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Guide to Emily Dickinson's *Collected Poems*

I. BIOGRAPHY

Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1830. She attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, but severe homesickness led her to return home after one year. Throughout her life, she seldom left her house and visitors were scarce. The people with whom she did come in contact, however, had an enormous impact on her thoughts and poetry. She was particularly stirred by the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, whom she met on a trip to Philadelphia. He left for the West Coast shortly after a visit to her home in 1860, and some critics believe his departure gave rise to the heartsick flow of verse from Dickinson in the years that followed. While it is certain that he was an important figure in her life, it is not certain that this was in the capacity of romantic love—she called him "my closest earthly friend." Other possibilities for the unrequited love in Dickinson's poems include Otis P. Lord, a Massachusetts Supreme Court Judge, and Samuel Bowles, editor of the Springfield *Republican.*

By the 1860s, Dickinson lived in almost total physical isolation from the outside world, but actively maintained many correspondences and read widely. She spent a great deal of this time with her family. Her father, Edward Dickinson, was actively involved in state and national politics, serving in Congress for one term. Her brother Austin attended law school and became an attorney, but lived next door once he married Susan Gilbert (one of the speculated—albeit less persuasively—unrequited loves of Emily). Dickinson's younger sister Lavinia also lived at home for her entire life in similar isolation. Lavinia and Austin were not only family, but intellectual companions during Dickinson's lifetime.

Dickinson's poetry reflects her loneliness and the speakers of her poems generally live in a state of want, but her poems are also marked by the intimate recollection of inspirational moments which are decidedly life-giving and suggest the possibility of happiness. Her work was heavily influenced by the Metaphysical poets of seventeenth-century England, as well as her reading of the Book of Revelation and her upbringing in a Puritan New England town which encouraged a Calvinist, orthodox, and conservative approach to Christianity.

She admired the poetry of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, as well as John Keats. Though she was dissuaded from reading the verse of her contemporary Walt Whitman by rumor of its disgracefulness, the two poets are now connected by the distinguished place they hold as the founders of a uniquely American poetic voice. While Dickinson was extremely prolific as a poet and regularly enclosed poems in letters to friends, she was not publicly recognized during her lifetime. The first volume of her work was published posthumously in 1890 and the last in 1955. She died in Amherst in 1886.

Upon her death, Dickinson's family discovered 40 handbound volumes of more than 800 of her poems, or "fascicles" as they are sometimes called. These

booklets were made by folding and sewing five or six sheets of stationary paper and copying what seem to be final versions of poems in an order that many critics believe to be more than chronological. The handwritten poems show a variety of dash-like marks of various sizes and directions (some are even vertical). The poems were initially unbound and published according to the aesthetics of her many early editors, removing her unusual and varied dashes and replacing them with traditional punctuation. The current standard version replaces her dashes with a standard "n-dash," which is a closer typographical approximation of her writing. Furthermore, the original order of the works was not restored until 1981, when Ralph W. Franklin used the physical evidence of the paper itself to restore her order, relying on smudge marks, needle punctures and other clues to reassemble the packets. Since then, many critics have argued for thematic unity in these small collections, believing the ordering of the poems to be more than chronological or convenient. *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Belknap Press, 1981) remains the only volume that keeps the order intact.

II. A GUIDE TO DICKINSON'S POETRY

Emily Dickinson had only one literary critic during her lifetime: T. H. Higginson, an editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*. After he wrote a piece encouraging new writers, Dickinson sent him a small selection of poems, knowing from his past writings that he was particularly sympathetic to the cause of female writers. He ultimately became her only critic and literary mentor. In their first correspondence, she asked him if her poems were "alive" and if they "breathed." He called her a "wholly new and original poetic genius." He then immediately advised her against publication. Most likely, Higginson felt that she was unclassifiable within the poetic establishment of the day—departing from traditional forms as well as conventions of language and meter, her poems would have seemed odd, even unacceptable, to her contemporary audience. Even though he failed her as a critic and colleague—telling her not to publish, never offering any real encouragement—she was pleased that he read her poems, and credited her audience of one with "saving her life."

Dickinson's subject matter is best understood in how it reflects but also departs from her background and education. It is unclear to biographers and critics exactly what books Dickinson had access to, beyond the books that she makes mention of, often cryptically, in her letters. Among the 100 or so classic works found in her family library (some of which may not have been in the library during her lifetime) and a few hundred more mundane works and popular novels that she discussed in letters, it is unlikely that she had read more than a handful of philosophers, poets, and novelists. Influenced most by the Bible, Shakespeare, and the seventeenth century metaphysicals (noted for their extravagant metaphors in linking disparate objects), she wrote poems on grief, love, death, loss, affection and longing. Her presumed reading in the natural sciences, also reconstructed from studying her family library, allowed her to bring precision and individuality to natural subjects, observing nature for itself, rather than as a testament to the glory of creation, and touching upon the less beautiful aspects of nature, such as weeds and clover. Her forms were various and included riddles, declarations, complaints, love songs, stories, arguments, prayers, and definitions.

Drawing from primarily musical forms such as hymns and ballads, and modifying them with her own sense of rhythm and sound, a Dickinson poem is unusual in that it both slows down and speeds up, interrupts itself, holds its breath, and sometimes trails off. The reader is led through the poem by the shape of her stanza forms, typically quatrains, and her unusual emphasis of words, either through capitalization or line position. The meter varies quite a bit even from the stresses expected in a hymn or ballad. Hymn meter differs from traditional meter by counting syl-

lables, not "feet." Unlike ballad meter, quatrains are typically closed, meaning that the first and third lines will rhyme as well as the second and fourth. Some common forms of hymn meter that Dickinson used are common meter (a line of eight syllables followed by a line of six syllables, repeating in quatrains of an 8/6/8/6 pattern), long meter (8/8/8/8), short meter (6/6/6/6), and common particular meter (8/8/6/8/8/6). However, unlike writers of traditional hymns, Dickinson took liberties with the meter. She also allowed herself to use enjambment more frequently than traditional hymn writers, breaking a line where there is no natural or syntactic pause. For example, in the second stanza of "I cannot live with you," she writes:

> The Sexton keeps the Key to –
> Putting up
> Our Life – His Porcelain –
> Like a Cup –

Dickinson breaks the first line after a preposition and before a direct object; in both places, one would not traditionally punctuate with a comma, semicolon, or dash, and there would be no pause.

Since so few of her poems were published during her lifetime, the posthumous discovery of Dickinson's cache of poems presented an unusual variety of challenges. What is now known as her poetics or prosody is bound to a discussion of how her poems have been edited, and how her handwritten manuscripts have been interpreted in contemporary editions.

Beyond deciphering her handwriting and trying to guess at dates, editors have had to work from poems that often appeared in several unfinished forms, with no clear, definitive version. Early publications of her selected poems were horribly botched in an attempt to "clean up" her verse; they were only restored in the collected poems as edited by Thomas H. Johnson in 1955, first in three volumes with considerable variants for each poem, and then in a single volume of all 1755 poems five years later in which a "best copy" was chosen for each poem. In no case were several versions of a poem combined. Only twenty-five were given titles by Johnson, and those often reluctantly. The titling system used most frequently today is the numbers assigned by Thomas H. Johnson in his various collected editions, along with the first line of the poem.

A typical manuscript for a poem might include several undated versions, with varying capitalization throughout, sometimes a "C" or an "S" that seems to be somewhere between lowercase and capital, and no degree of logic in the capitalization. While important subject words and the symbols that correspond to them are often capitalized, often (but not always) a metrically stressed word will be capitalized as well, even if it has little or no relevance in comparison to the rest of the words in the poem. Early editors removed all capitals but the first of the line, or tried to apply editorial logic to their usage. For example, poem 632 is now commonly punctuated as follows:

> The Brain – is wider than the Sky –
> For – put them side by side –
> The one the other will contain
> With ease – and You – beside –
>
> The Brain is deeper than the sea –
> For – hold them – Blue to Blue –
> The one the other will absorb –
> As Sponges – Buckets – do –
>
> The Brain is just the weight of God –
> For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –
> And they will differ – if they do –
> As Syllable from Sound –

The above capitalizations, which include such seemingly unimportant words as "Blue," "Sponges," and "Buckets," capitalizing "Sky" but not "sea," were regularized into the following traditional capitalization and punctuation by early editors:

The brain is wider than the sky,
For, put them side by side,
The one the other will include
With ease, and you beside.

The brain is deeper than the sea,
For, hold them, blue to blue,
The one the other will absorb,
As sponges, buckets do.

The brain is just the weight of God,
For, lift them, pound for pound,
And they will differ, if they do,
As syllable from sound.

The punctuation is equally difficult to decipher; what is now known as Dickinson's characteristic "dash" is actually a richer variety of pen markings that have no typographical correspondents. Dashes are either long or short; sometimes vertical, as if to indicate musical phrasing, and often elongated periods, as if to indicate a slightly different kind of pause. Poem 327, "Before I got my eye put out," the original manuscript of which can be found online,[1] ends with one of these markings:

So safer – guess – with just my soul
Upon the Window pane –
Where other Creatures put their eyes –
Incautious – of the Sun –

In keeping with her background in church hymns, some modern critics have even discussed the upwards or downwards movement of a dash, as if it might correspond to a "lifting" or "falling" phrase. Dickinson uses dashes musically, but also to create a sense of the indefinite, a different kind of pause, an interruption of thought, to set off a list, as a semi-colon, as parentheses, or to link two thoughts together—the shape of any individual dash might be seen as joining two thoughts together or pushing them apart. One of the most characteristic uses of the dash is at the end of a poem with a closed rhyme; the meter would shut, like a door, but the punctuation seems open. In these cases, it is likely meant to serve as an elongated end-stop. The dash was historically an informal mark, used in letters and diaries but not academic writing, and removing the dashes changes, even upon first glance, the visual liveliness and vigor of her verses. While Johnson's system of transcribing all dash-like markings as a printed "n-dash," or short dash (as above), is imperfect, in early editions, these dashes were replaced by more regularized punctuation, such as commas and periods. Poem 320, "We play at Paste," was changed in punctuation, capitalization, and even stanza form.

We play at Paste –
Till qualified, for Pearl –
Then, drop the Paste –
And deem ourself a fool –

The Shapes – though – were similar –
And our new Hands
Learned Gem-Tactics –
Practicing Sands –

The above poem, when published for the first time, looked like this:

We play at paste,
Till qualified for pearl,
Then drop the paste,
And deem ourself a fool.
The shapes, though, were similar,
And our new hands
Learned gem-tactics
Practicing sands.

Not only does the poem leave a completely different visual impression on the page, but the pacing created by the punctuation is distorted as well, causing "The Shapes – though – were similar –" to be compressed

into "The shapes, though, were similar." Finally, a traditional period ends the poem with more certainty than the original would suggest.

While altering capitalization or punctuation seems like a horrible offense to these poems, other editorial gestures were even more egregious. In an effort to make Dickinson's poems seem more educated, words were replaced. What is now known as "the heft/ Of cathedral tunes" (from 258) was altered, with no textual variant, to "weight" by Dickinson's first editor, Mabel Todd. Other changes included fixing misspellings, which seems innocuous enough, but sometimes involved removing a New England pronunciation that she might have been trying to indicate, as well as more serious swapping of lines and regularizing of her most unusual rhythms and meters. The selected poems were arranged in no particular order; one great challenge of Dickinson scholarship has been reassembling her hand-bound packets, or fascicles, as they are sometimes called, to reflect the order that she may have intended. They were originally taken apart and deemed useless, or merely chronological. As is typical with most poets, the most frequently anthologized poems have not often reflected the breadth of Dickinson's political range, erotic sensibilities, theological challenges, or depth of darkness. Her poems were cleaned up not only in mechanics, but also in subject matter.

The critical reaction to Dickinson's poems did not occur during her lifetime, as only seven poems were published, and those anonymously. Since she was "discovered," critical and popular reaction has historically trailed the various publishing strategies for her work. Once seen as religious, bland, even sentimental, she is increasingly becoming understood for her strangeness and versatility, especially after the publication of Johnson's 1955 edition, and most recently, facsimiles of the manuscripts. The myth, or perhaps exaggeration, of her reclusiveness (recent scholarship has shown that at least an element of it was quite normal for an unmarried woman devoted to her family), and the tendency of biographers to attach her poems to a mysterious unrequited love, have obscured more serious scholarship for too long as critics have overlayed a fantasy of her life onto her poems. Unsurprisingly, she has benefited greatly from feminist scholarship, most notably in the biography by Alfred Habegger. She is now regarded as one of the two founders of American poetics, alongside Walt Whitman, but her legacy provides an alternate direction for American verse—her abstract, spare musicality and contemplative introversion providing a counterpoint to Whitman's sprawling lines, concrete subject matter, and grandiosity.

Reading Dickinson requires that we tune our ear to her peculiarity, and look, as she did, into the "look of death," observe "a certain slant of light," and perhaps "play at paste"—consider ourselves to be, as she considered herself, "of barefoot rank" until we are transformed by this strange apprenticeship.

III. A CLOSE READING OF "I CANNOT LIVE WITH YOU"

"I Cannot Live With You" is one of Emily Dickinson's great love poems, close in form to the poetic argument of a classic Shakespearean sonnet.[2] The poem shares the logical sensibility of the metaphysical poets whom she admired, advancing her thoughts about her lover, slowly, from the first declaration to the inevitable devastating conclusion. However, unlike most sonnet arguments or "carpe diem" poems, this poem seems designed to argue *against* love. The poem can be broken down into five parts. The first explains why she cannot live with her love object, the second why she cannot die with him, the third why she cannot rise with him, the fourth why she cannot fall with him, and the final utterance of impossibility. The poem begins with a sense of impossibility:

> I cannot live with You –
> It would be Life –
> And Life is over there –
> Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the Key to –
Putting up
Our Life – His porcelain -
Like a Cup –

Discarded of the Housewife –
Quaint – or Broke –
A newer Sevres pleases –
Old Ones crack –

Moving from the abstraction of the first four lines, the second and third stanzas enter into the domestic metaphor of china, which is described variously as discarded, broken, quaint, and cracked, put up on the shelf and forgotten. If life is "behind the shelf," it is completely outside the experience of the china, as is the speaker's life. The power of the first line is temporarily muted, and the reader is similarly trapped inside a haunting verse of cups and shelves, eerie in their quietness. That the china is locked away by the Sexton, a representative of the official or practical face of religiosity, seems to imply that it is not only the domestic sphere that the speaker is trapped in, but also the binds of the church, or at least the administrative daily function of the church, which Dickinson viewed as being quite separate from the passion behind it.

The lines themselves alternate between long and short, and the disparity between the lines becomes more dramatic in the second and third stanzas. The delicate, halting, "cracked" lines that describe the china seem physically overwhelmed by the lines about the housewife or Sexton. Between the second and third stanzas, the enjambment (pausing on "cup") compounded with the dash, which emphasizes the pause and line break, allows life to be hopefully like a "cup" for the fraction of a second it takes the reader to make it to the next line, where it is discarded "of the housewife." This line reads as both "The housewife discards the cup" and also "the Sexton puts away the cup discarded by the housewife," as if what is not good enough for marriage is good enough for the church. "Quaint," incidentally, is a word that Dickinson used to describe herself in letters, when writing about her reclusiveness; "half-cracked" is a word that T. H. Higginson, her poetic correspondent, used to describe her.

In the second part of the poem, Dickinson imagines that the alternative to living with someone is dying with them, but that also has been denied to her:

I could not die – with You –
For One must wait
To shut the Other's Gaze down –
You – could not –

And I – Could I stand by
And see You – freeze –
Without my Right of Frost –
Death's privilege?

These stanzas express not only the fact that if she cannot live with her love she is dead, but also that the "with" is taken from her—she can die, but not with him because death is necessarily a private act. First she argues that she must wait to "shut the Other's Gaze down," which might literally mean to close his eyes, but also the word "Gaze" implies that there is something sustaining about the act of looking upon another with love; it is that which creates life, and it must be actively shut down for death to occur. She imagines that he would not be strong enough to do that for her. Her second argument within this section is that, upon his death, denied the "Right of Frost," she would long for death.

In the third section of the poem, Dickinson imagines the final judgment, and how it might be overwhelmed by her earthly love:

Nor could I rise – with You –
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus' –
That New Grace

Glow plain – and foreign
On my homesick Eye –
Except that You than He
Shone closer by –

They'd judge Us – How –
For You – served Heaven – You know,
Or sought to –
I could not –

Because You saturated Sight –
And I had not more Eyes
For sordid excellence
As Paradise

She is unable to see or experience paradise because she is so consumed with her vision of him—not only does his face "put out" the face of Jesus like a candle, but he "saturated her sight" so much in life that she is unable to "see" paradise, meaning, perhaps that he distracted her from piety. The speaker's experience in this poem is deeply linked to sight, and suggests that that which cannot be seen cannot be experienced. In the stanza beginning "They'd judge us," there is a complete breakdown of rhyme; when she writes "I could not" she does not rhyme, and the faltering echoes the broken fragility of the first lines. The pairing of "sordid excellence" is both a metaphysical touch, and a characteristic Dickinson moment of transforming an abstraction into its opposite with an oddly chosen adjective.

In the fourth section of the poem, the speaker describes why she cannot be in hell with her lover:

And were You lost, I would be –
Though My Name
Rang loudest
On the Heavenly fame –

And were You – saved –
And I – condemned to be
Where You were not –
That self – were Hell to Me –

Just as she cannot see heaven because his face obscures her view, her perspective of hell is confined to being without him. If she were saved and he were lost, then she would be in hell without him, and if they were both saved, but saved apart, then that would also be hell. In admirable pursuit of the conclusion of this radical argument, which has grown ever more impossible as she chases it, she passionately refuses to believe that there is an alternative where they are both saved together or both condemned.

The final stanza acts structurally like the final couplet of a sonnet, finishing the argument, but leaving a question for the reader to consider:

So We must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –
Despair –

In the line "You there – I – here" we can see a perfect example of how the poet's dashes work to hold the words, and ideas, of "you" and "I" apart.

As in a sonnet, the rhyme scheme tightens up quite a bit in this final section. Dickinson internally rhymes "are" with "ajar," half-rhyming "apart" and "ajar," "despair" with "there," "here" and "prayer," then closing up the stanza in rhyme. It is as if she intends the final rhyme to show the perfection of her argument in the poem's conclusion. Additionally, those four words that she rhymes quite eloquently express the problem itself, with prayer standing in for its close synonym, hope. The intricacy of the rhyme leaves "sustenance" as unrhymed, underscoring that "White Sustenance" does not nourish. Incidentally, early publications of the poem replaced "white" with "pale" as if softening the conclusion that she reaches by modifying the de-

gree of her language; pale sustenance seems somehow more sustaining.

However, even as she closes the argument, it opens up a little, because in this despair she has found a kind of sustenance, however undernourishing it is. There is something holy about this kind of despair, and "white" seems also to be "heavenly," as if in losing her hope for the afterlife, she has found a new earthly devotion to replace it, and then elevated it to celestial levels. This stanza is notably the first time she uses the word "we," capitalized for emphasis, and creates a paradox where "meet apart" seems possible, or at least more possible than any of the other alternatives she has rejected throughout the poem. She claims that the door is just "ajar" but then compares it to oceans, making "ajar" as wide open as the earth itself, and then linking it to prayer, or hope. In this amazingly deft bit of wordplay, Dickinson reverses everything as she's saying it—the lovers are apart but meeting; the door is ajar, like an ocean; and the speaker is somehow sustained by despair. In a final touch, she ends the poem with an elongated endstop, printed as a dash, and whether it is meant to be "ajar" or more definitively shut is as unanswerable as the final question of the poem.

1 www.cs.virginia.edu/najfj/emily/stab.html

2 A Shakespearean sonnet typically uses the three quatrains to develop an argument about love, adding a new logical point in each. While poems are not typically thought of as arguments, the Renaissance tradition demanded rigorous logic and quality of thought rather than simple sentimentality—even when writing about love. For example, in a "Carpe Diem" poem, the poet is trying to find inventive ways to convince a virgin to "make much of time." Other arguments might be why love lasts beyond death, why a comparison to a summer's day is a complete failure, or why the poet's love is greater than any other previous love.

IV. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 What does it feel like to read a Dickinson poem? What is your sense of her musicality, sound, rhythm, and use of space? Do you read these poems quickly or slowly? What do you think about the capitals or punctuation?

2 In "They shut me up in Prose," Emily Dickinson writes that being inside prose is "As when a little Girl/ They put me in the Closet –/ Because they liked me 'still' –" How does the musicality and rhythm of this poem contribute to her idea of movement? Is there a place for being still in Dickinson's poems?

3 In two of her poems about grief, Dickinson hints at the possibility of a greater truth coming from sadness. In "There's a certain slant of light" (258), she writes that the "Heavenly Hurt" gives us "internal difference/ where the meanings are." In "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (280), she writes that it seems "That Sense was breaking through –" Read these two poems together. What kinds of "sense" or "meaning" might she be suggesting?

4 "I'm nobody – who are you?" (288) is an invitation to loneliness. How does this poem or "I taste a liquor never brewed" (214) invite the reader into the a kind of shared strangeness? Do you feel separated or connected by the language?

5 "What Soft Cherubic Creatures" (401) is full of contractions, such as "refined horror" and "common glory" as Dickinson describes the gentlewomen of her day. How do these contractions affect your understanding of these women?

6 In "I dwell in possibility" (657), Dickinson sets up "possibility" as the opposite of "prose." How does her poetry represent this idea of possibility? Using Dickinson's metaphor of the house, what does she

suggest when she says that poetry is "more numerous of windows, superior – for doors"?

7 In "The Soul Unto Itself" (683), Dickinson imagines that her soul is separate from herself. How can a soul be a "friend" or "spy"? How might a soul be "secure against its own"?

8 In "I heard a Fly Buzz" (465), Dickinson imagines the moment of her own death. What role does the fly play in this imagining? She writes "There interposed a Fly –/With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –/Between the light – and me." What is her relationship to the fly?

V. SUGGESTED READING

COLLECTED POEMS

- Johnson, Thomas H., ed. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960. The definitive collected poems, with restoration to the original punctuation and capitalization, arranged, as much as possible, in chronological order.
- Franklin, R.W., ed. *The Manuscript Books Of Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press/Harvard University, 1981. The most recent incarnation of Dickinson's poems, presented as she wrote them, with all their variants of punctuation, capitalization, and arrangements on the page. Many do not fall into such neat hymn patterns as earlier publications suggested.

BIOGRAPHY AND LETTERS

- Habegger, Alfred. *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson.* Modern Library: New York, 2001. This recent biography includes the significant feminist scholarship accrued since Sewall's lauded 1972 biography, and is worth reading for this perspective as well as a devotion to overlooked Dickinson poems.
- Howe, Susan. *My Emily Dickinson.* North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, California: 1986. A personal, poetic, and accessible entrance into the world of Emily Dickinson that mixes biography and criticism.
- Johnson, Thomas H., ed. *Emily Dickinson Selected Letters.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971. Edited by Thomas Johnson, who compiled the definitive collected poems, these letters show an astounding variety of wit, poetics and personality, giving us perhaps the truest biography—though, following her own rule, she chose in the many letters of her lifetime to "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant," revealing more moods and modes of thought than concrete biographical detail.
- Sewall, Richard B. *The Life of Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972. Winner of the National Book Award. Widely considered to be the best biography for accuracy and richness of biographical detail.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *Emily Dickinson.* Perseus Books: New York, 1986. A good critical biography, and exploration of the intersection between her life and works.

CRITICISM

- Martin, Wendy, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2002 . A collection of essays by notable Dickinson scholars that address historical, thematic and poetic issues over the scope of her poetry.
- Farr, Judith, ed. *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Articles.* New Century Views: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1996. A collection of essays, mostly focused on Dickinson's poetics.
- Anderson, Charles R. *Emily Dickinson's Poetry.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York, 1960. A classic critical work on Dickinson's poems that explores

what Anderson believes to be the “major” poems from various angles such as “Wit,” “Circumference,” and “Process.”

ELECTRONIC

- *Translating Emily: Digitally Re-Presenting Fascicle 16.* (www.cs.virginia.edu/najfj/emily/stab.html) Traces historical publishing variants of an entire fascicle, and presents a scanned version of the pages. A great way to study the regularization of the dash in a handful of poems.

SUGGESTED POEMS

After great pain, a formal feeling comes (352)
Because I could not stop for Death (712)
Fame is a fickle food (1659)
I cannot live with You (640)
I dwell in possibility (657)
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain (280)
I heard a Fly buzz (465)
I measure every Grief I meet (561)
I taste a liquor never brewed (214)
I’m Nobody! Who are you? (288)
The Soul selects her own Society (303)
The Soul unto itself (683)
There’s a certain Slant of light (258)
They shut me up in Prose (613)
To make a prairie (1755)
What Soft Cherubic Creatures (401)
We play at Paste (320)