In her dense and sorrowful look at *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Faust cites the explosive nature of this trend:

A series of spirit rappings in upstate New York in the late 1840s had intensified spreading interest in the apparent reality of communication between the living and the dead. . . . By 1853 one spiritualist estimated that thirty [spirit circles] met regularly in the city of Philadelphia alone,

and that thirty thousand mediums were operating across the country. The *Spiritualist Register* reported that just before the outbreak of war 240,000 inhabitants of New York State—6 percent of its total population—were spiritualists. (180–81)

One mission of this essay is to explore Dickinson's tone toward what amounted to a fad and to reexamine in that light the given: that, for her, immortality was indeed "the flood subject." One clue is, again, in the *look* at the poems, page against page. On the left, the leftover stanzas of "In Ebon Box" begin with "A curl, perhaps, from foreheads / Our Constancy forgot"; on the right, brow to brow, we see "Wait till the Majesty of Death / Invests so mean a brow!" And underneath the brows, the foreheads, Dickinson has copied into her book that "Portraits" poem on the left and the transformed dead on the right. Senior scholars like David Porter and Ralph Franklin may insist that such things are the coincidences of the scrapbook collector Dickinson, but to my eyes, they seem deliberate—and witty. That by no means negates the deadly seriousness of Dickinson's explorations of what happens to us when we die. We turn the page; we are now halfway through the fascicle, and there seems to be a new nuance to the tone: the reportage of the first "wounded Deer," the awe of the "Ebon Box," the witty talk of "Transport" and transfiguration becomes intense and personal.

"'Tis so much joy! 'Tis so much joy!" (Fr170), next in the series, flies across and down the page in a breathless rush to its crashing finish. "If I should fail, what poverty!" and "if indeed I fail," and then, "And if I gain!": each of the three verses sets up a subjunctive, wistful, urgent tone. Balancing joy and defeat, bliss and breath against each other, the tone is restrained until the speaker's excitement reaches a wishful crescendo:

And if I gain! Oh Gun at sea,
 Oh Bells, that in the steeples be!
 At first, repeat it slow!
 For Heaven is a different thing,
 Conjectured, and waked sudden in –
 And might extinguish me!

So much hinges on this victory that the reader is left with the top of her head exposed, cold and hot simultaneously, in the grip of a poet whose hopes are visceral. As Jane Eberwein points out, this sense of the lure, the exhilaration of death and the Dead is as much a part of Dickinson as the mourning for the lost (*Strategies* 210). As we move toward the call on "Necromancy,"

the pattern emerging from the play of single lyric against lyric becomes more complex and compelling. Opposite the tentatively triumphant mood of "Tis so much joy!" is "A fuzzy fellow, without feet –" (Fr171) with a less tentative story of transfiguration as the squat, dun caterpillar takes "*Damask Residence – / And struts in sewing silk!*" with the mission of telling "the pretty secret / Of the butterfly!"

One version of the "pretty secret" is the poem Dickinson places below that final stanza which is spilled over to the next page as a sort of preamble to the poem which will later appear, almost unchanged (readers will note that the punctuation in Fascicle 21, slightly different, is the version Franklin used for the Reader's Edition), in Fascicle 21: "At last, to be identified!" (Fr172). This tale of self-revelation brings the feet—perhaps those that appeared in the early poems—to a space "leagues" away from the old life to a new identity. The two parts of the page on the left are related: the caterpillar becomes butterfly on the top third of the page, and, below, the speaker is transformed into the inhabitant of a dark place (past midnight, past the morning star, past sunrise, past day, as she tells us). All of this is magic; all of it is transfiguration. It is the kind of sequence in which the poet's "metapoetic treatment of metaphor," as James Guthrie puts it, makes her most closely resemble "a mystic" (*Vision* 60).²¹

One of Dickinson's most famous "metapoetic metaphors" now appears on the right side of her little book, almost like an ember smoldering in that dark. As is the opening's "wounded Deer," this next long poem, "I have never seen 'Volcanoes' –" (Fr165), is a narrative. Although both narratives have been read as autobiographical reactions to one love relationship or another, and indeed they may have originated as such,²² in this context, copied as they are in a gathering with that strange call to "Necromancy Sweet!" and anticipated with meditations on transformations, of which the largest is the passage to death, the Volcano and the Deer seem to have more to do with ways to deal with pain that transforms: through active struggle, through the quest to quiet the struggle, through containing passion with self-control. The two "as told to" narratives, "The wounded Deer" and "Volcanoes," are reversals of each other. "Mirth is the mail of Anguish," observes the hunter who reports on the wounded deer; the story he tells is of control born of the mortal wound. On the other hand, in the twelfth poem of the series, the "Travellers tell" of the surface placidity that masks the deeper explosive identity of the Volcano. "The mail of Anguish" in "The wounded Deer" becomes "the smoldering anguish" of the "appalling Ordnance" in "The still Volcano" (even in this horror Dickinson puns with "pall"). The parallel/opposing stories end the same: the deer dies in the

brake; the dust in the "palpitating Vineyard" settles down over a destroyed, buried world. But in the latter, the speaker yearns for "some loving Antiquary, / On Resumption Morn" to "cry with joy, 'Pompeii!' / To the Hills return!" As in so many Dickinson poems, the mood is subjunctive: again three "ifs" frame the action as the speaker wishes for resumption, a restoration of all that has exploded, burned, died. That plea, contained in the last stanza, is on the top of the next page; under it and the usual demarcation line, is what seems a provisional answer to the cry of the Antiquarian.

The silence of the spent volcano, the smoldering ruin, leads to "Dust is the only Secret" (Fr166). The secret in the dust is "Death," pictured here as lonely ("Nobody knew 'his Father' – / Never was a Boy –" and so forth) and also as New Englandish: "Industrious! Laconic! / Punctual! Sedate," and as, oxymoronically, "Bold as a Brigand / Stillier than a Fleet!" Can this "Dust/Death" with all its sterling qualities, somehow answer the wish of the "loving Antiquary"? Taken out of its fascicle context, "Dust is the only Secret" demonstrates Cameron's thesis that "one inevitably sees an individual poem as something different from what an individual poem was before one read the fascicles. For the individual poem now is interpenetrated or saturated with the kind of connections revealed by reading Dickinson in the fascicles" (*Choosing* 174–75). Taken out of the fascicle, the poem is indeed, as Jane Eberwein calls it, "Solemn" (*Strategies* 224), but in its fascicle setting its solemnity bridges poems profoundly and wittily. It needs to be *seen*:

*On the left, the last stanza of
"Volcano":*

If some loving Antiquary,
On Resumption Morn,
Will not cry with joy, "Pompeii!"
To the Hills return!

*On the right, the last stanza of
"Dust":*

Builds, like a Bird, too!
Christ robs the nest –
Robin after Robin
Smuggled to Rest!

Below each of these is that solid Dickinson demarcation line; the leftover stanzas of preceding poems seem introductions to the poems below them, but they also read across the pages so that the reader imagines the compiler, Dickinson, looking up from her pile of manuscripts, smiling at the congruence she has just discovered herself. The loving Antiquary has the capacity, like the Bird, to build from bits and pieces. The Resumption Morn calls to mind the Resurrection that, according to Christian doctrine, will rob the worldly nest in order to people the next, spiritual world. And the cry for a "resumption" of Pompeii might be that of the Robins, robbed of this

worldly kin, who are smuggled to rest. If that is too baroque, too much a reading in the head of the witness rather than in that of the poet, the words nevertheless exist on the page waiting for us to scan, con, study, deal with in some way. On the back side of "Birds smuggled to rest" we find—at last—the call for "Necromancy." First, though, there's another bit of the wit, witnessed only by the fascicle reader.

What Then? Only Your Inference—and Necromancy

Under the "loving Antiquary" stanza are the first three quatrains of "Dust is the only Secret," and, on the opposite page, in exactly the same dimensions, under the last stanza of "Dust," the one about the robbed robins, are the first twelve lines of "I'm the little Heart's Ease" (Fr167). Thanks to Judith Farr's book on Dickinson's garden, we know what Dickinson must have known: that the "Hearts-Ease" is a pansy-violet that "comes up early, announcing the longed for spring." It also symbolizes bravery because it can withstand even the snow (Farr and Carter, 94). The poem thus heralds the very last poem of the sequence with its "Arctic flower." The twelve lines, of course, more than describe the flower; they echo previous poems in the group. There is a butterfly (we met it four poems back), for one thing, and the "Birds are antiquated fellows," putting together two images from those verses opposite each other ("Antiquarians" and "Robins") which appeared at the top of the opened book. Here is the entire last verse of "I'm the little 'Heart's Ease'!" It answers the question from its eighth line: "Who'll apologize for me?"

Dear – Old fashioned, little flower!

Eden is old fashioned, too!

Birds are antiquated fellows!

Heaven does not change her blue.

[These last two lines spill onto the next page, forming almost a title to

"Ah! Necromancy Sweet!"]

Nor will I, the little Heart's Ease –

Ever be induced to do!

If the flower stands in for the poem or the poet in its loveliness and courage, it is also speaking here for a kind of steadfastness into eternity, the kind at the heart of the Spiritualists of Dickinson's day. The heated urgency of the fascicle's earlier poems—the desperation of the hurt deer, the bloodiness of

the sunset, the excitement of the discoveries in the ebon box and of "at last" being "identified"—all of that which is metaphorically exploded and spent in the images of the volcano, the dust of which settles over ruins—all of that seems changed. Yes, there is sadness; the robins are robbed away from the dust and "smuggled to rest," but the "rest" to which they seem smuggled may be, in this context, the "old fashioned" Eden of the "Heart's Ease." In that case, the call on "Necromancy Sweet," centered on the page as few of Dickinson's poems are and left with a large margin of white space below, seems less strange than when read outside of this context. As the deer comes to stillness through pain and as a mountain can contain the violence of a volcano without erupting, so *human beings* come to stillness through pain; that pain can be so intense that it must erupt from the stilled volcano; that in the end, dust or death is the "only Secret": all that harsh news may be read in the poems that precede this. The Necromancer might be akin to the magician of the earlier poems, one who can transform, as it were, a little freckled boy into a king, can bring from the rubble of the inevitably shattered world, something remarkable. What cannot be assuaged is the knowledge that in the end, there is this "punctual, laconic, industrious" visitor, death.

Death would be the news—punctual, laconic, industrious—for the next five years. Paula Bennett's essay in this book raises the question of the poet's tone in Fascicle 16's famous elegy on Frazar Stearns, who "brought the horror of war home with him in his coffin." Bennett reads most of the poems in Fascicle 16 as spoken from the dead—and with an "edge" turned toward the "public, highly romanticized story." Although, according to Franklin's reckoning, the two fascicles are two years apart, those in Fascicle 16—especially seen through Bennett's sensibilities—are helpful in grappling with this fascicle's stunning invocation to necromancy: that the magician give the speaker the skill to "instill the pain / Surgeons assuage in vain." "I like a look of Agony," says one of the already dead in Fascicle 16, and "'tis so appalling – it exhilarates," says a living soldier. What happens to the dead and to those left to mourn and miss them was a subject for the poet who sought "the skill" to "instill the pain" all her writing life. One sees the skill developing through the three versions of "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (Fr124, F6 and Fr10) as Dickinson inscribed (instilled) imagery to replicate the experience that surgeons assuage in vain. Between Fascicles 6 and 10, she ups the ante of bitterness toward the enemy that takes away laughter (in Fascicle 6) and all else in Fascicle 10 ("Tribes of Eclipse").

She was not alone in her time and place. Although the expected religious systems with which Dickinson has been linked have been repeat-

edly studied, the rise of interest in Spiritualism which may animate "Ah! Wizard erudite" has been less so. Diary entries of the time attest to the growing fascination and scorn for the phenomenon: young Burrill Curtis, for example, wrote from Brook Farm to his father in 1843: "I hear Animal Magnetism [hypnotism] is very lively in Providence. Do you know aught new of it?" (Myerson 421). Ten years later Bronson Alcott registered in his journal for January 1, 1853: "Boston. A while at the Spiritualists' Convention which is sitting—or sleeping, rather—in the Masonic Temple [he had given a talk there] and left them to their preferred lunacies" (Shepherd 265). And three years after that—in August 1856—Alcott recorded another experience with the new movement: "Attend a conversation at Dr. B's [Henry Whitney Bellows] on 'Spiritualism' . . . the apotheosis of idiocy and fatuity only serves to betray the latent atheism and dark superstition of multitudes in our time" (Shepherd 283). Alcott, no stranger to strangeness himself, continued to rail at the "grim goblin gods here enthroned from the vacant popular mind" and "this ghastly superstition . . . spreading fast and wide" (284). Such talk had been around since the Salem Witchcraft Trials, but the mid-nineteenth century, with its proliferation of a popular press and its plethora of Lyceum-type speaking venues, was bringing it back with a vengeance.

By the time Dickinson wrote this strange "Necromancy" poem, intellectual and popular journals, many of them read by the Dickinson circle,²³ and best-selling books²⁴ vividly recounted adventures in the Spiritualist trade and noted behavior like that of the famous (notorious?) adolescent daughters of a Methodist minister who were eventually hired by P. T. Barnum. People like the Fox sisters inspired so many others that there were perhaps one million believers nationwide (Kerr 9). The carnage of the Civil War would enlarge the movement even more, but that would be after Dickinson's puzzling use of "Necromancy" in Fascicle 8. The movement's "mediums" attempted to bridge the worlds of the living and the dead, sometimes in bizarre ways such as interpreting the "rapping" of deceased people. It is not surprising, then, to hear the verdict of Dickinson's fellow New England writers on "Spiritualist" practices and beliefs. Emerson called such meetings "droll bedlam"; Thoreau, "the croaking of frogs"; Oliver Wendell Holmes, "jiggery and manipulation"; and Henry James, "hocus pocus" and "insanity" (Sparks 452).²⁵ Some, while skeptical, were not so quick to mock the belief that the dead could correspond with the living, as Howard Kerr explains in detailed discussions of fictional characters, letters, editorials, and parodies reflecting the phenomenon.

For all the fuss over the hocus pocus elements of Spiritualism that may or may not have influenced Dickinson's "Necromancy" poem, there was something about the movement that may have resonated with her. The movement attracted strong women—women such as Sarah Grimke, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frances Willard (Braude 70). Although Dickinson was far from a reformer, she was in her way—especially as the speakers of the poems in Fascicle 8 iterate—a proud, idiosyncratic, autonomous woman, and "Spiritualism held up a model of women's unlimited capacity for autonomous action" (Braude 201). Dickinson, then, could not *not* have been aware of and even influenced by the Spiritualist movement, its passionate followers, and its ironic or scathing detractors. The coming carnage of the war would increase interest. The "Necromancy" poem in which the poet begs for "skill" to "instill" such severe and hopeless pain is a particularly cruel phrasing of Dickinson's lifelong interest in what mystery, what "riddle," lies so "still" beyond the grave. What poets do, though, is to defy the grave. They keep the dead alive through their art, as Dickinson's Shakespeare said ("So long lives this, and this gives life to thee"). The fascicle began with instances of magic and transformation; these are synonyms for "necromancy," as is "foretelling of the future by communicating with the dead." The fascicle has another five poems, contained on the fifth folded sheet. Each, but especially the last, seems in the context of this fascicle to be about that skill of a poet—and of the reader who must herself grapple with the hard "pain" that neither "surgeons" nor nature ("herb of all the plain") can heal.

"Except to Heaven, she is nought" (Fr173), the poem which follows "Necromancy," may seem completely unrelated (and perhaps it is), but it may also be an example of what the Necromancy can do: save and reinvent the lost. Indeed, that would place the whole collection in a more orthodox tradition. Joanne Dobson, for one, reads "Except to Heaven" as one of fifty poems (two come from this fascicle) which she (Dobson) says would not have created a barrier between the poem and the reader in the nineteenth century, specifically in 1864 (132). This one (Dobson names it "Home for Heaven") appears in an imagined anthology for that year. The little poem ("Except to Heaven") posits that the little flower or the small, unnoticed person may be "nought" to all the world—but is *not* nought to Heaven or to the waiting Angels (remember the Laureates waiting above for "the duller scholars" in "To learn the Transport by the Pain," the fourth poem in the sequence?). The poem itself has made the insignificant significant, the trite fresh: quite a feat. If that seems somewhat saccharine, the next, "I

cautious, scanned my little life" (Fr175), third from last, answers it with self-proclaimed cynicism but with something else as well. The speaker's first verses return to the desperation of earlier poems in the fascicle, but we also recall that many of the earlier poems valorized texts of one kind or another. The language has included scholars, letters, portraits, laureates, and acts of scanning, conning, and transforming through imagination. In this third-from-last poem, whatever the "hay" symbolizes has been harvested, winnowed, hidden, and lost. But that is not the end of the poem. After wondering whether a thief, the wind, or God himself took what was so precious, the speaker regains agency, saying, "My business is, to find!"

Lopped over to the next page—the habit throughout the little book—are the closing lines of "I cautious, scanned my little life":

So I begin to ransack!
 How is it Hearts, with Thee?
 Art thou within the little Barn
 Love provided thee?

Under that packed quatrain/question is a poem that this reader, at least, can only read as the speaker's wistful determination to have that for which she is ransacking the barn, the "little life" that it was her business to find—the fruits of her labor and love and wit—that "business," as she repeats the word, of her life. Here is the portion of the poem below the "ransack" lines:

If I could bribe them by a Rose
 I'd bring them every flower that grows
 From Amherst to Cashmere!
 I would not stop for night or storm –
 Or frost, or death, or anyone –
 My business were so dear!

If they w'd linger for a Bird
 My Tamborin were soonest heard
 Among the April Woods!
 Unwearied all the summer long,
 Only to break in wilder song
 When Winter shook the boughs!

What if they hear me!
 Who shall say

[And on the next page—the last]

That such an importunity
 May not at last avail?
 That, weary of this Beggar's face –
 They may not finally say, Yes –
 To drive her from the Hall? (Fr176)

The little life/Rose/birdsong/Beggar *will* be heard. Metaphorically like those rappers in other halls, this one will make such a ruckus that she will be driven from the Hall by those who may resist but must listen to her demands. The Necromancer not only calls forth the spirits, but he or she interprets them as well. Those thousands of Dickinson's fellow citizens, including intellectuals, who sat raptly waiting signs from the other side, are joined by the poet who wishes to know, too, what goes on beyond that swelling in the ground. In these poems, as in the séances to which the hopeful flocked, the dead are given a voice; consider the scores of proleptic poems among the almost eighteen hundred. In Dickinson's poems the dead come alive again and again as the poems are continually reinterpreted, and that is what the final poem in this twenty part sequence is all about:

As if some little Arctic flower
 Opon the polar hem –
 Went wandering down the Latitudes
 Until it puzzled came
 To continents of summer –
 To firmaments of sun –
 To strange, bright crowds of flowers –
 And birds, of foreign tongue!
 I say, as if this little flower
 To Eden, wandered in –
 What then? Why nothing,
 Only, your *inference* therefrom! (Fr177)

The word "inference," underlined by the poet on the final line of this little book, is Dickinson's instruction, invitation, across the miles and years, to us. She speaks to us from beyond the great divide that so absorbed her, telling us—by way of metaphors for the poet and the poem, figured variously as all the contents of this poem (flowers, and birds, a letter in a box, a portrait or picture, a hay in a barn, a wounded deer, a pent-up volcano)—that we must pay attention. The language of the Spiritualists all around her,

though perhaps ridiculous to many in Dickinson's day and ours, acted as objective correlatives for thoughts too complex for abstraction.

"At last, to be identified," she had exulted midway through the fascicle. Dickinson would repeat that self-identification two years later with few changes in Fascicle 21. That fascicle, too, is about "the business" of the poet, though there is no Necromancer in it. Although "At last" appears in about the same position in that later fascicle, the poem seems there to convey a less exultant, more business-like, if you will, tone. Perhaps that is because Fascicle 21 begins with a person returning home to find it absent of those she knew, to find it hostile and to flee from it. Images of darkness, burial, exhausting journeys prevail. There are no flowers or birds. Fascicle 21, in short, has a different identity, a different "thumbprint." Between the compiling of Fascicles 8 and 21 much had happened to the person exulting in her identity as one, who, through texts that are as precious as a vision of the Promised Land, can thwart death or at least burst through it. By the time, two years after 1860, when she finished copying poems (written who knows when) into the book we call Fascicle 8, a destructive war had swept through her consciousness and the whole country—something like that volcano, after which the known world seemed covered in soot. When, then, she speaks up again for the chance "to be identified," her tone has become more sober toward the urgency she feels to enact her "business" and the exigencies that stand in the way. However, she is exultant about her "business," which was, of course, to sing or to write. On the last page of *this* little book (Fascicle 8) Emily Dickinson tells us, the readers, of her work, what *our* business must be. We must have the ability and courage to *infer* what she has left in the barn, the ebon box, the air that wafts from Amherst to Cashmere. In her own way Dickinson enacts the quest of those all around her. As the journals, diaries, offhand comments, and speeches of her fellow nineteenth-century intellectuals did, she found the Spiritualist practices interesting—useful—as metaphors, and, in her most ardent wish, as realities; she must have known her little books and the poems in them would "wander down the latitudes" and speak for her from her side of the mysterious divide about which she wrote so often.

Tate's comment that linked Dickinson with Cotton Mather was no stretch. Three years before her death, Dickinson herself wrote that

Witchcraft was hung, in History,
 But History and I
 Find all the Witchcraft that we need
 Around us, every Day (Fr1612)

For her, "Witchcraft" was in the sunset, the children, the caterpillars, the pictures and portraits, but mostly it was in the faded letters lifted from the ebon box, the texts that, like the "little Arctic flower" would wander "down the Latitudes" awaiting our "*inference* therefrom." Others of her generation might gather around tables awaiting strange rapping from the dead. Emily Dickinson found in that practice a metaphor for what readers of her fascicles do today as they stare, in perplexity and delight, at what she left on those pages.

Absent some remarkable attic discovery, we can never know Dickinson's intentions. Following her instructions, we might make educated guesses, draw *inferences* from her enormous, if mysterious, paper trail, her meta-poems about poetry and her tantalizing hints in letters. What she was *up to* when she began her project of collecting poems for her gatherings we cannot know, but we *can*, thanks to Franklin's reproductions of them, appreciate *what* she *put on* those pages. Such a study is much more entertaining and inspirational than a literal séance; it is our version of "Necromancy Sweet."