

R*owing in Eden:
Rereading Emily Dickinson*

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“S he” is indefinitely other in herself. That is undoubtedly the reason she is called temperamental, incomprehensible, perturbed, capricious—not to mention her language in which “she” goes off in all directions and in which “he” is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with ready-made grids, a code prepared in advance.

—LUCE IRIGARAY, *THIS SEX WHICH IS NOT ONE*

It is precisely because her traits, habits, needs, and probable demands are distinct from those of man, that she is not, never was, never can, and never will be, justly represented by him.

—THOMAS W. HIGGINSON, *WOMEN AND THE ALPHABET*

Readers will be struck by the frequency with which her variants show that her line spacings and stanza divisions follow no pattern. Much of the irregularity clearly suggests a conscious experimentation.

—THOMAS H. JOHNSON, *THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON*

All men say “What” to me, but I thought it a fashion—

—EMILY DICKINSON, L 271

One To Fill a Gap: *Erasures, Disguises, Definitions*

When Emily Dickinson wrote Thomas Higginson, “I had told you I did not print,” she enclosed a clipping of “The Snake,” the version of “A narrow Fellow in / the Grass” (Set 6c; P 986) which had appeared in the *Springfield Weekly Republican* two months earlier, to demonstrate her reasons for choosing not to do so. She comments on the printed version: “Lest you meet my Snake and suppose I deceive it was robbed of me—defeated too of the third line by the punctuation. The third and fourth were one—I had told you I did not print—I feared you might think me ostensible. . . .” (L 316, early 1866.)¹ She appears angry because editors, presuming to know how the poem should be punctuated, inserted a question mark she had purposely omitted. By 1866 she had seen at least ten, very probably more, of her poems in print. The *Republican* had printed most of them, and in most of the printings Dickinson had seen alterations of her poems.² According to her, such editorial interference dissuaded her from conventional publication. So distressed by the changes that she employs a language of conquest to describe an apparently minor tampering of the editors, Dickinson remarks that their revision by no means improved the reader’s lot but was one that “defeated” her intention that the third and fourth lines be read together, as a unit. Editors had not recognized that her choice of

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

was “defeated” and printed as

You may have met him – did you not?
His notice instant is,

(P 986, L 316, SEE ESP. NOTES ON PUBLICATION)³

The question mark separates “not” from “notice,” spoiling the anaphoric pun. “Not,” followed so quickly by “notice,” with no pause underscored between, brings to mind “Did you note?” On the other hand, the divisive punctuation discourages the punning and ambiguity made possible in its absence. By emphasizing the break between lines, the punctuation mark practically insists on a particular reading, whereas its omission makes the relationship between the two lines more indeterminate, hence encouraging more interaction by the reader and more possibilities to create meaning. Therefore, the poet objects to limits that she herself did not wish to impose being forced upon her poem. If, as Paul Valery suggested, “a poem, like a piece of music, offers merely a text, which, strictly speaking, is only a kind of recipe,” then Dickinson becomes exasperated because editors changed the instructions for performing or cooking up readings.⁴

A Story about Reading

That is one story to tell about the meaning of her remarks. Certainly the combative language of assault and thievery, Dickinson’s own more violent metaphors for editorial intervention, argues for such an interpretation. Elsewhere her metaphors are claustrophobic; Dickinson writes as if a poetic impulse has been shut up in prose (F 21; P 613), as if she has been “robbed” of a room in her literary house of “fairer” possibility (F 22; P 657). To construct a narrative about her reaction to editorial interference, the reader fills several key gaps in the letter’s passage: she asserts the cause-effect relationship implied by Dickinson’s placing a statement about conventional editorial practices beside her professed attitude toward standard published forms; the reader assumes, therefore, that the particular incident Dickinson describes is representative of her general experience with the world of mechanical literary reproduction and that Dickinson found the printed transformations of her work dissatisfying; most important, the reader concludes that, because of her disappointments, Dickinson chose not to distribute her work in the mass-produced ways to which most unknown authors aspire. Concurring with Joanne Dobson’s recent study, other readers might choose to literalize the last clause in the passage and maintain that “in conformity with the attitudes of her female contemporaries toward the private nature of personal lyrics, she herself chose not to publish.”⁵ Such interpretation concludes that internalized codes of femininity constrained Dickinson more than editorial interference and her ambitions for her poetic project. Yet as Richard Salter

Storrs Andros’s preface to *Chocorua and Other Sketches* (1838) as well as many other statements by male authors contemporary to Dickinson show, proclamations of authorial deference were conventional for both men and women: “The author of the following pages is not, perhaps, the first who has been dragged before the public against his own will.” Deciding whether Dickinson’s refusal is a personal response, a convention of authorial or feminine codes of behavior, or none of the above, readers must acknowledge the problem of distance in time and would do well to heed Hans Robert Jauss’s observation that “distance in time is to be put to use and not—as historicism would have it—overcome, that is, abolished through a one-sided transplanting of the self into the spirit of the past.”⁶

The author’s preferences are clearly important to both stories of reading outlined above. Equally vital to the narrative is a reader’s willingness to accept her role in scripting Dickinson’s text. Thus intentionalities of both the author and readers play central roles. To determine preference among her variants, Thomas Johnson invokes Dickinson’s intention time and again, for example to privilege a commaless first stanza version of “A narrow Fellow” (see P 986n, particularly the last comment on its transmission through “Publication”). Indeed, a century of stories told about reading this poet and her written expressions are predicated on convictions about her intentions: Thomas Higginson’s “virgin recluse” kept to her father’s ground and to the editor’s preconceptions of what she meant to imply in “Wild Nights – Wild Nights!” (AB 127); Clark Griffith’s Emily Dickinson lived “on the outskirts of sanity”; Cynthia Griffin Wolff’s Emily Dickinson sat in the corner of her most recent biographer’s study waiting for her to tell how her subject’s “poetic mission” was “an explicit reenactment of Jacob’s struggle with the Lord”; Adrienne Rich’s Emily Dickinson practiced “necessary economies” on “her own premises”; and John Hollander’s Emily Dickinson did not punctuate her poems.⁷

The willful Emily Dickinson of this chapter’s opening paragraph is the poet central to this book. As in that tale, her intentions are important considerations for this practice of interpreting her statements, though, as will become evident, they are not necessarily the final arbitrating factor. Important too is the reader’s awareness that through various elliptical strategies, this Dickinson invites readers to author connections between her texts and patterns within texts. Whether writers acknowledge their participation or not, readers will construct texts, but the Dickinson of these pages is conscious of the inevitability of the reader involved in such play.⁸ But print reproductions often erase significant textual experimentations directed toward prospective readers and their performances. Because

of these erasures, recovery of the designs Dickinson created in her hand-made poetic productions (and presumably intended for the reader's pleasure) is vital to our reading. Contemplating my consensus with and departure from Hollander's reading of "those things that are reproduced as dashes" reveals a particular manifestation of the paradoxes that emerge in my reading of Emily Dickinson. Though I agree with Hollander that "like all great poets Dickinson turns every reader into a poet" and that, in order to understand a poem of hers, every reader is "implicitly punctuating it," I do not dismiss as "scholarly nonsense" conjectures about her unusual holograph experimentations. Nor do I concur with his conclusion that had someone "in the local printer's shop" insisted that she print a volume, she would have "probably done what Higginson did, rather better"; in other words, Hollander agrees with a century of readers who argue that had Dickinson published conventionally, she would have of her own volition smoothed her poetic forms and rendered them much more conventionally. Like Hollander, John Updike, also widely published, maintains that Johnson's transcriptions of Dickinson's dashes "is a mistaken scholarly fidelity to holograph mannerisms that were never meant by the author to be translated into type."⁹ Though I agree that Johnson's translation of the oddly angled marks as dashes may be "mistaken" in leveling many different marks into one kind of representation, I am not so confident about what Dickinson would have intended for typeface. Whether one holds that, as Higginson usually did, she would have opted to translate her marks into commas and periods, or, like Johnson, to straighten them into dashes, one limits conceptions of Dickinson's intentions to the forms and conventions of mechanical reproduction.

Of the Dickinsons named so far, *Rowing in Eden's* poet is most akin to the resolute woman imagined by Adrienne Rich, having it out "always on *her* premises." However, "cartooning" in her word pictures, in sketches on letters and cutouts framing poems, and in her calligraphy, my Emily Dickinson probably teeters more often on hilarity. Upper middle class, white, Protestant, without the right to vote, this Emily Dickinson without much socially sanctioned public authority was (and still is) nevertheless powerful. That she was privileged by class but disenfranchised by gender is important. Her class standing enabled her to remain comfortably single and afforded her time for writing. Yet as a female, she found her social status and her literary authority compromised. As a woman poet, Dickinson was not read by her contemporaries and has not been read over the past century without the fact of gender having significant influence. Nor did she read her cultural situation as a man might have. While Whitman

printed himself and sent a volume to Emerson, a premier man of letters who wanted "spermatoc, prophesying man-making words,"¹⁰ Dickinson established a correspondence with a self-appointed adviser of young writers who championed the rights of women yet recognized that "there is a brutal honesty in this frank subordination of the woman according to the grammar."¹¹ Higginson admits that a woman's relation to language is not the same as a man's. On the most rudimentary level, all can see that *he* is the paradigmatic pronoun, *she* the variant, and also that women's access to public speech was much more circumscribed than men's. Emily Dickinson was far from oblivious to this.

Yet we need to be aware of the distinction Dickinson and her sister-in-law emphasized between the often synonymously used terms *publish* and *print*. Dickinson did not say, "I had told you I did not *publish*"; she said, "I had told you I did not *print*" [emphasis added]. Also, when she smiles at Higginson's conjecture that she delays "to publish," quotation marks make it plain that she uses his words when she utters the more commonplace term for works produced in the literary marketplace instead of her more precise "to print" (L 265, June 7, 1862). Writing February 18, 1891, to William Hayes Ward, superintending editor of the *Independent*, Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson corrected herself:

. . . I recognize fully all Miss Emily's lack of rhyme and rhythm, but have learned to accept it for the bold thought, and everything else so unusual about it.

I think if you do not feel that your own literary taste is compromised by it, I would rather the three verses of the "Martyrs" ["Through the Straight Pass / of Suffering" (F 36; P 792)] should be published if any. I shall not be annoyed if you decide not to publish at all. I should have said *printed*. . . .

(H LOWELL AUTOGRAPH, AB 115)

Surrounded by lawyers (Dickinson's father and brother), these women are somewhat legalistic in their differentiations, using *publish* in the special sense "to tell or noise abroad" (*OED*).¹² For the purposes of this study and story of reading Emily Dickinson, that is not a negligible fact.

The Story Continued

Suppose we extend the story which takes seriously Emily Dickinson's declaration that she "did not print" (L 316, early 1866) to allow that she

was deliberate, not desperate, when she “replied declining” to someone who requested that she “aid the world” by permitting the printing of her poems (L 380, late 1872?).¹³ Opening a folder containing one of Dickinson’s documents, one cannot help but imagine that this is indeed the case. To see the quiet weave of the fine linen stationery, and the pinholes where those leaves had been so carefully threaded together to make the fascicles, the manuscript books she folded and tucked and left in her drawer (or chest) for posterity, and to see the poems written and rewritten, sometimes even revised after they had been carefully copied onto these pages sometimes edged in gold leaf, sometimes embossed (with a capitol building or a queen’s head or flower), enables one to see more clearly the writer for whom the choice of each word mattered, the woman who diligently recorded her words on exquisite paper, then lovingly laid the little books of lyric away in a place where they were sure to be discovered by those willing away that portion of her belongings “Assignable” (F 26; P 465). Old questions come to mind. Had anyone known of the poet Dickinson’s bookmaking enterprise? Had anyone seen her threading and unthreading the little fascicles? Had any contemporary suspected all these poems?

To entertain as fact that she devised her own method of publication by sending her poems out in letters moves the locus of study to the manuscripts themselves. After all, if, like Blake, she was publishing herself, but without his access to engraving and printing materials, then her pencil or pen was her printing press and her calligraphic orthography her typeface; and, as Susan Howe has pointed out, holographs like that of “The Sea said / Come to the Brook” (Set 11; P 1210), in which the *S*’s are shaped like waves and the *T*’s formed to resemble choppy seas, indicate that eschewing that foul auction, conventional publication (P 709), freed her to appropriate even calligraphy for her poetic practice.¹⁴ Such strategies are, of course, lost to us in printed transcriptions. Further, to study Dickinson’s major correspondences in transcription is made especially problematic by the evidence that—at least according to his lover, Mabel Loomis Todd—Dickinson’s brother, “Austin,” changed his sister’s epistolary record by scissoring and erasing passages about his wife that he regarded as private. These and other gaps have caused distortions in the critical treatment of Emily Dickinson, which in turn directed my critical attention toward the archives.

Sitting in the Frost Library at Amherst College, poring over erasures, surprised by scissorings, I was, quite frankly, aghast at the extent of mutilation to some of Dickinson’s letters and poems. Translated into descriptions by Thomas Johnson, the tamperings, like Dickinson’s handwrit-

ten productions translated into uniform type, “sound” considerably less dramatic than they actually appear. Remarking upon the powerful effect of reading Dickinson’s manuscripts, Amy Clampitt declares that “there’s something about the way those words go racing across the page, and yet with spaces between them, that changes your idea of everything you’ve read before. . . . The handwriting is fierce.”¹⁵ Likewise, the mutilations are fierce, and, as I said at the outset, readers cannot help but wonder what provoked an earlier reader or readers to responses creating such gaping gaps in the Dickinson documents. Yet especially penetrating was a much more subtle change caused by translating the penciled “like you” that I found in the “Master” letter beginning “If you saw a bullet hit a Bird” (L 233).¹⁶ Three drafts to an addressee or addressees unknown, the “Master” letters are also Dickinson’s most well-known correspondences. Some have taken them as documentation that poor Emily had her heart broken by some man. But an apparently negligible detail, noticeable only in manuscript, had raised the vital question of whether the real or imagined addressee of a couple of drafts was indeed, as I and most others had always assumed, male. Despite other difficulties noted by critics in getting Dickinson’s writings correctly from her page to the printed one, no printed representations or critical commentary reproduce two very crucial words—“like you”—as they appear on the holograph.¹⁷ Penciled in above the inked line, the phrase is plainly an addition—probably but not necessarily by the poet—to a line once considered finished.

This failure to indicate the nature of the transcriptive interpretation “like you” is especially important, for some critics hinge part of their interpretations of these letters on readings limited by it. These critics accept the idea that these two words seem to confirm that this frustrated love letter could only have been written to a man. Johnson indicates in print that, addressing “Master” as “Sir,” this letter’s speaker cries, “but if I had the Beard on my cheek—like you—” (L 233). Along with many critics, John Cody recognizes that Dickinson was in love with her sister-in-law, Sue. He also notes, with Richard Chase, Charles Anderson, and Rebecca Patterson, that in Dickinson’s love poems, “the figure of the beloved man lacks presence,” then proposes a dilemma: “If ‘Master’ existed and was close enough to Emily Dickinson frequently enough to feel he might proffer offers of sexual intimacy with her, why does he appear so insubstantial and unindividualized in her verse?” But when he evaluates Patterson’s “hypothesis” that Dickinson’s “lover was, in reality, a woman,” an assertion that “would explain the lack of a distinct masculine image in the verse, while at the same time it would account for the sexual fears and reserva-

tions" so evident in writings like the "Master" letters, he dismisses this conjecture, saying, "The 'Master' letters alone are sufficient to explode this theory. In these it is clearly stated that 'Master' has a beard; the relationship the letters picture is that between a small, fragile, immature female and an older, parental, kindly, somewhat formidable male."¹⁸ Yet holograph study of these letters that have so often been used to document Dickinson's passionate and unrequited love for a man indicates that his rebuttal is insufficient, for it is not so "clearly stated" that "Master" has a beard.

Why Are Manuscripts Crucial?

Why are those two penciled words so crucial? In a transcription so scrupulous, where another penciled addition, above the line, like this two word emendation, is carefully denoted by parentheses, it is odd that, when the two penciled words "like you" reach print, they are presented as if they were part of the original sentence, when it is absolutely clear that they were not. When the "like you" is treated as a solid part of the letter, the line becomes conventional in that it is necessarily heterosexual. But without it, Dickinson might be saying to a female lover, "If I had the beard on my cheek"—if I were a man—"and you had Daisy's petals"—and you were a woman—if, in other words, ours was a conventional, "normal," heterosexual romance, then would it be acceptable to speak our love? Unfortunately, the possibility that Dickinson, like her beloved Shakespeare, may have been disguising her characters by dressing a woman up in masculine pronouns and names has been made very difficult to recover in all available transcriptions of these drafts, and even Franklin's photographic representation obscures the difference between pencil and pen.

In effect, there is a silence surrounding that penciled change, a subtle erasure that partially hides, as Susan Howe puts it, "Dickinson's brilliant masking and unveiling, her joy in the drama of pleading." This silence, this erasure, obscures unconventional, possibly even lesbian interpretations of these letters in which the imploring rhetoric most resembles not the rhetoric of her letters to Samuel Bowles or her male correspondents, but the beseeching rhetoric of many of her letters to her beloved Sue. Why this silence? Was it merely an oversight? Is there any significance to this gap? Of the letters' design and purpose we can never be certain. These "Master" letters, these most popular of all her epistolary documents, are love letters on the order of who knows what. They might be to a man, they

might be to a woman, they might not be to anyone in particular at all. Reading the "Master" letters, we would be wise to remember Dickinson's imaginative power and her amazing ability to transform experience and, of the most familiar (even, as John Crowe Ransom would say, the Mother Goose-y¹⁹), make the surprising and wonderful. And we would be wise to entertain seriously suggestions like Howe's that the "Master" letters may be modeled on the hysterical letters of Dickens's "Little Em'ly" (written after she has eloped with Steerforth) and "were probably self-conscious exercises in prose by one writer playing with, listening to, and learning from others."²⁰

Silence surrounds other editorial changes. Perusing the facsimile printings in R. W. Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, one concurs with Sewall that her dashes are "not . . . mere eccentricities of penmanship" (*Life* 2: 349); one sees that Dickinson's directing her dashes up or down was, as Edith Wylder argued, an intentional appropriation of rhetorical notation learned at the Amherst Academy, and not, as Johnson and his assistant Theodora Ward had claimed, an "especially capricious" (P, p. lxiii) accident of emotional "stress."²¹ For example, the dash at the end of "I dwell in Possibility," (F 22; P 657) dances up; when the fly re-enters the text in "I heard a Fly buzz – when / I died –" (F 26; P 465), and the speaker sees the little beast, the dash drags down: "There interposed a Fly .," This comic sensibility is lost to us in conventional transcription, as are Dickinson's unusual experiments with lineation. In the holograph of the much talked about "One need not be a Chamber / to be Haunted," (F 20; P 670), her lineation elicits a chuckle. In this ghost story of a poem about psychic fragmentation, Dickinson has a little fun with the third stanza's scheme:

Ourselves behind Ourselves –
 Concealed –
 Should startle – most –
 Assassin–hid in Our Apart –
 ment –
 Be Horror's least –

What we expect is not what we get: the unanticipated mid-syllable line ending, not haphazard, is a deliberate breaking of form. Mimicking the lyric's sense, the lineation acts almost as cartoon. Yet this prosodic experimentation has not previously been transcribed and, until Franklin's *Manuscript Books*, had been lost to Dickinson's public. Seeing so much of the visual impact of Dickinson's cartooning and experimentation with lin-

eration and punctuation silenced in transcription, I wondered what impact might be lost to us in the transcriptions of the "mutilations" (L 80n). Since reading the facsimile printings of the holographs in Franklin's *Manuscript Books* had made such a remarkable difference in my experience of the poems, I reasoned that examining the holographs of the mutilated letters would prove more enlightening than pondering transcriptions.

As "Austin's" work with scissors and erasures shows, not all of the silences imposed on Dickinson's texts are so subtle as the misleading transcriptions of lineation (which to date have assumed that the stanza and not the line is her basic poetic unit²³), of dashes, and of "like you." A glance at the first couple of fascicles in the *Manuscript Books* provides excellent examples of what a review of Dickinson's correspondence to her brother makes clear: "Austin" sought to expunge every affectionate reference to his wife, the woman whom Dickinson herself acknowledged as, "With the Exception of Shakespeare" (L 757), her greatest teacher. In an effort to blot out a loving poem about Sue, the text of "One Sister have I in the house" (F 2; P 14) is inked over.²³ In this case, "Austin's" attempt proved futile; Sue had her own copy of the poem and it survives, intact. When Loomis Todd's daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, repeated her mother's story that "Austin" was responsible for mutilations of his sister's work, she conveyed much more important information about the nature of the expressions provoking such seemingly hysterical reader response than the mutilator's identity: ". . . Mr. Dickinson stipulated that if Emily's letters to him were to be used, the name of one of her girlhood friends must be left out—that of Susan Gilbert, his wife. But omitting her name was not enough. Before turning over the letters he went through them, eliminating Susan Gilbert's name and in some instances making alterations to disguise a reference to her . . ." (*Home* 54). Thus many of the letters to Austin are altered, and the changes always appear near adulatory mention of Sue.

Almost all the deletions are made in letters written to Austin during the years Susan grew intimate with the Dickinson family, particularly with Austin and Emily. Between 1851 and 1854, almost half of Dickinson's letters to Austin are mutilated, sometimes extensively (with a half or quarter of a page cut out or several lines erased), sometimes with only a few words erased.²⁴ After 1854, the record shows only three more letters (written 1861, 1884, 1885) to Austin; none of them is mutilated, not even in mention of "Sister," Susan. Noting that the deletions do not begin to occur until the fall of 1851, when Emily begins to write Sue passionately (see L 56, L 57), and keeping in mind that the passages deleted all refer to Sue, examining the altered letters to Austin in context of the letters Dickinson

was writing to Susan Gilbert at the same time substantiates the conclusion that the expurgations clearly seek to expunge the record of Dickinson's affection for this woman she was to call "Only Woman in the World" (L 447, about 1875). It was not, as Johnson declares, simply all references to Sue that "Austin" wanted to excise, for in some letters of this period mention of Sue goes undoctored: Emily's expecting a letter from Sue is not particularly affectionate and remains intact (H L 23; L 87, 1852), as do hoping that Susan appreciates a "blessed" thunderstorm (A 590; L 89, 1852) and telling Austin that their father called on Sue (A 592; L 95, 1852). Though there is an attempt to erase mention of Sue's ability to excite a laugh, an incidental reference in the same letter to her receiving letters from Austin is left alone (A 595; L 108, 1853), as is an apparently unimportant observation of Sue's impending arrival after she has been in Boston with Austin (A 596; L 109, 1853). Passages focused on Austin are generally not defaced: when Dickinson writes of Susie's visit "to supper" and of their walk to the "Old Oak Tree," where they speak primarily of missing Austin, all is intact, as is a paragraph in which Dickinson describes Susie's "carrying" Austin's letter with her, and reading it "over and over" (A 602; L 118, 1853), a remark that Susie is "so disappointed at having no letter from" Austin (A 608; L 128, 1853; a later phrase putting Austin "and Susie and Emily" together has been erased), mention that Susie plans to write Austin (A 612; L 132, 1853), a passage reminding Austin that "Poor Susie hears nothing from you" (A 617; L 144, 1853), and information that Susie, evidently practicing a lawyer's wife's role, "went round collecting for the charitable societies" (A 618; L 145, 1853). If the perpetrator wanted to remove evidence of Sue and Austin's courtship, as some have conjectured, then surely passages like these, especially ones like the dreamy-eyed longings for him beneath the "Old Oak Tree," would be gone. When Dickinson writes of her intense feelings for Sue, the letters are defaced.

Words and Affections Lined Out

A March 7, 1852, letter shows that when Dickinson talks of sending Sue flowers, the words are lined out:

~~I have been hunting all over the house, since the folks went to meet-~~
~~ing, to find a small tin box, to send her flowers in [lines missing] very~~
~~often and [line erased] . . .~~

(A 587, 587A; L 80)

With bracketed notations Johnson records the erasure but not that the most affectionate words are censored, overlaid with penciled lines. Neither does he note that when "Austin" sought to obfuscate his sister's erotic expressions, the change sometimes borders on the absurd, as an April 16, 1853, letter makes plain. There "Austin" alters the singular pronoun from feminine to masculine, evidently in an effort to disguise reference to Sue. "Austin" erased "her" and wrote "his" over it and erased the *s* from "she," so that a sentence about Emily and Sue reads: ". . . I shant see him [her] this morning, because [s]he has to *bake* Saturday, but [s]he'll come this afternoon, and we shall read your letter together, and talk of how soon you'll be here [*seven lines erased*]" (A 601; L 116). Johnson creates yet another gap when he records that there was a change, but does not note that the apparently hostile "Austin" went so far as to change pronouns and, therefore, in effect, gave Sue a "beard."

After Austin and Sue trysted for the first time at the Revere Hotel in Boston, Dickinson wrote her brother an angry letter. In its most telling paragraph, "Austin" tried to erase "Susie," the name of his sister's love: "Dear Austin, I am keen, but you a good deal keener, I am *something* of a fox, but you are more of a hound! I guess we are very good friends tho', and I guess we both love [S]us[ie] just as well as we can" (A 597; L 110). Although he does not represent it in the text (L 110), Johnson notes that an "attempt has been made to erase 'Sue' in the second paragraph above the signature." His misdescription of the erasure is slight, but what it overlooks about the holograph is significant. It appears that it is "Susie," not "Sue," that is erased from the text. Not all the letters are erased, but only the first one and last two, leaving "us." So the sentence reads "I guess we are very good friends tho', and I guess we both love us just as well as we can." Obviously this is an attempt to remove a record of Sue being at the center of the conflict between brother and sister, and to replace expression of love for the outsider with declaration of sibling affection.²⁵

Why was "he" so sensitive about such expressions of woman-for-woman love when, "for centuries, within Western societies women's love for one another was considered to be one of women's noblest characteristics"?²⁶ Why have so few critics talked about these silences imposed on Dickinson's expression? Is it that "Austin's" self-consciousness is so painfully clear? Does Loomis Todd's declaration that her lover Austin had grown very bitter toward his wife account for his actions? Her unavoidably biased account must be questioned. It is not only that of the mistress, but it is also hearsay: Mabel said that Austin. . . .

As several studies have shown, by the end of the nineteenth century men were no longer "convinced of their own representations of (their) women's basic purity and asexuality," and "Austin," well aware of her intense devotion to his wife, may have simply been trying to protect his sister from the speculations of "the malignant."²⁷ Widely recognized is the fact that, by the end of the nineteenth century, "the separation of sexuality and reproduction made Americans more conscious of the erotic element" of passionate friendships between women, and "during the 1890s, the labels 'congenital inversion' and 'perversion' were applied not only to male sexual acts, but to sexual or romantic unions between women, as well as those between men." In fact, "when the medical discourse on sexual perversion emerged at the end of the century, . . . the medical labeling of same-sex intimacy as perverse conflated an entire range of relationships and stigmatized all of them as a single, sexually deviant personal identity." Some have argued that the lack of an indisputable record of homosexual acts between Emily and Sue could well mean that such desires never occurred. As John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman astutely point out about the general situation of sexuality in American culture, though there is of course an "absence of procreative evidence" and a paucity of "direct records of homosexual acts," "the condemnation of the practice at the end of the century provides a clue that [homosexuality] indeed existed."²⁸ Likewise, the censorship of Dickinson's papers at the end of the century suggests that her passionate friendship with Sue was not simply innocent.

Significantly, anxious editing of Dickinson's declarations to Sue persists, even in recent feminist criticism. Lately many have started to turn their attentions to Dickinson's relationship with Sue, but, again, gaps have been created. Thus, in one of the most informative and widely read essays about her love for Sue, a curious silence is imposed which in effect excises not "Austin's" but Dickinson's own self-consciousness. In "Emily Dickinson's Letters to Sue Gilbert," Lillian Faderman chastises Austin and Sue's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, for editing Dickinson's letters in a way that masks her aunt's love for her mother and points out that post-Freudian Bianchi excises the very sensual "How vain it seems to *write*, when one knows how to feel—how much more near and dear to sit beside you, talk with you, hear the tones of your voice, . . . Oh *what* will become of me? Susie, forgive me, forget all what I say." Yet Faderman's own selective quotation edits out and disguises Dickinson's self-consciousness, which appears long before "Austin's" actions at the end of the nineteenth century. She stops quoting as if the letter ends with "forget all what I say."

But this letter, which, like others of this period, speaks of wanting to hold, kiss, and caress Sue, continues, and Dickinson seems well aware that her feelings for Sue are unacceptable. She urges her beloved to ignore her loving speeches and take up tales of holy virginity: "Susie, forgive me, forget all what I say, get some sweet scholar to read a gentle hymn, about Bethlehem and Mary, and you will sleep on sweetly and have as peaceful dreams, as if I had never written you all those *ugly things*" (H L 10; L 73)."

In light of this complete quotation, the fox-hound metaphor in the letter to Austin, somewhat obscured by his editing, suddenly is perfectly appropriate: whereas women's erotic love is, when not denied or silenced, formally or informally punished, and whereas heterosexual love is a conquest and men are the conquerors, Dickinson casts herself as the sly one in her love for Susie, while representing Austin as a bounding, stalking hunter. The most self-conscious part of the sentence is that which encourages Susie to embrace patriarchal normalcy and to act "as if" Dickinson "had never written . . . all these *ugly things*." Significantly, Dickinson's handwritten flourishes point a reader's attention to "*ugly things*." Just glancing at the holograph, a reader's eye is pulled to the phrase, for in both words an exaggerated *g* underscores the letters preceding. Calling remarks about her affection "*ugly*" makes Dickinson's anxiety clear, yet in her attention to Bianchi's self-consciousness, Faderman overlooks the degree to which Dickinson sees her woman-for-woman love as transgressive. The commonplace assertion that nineteenth-century women were not self-conscious enough about their intense romantic friendships to qualify those as lesbian is quite similar to what Faderman proclaims about Dickinson's love for Sue.³⁰ But in order to make sure that Dickinson fits this widely accepted analysis of nineteenth-century culture and its rhetoric, a gap has been created and a silence imposed. Both Peter Gay and Karen Lystra have recently demonstrated that there are significant gaps in our understanding of nineteenth-century sexuality.³¹ Though Lystra is concerned with heterosexual eros in her study of romantic love in America, her persuasive case for women's sexual expression demands a revision of the widely held characterization of woman-for-woman love in the female world described by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. Since we can no longer blithely proclaim that nineteenth-century American middle-class women repressed sexual desires toward men, any proclamation that passionate friendships between women were nonsexual is also questionable. As Lystra argues, privatization of sexuality is not the same as denial or repression, thus generalizations about an absence of sexuality between women must

be skeptically scrutinized. And a consensus on what it means to be lesbian is not so certain as Faderman implies.

Dickinson's Love

When analyzing Dickinson's love for her sister-in-law, it is important to keep in mind both Adrienne Rich's range of "woman-identified experience," which embraces on a "lesbian continuum" many "forms of primary intensity between and among women," and Catharine Stimpson's insistence that lesbianism "represents a commitment of skin, blood, breast, and bone," that "carnality distinguishes it from gestures of political sympathy with homosexuals and from affectionate friendships in which women enjoy each other, support each other, and commingle a sense of identity and well-being."³² Although the sisters-in-law's desire for one another may have remained unconsummated, with Emily refusing to act on her passion and Sue displacing hers onto Austin (see Cody's *After Great Pain* for a more thorough discussion of Sue's "homosexual panic"), Dickinson's correspondence to Sue, frequently expressing her wanting to caress and kiss her beloved (L 96 is one of the many examples) and imagining orgasmic fusion with her (L 288, about 1864), speaks a carnal as well as an emotional affection. Therefore, even Stimpson's "conservative and severely literal" definition of what can and cannot be called lesbian is appropriate to consider. Yet that this was an emotional devotion of a lifetime is very important, so Rich's insistence on primary emotional intensity between women is also vital to our understanding. If Dickinson herself had not been so self-conscious about it and if Sue had not acknowledged that some of Dickinson's expressions of love for her were "too adulatory to print," this woman-for-woman love might comfortably fit under the umbrella of Smith-Rosenberg's nineteenth-century female world. Yet Dickinson's own words suggest that her participation in the female world of love and ritual is not so innocuous. Because we need to connote both the eroticism and difference of Dickinson's affection, *lesbian*, that loaded gun of a word that both Stimpson and Rich attempt to define, is most appropriate for characterizing this relationship, which has been ignored and trivialized over the last century.

Objections to the use of this term may be swift, with critics insisting that we have no foolproof documentation of a physical relationship between Sue and Emily. But such dissensions miss a very important point. In

her study of H.D., *Psyche Reborn*, Susan Stanford Friedman makes a crucial observation, reminding us that the term *lesbian* is not entirely unique in provoking quandaries about meaning:

Compounding the difficulties of ignorance is the current ambiguity of the labels “lesbian,” “bisexual,” and “heterosexual” in our culture in general and in the feminist movement much more particularly. . . . All three terms are variously used to describe specific sexual behavior at any point in time; inherent, lifelong sexual preference; socially conditioned sexual preference; erotic attraction and fantasy; sexual and/or psychological identity, including those whose behavior is at odds with their sense of self; and a political perspective, epistemology, and lifestyle.³³

Though Friedman focuses on the problems with only one of those terms—“within this complex of definitions, ‘lesbianism’ has been inconsistently equated with everything from sexual intimacy between women, to female friendship and sisterhood, woman’s creative center, woman-identification, and the epistemology of the oppressed who exist on the fringes of the patriarchy”—inconsistent equations characterize our use of even the most conventional label. We do not distinguish among all the phenomena coexisting under the term *heterosexuality*, yet are bound not to notice because our contradictory and contesting definitions are so deeply ingrained that we assume they are “natural,” hence take them for granted. *Heterosexual* refers to relationships between husbands and wives; men and women engaged to be married; psychosexual familial dynamics between brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons; affections between boyfriends and girlfriends dating; the muse as the artist’s creative center; numerous political positions, epistemologies, and lifestyles. Then, describing erotic experiences and potentially sexual relations, *lesbian*, like *heterosexual*, of course takes on a range of often inconsistent meanings. Whether we see hers as a utopian fantasy of women empowering women is finally not so important, because Rich’s idea that all sorts of relationships described by the same term are in fact variously erotic, from practically negligible to irresistible in degree, is crucial to our beginning to understand the many stories we tell about sexuality and its divorce from our other affections. What Friedman’s perspicacity forces us to reconsider are the ways in which we schematize our basic attractions. Such reconsideration is essential if we are ever going to get beyond and find some answers to the now very tired question, “How genital must it be to call it homosexual or lesbian?”

Also analyzing H.D., Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes that the modernist’s bold concept was that “the erotic” is “played out for spiritual stakes on a historical terrain . . . far beyond the domesticity of depicted relationships, acceptable or taboo,” and that H.D.’s response to rigid schematizations provides an enlightening model. In a letter to one of her close friends (possibly a lover), H.D. makes plain her resistance to psychoanalysis when it is in the hands of those who adopt an overly clinical, corrective attitude toward the erotic: “It is hardly a question of your being, as you say, A₂ or B₃ Lesbian. . . . But it’s a matter of something infinitely bigger than Lesbian A₂ or anything. The Lesbian or the homo-sexual content is only a symbol—note I did not say a ‘symptom.’ *That* is not very important. *How* you love is more important than *WHO* you love.”³⁴ *How* we use this powerful term to convey a sense of relationship is all important, and how intensely Dickinson loved Sue demands such a strong word.

Faderman is right to exhort us to remember that “lesbian history has been buried even more deeply than women’s history,” that it is difficult to trace its evolution, and that we must be very careful when applying the label to instances of woman-for-woman love in centuries and circumstances different from those of our own. Yet her definition for “the fairly common type of situation which we label ‘lesbian’ today” could be appropriate for describing Dickinson’s relationship with Sue: “two women living together in an affectional relationship over a long period of time and sharing all aspects of their lives.” In a well-tempered analysis of the severe limitations imposed by the fact that a number of Dickinson biographers and critics embrace the hearsay testimony of an opportunistic Mabel Loomis Todd while ignoring the “Dickinson revealed in her letters” to her primary correspondent Sue, Dorothy Huff Oberhaus points out that Dickinson’s relationship with Sue was “loving and lifelong” and notes that “Sue possessed an understanding of Dickinson’s solitary life, her reluctance to publish, the uniqueness of her voice, her wit, her reifying and emblematically visual imagination, the movement characteristic of so many of her best poems, her love of nature, her reading habits, and her religious sensibility and reverential attitude toward life and poetry.”³⁵ As Marilyn Farwell observes, “Although contemporary definitions of lesbian at times seem at odds, feminist theorists have begun to evolve a complex, problematic, and yet flexible image that both deconstructs the heterosexual pattern for creativity and creates a space for redefining the relationship of the woman writer to other woman writers, to readers, and to the text,” and such redefinitions are necessary if we are to analyze Dickinson’s complex and creative decades-long literary exchange with Sue.³⁶

Interpreting her own definition, Faderman insists on twentieth-century terms, for “women living together” means women setting up a separate household together. However, as she points out, in a century so different from our own, where “economic reasons alone” made such arrangements between women “extremely rare,” lesbian arrangements would not necessarily resemble the heterosexual arrangements of marriage. Even while Faderman pronounces Dickinson’s affection for Sue homoerotic, she masks the degree of Dickinson’s self-consciousness about her feeling by excising part of her expression. By erasing, Faderman directs our attention away from the fact that Dickinson’s most important lifelong relationship was the one with Sue about which the young poet in her twenties seems to have felt guilty, and yet another portion of lesbian history is left unearthened, for just how important this relationship was to Dickinson is partially disguised. Sue was the most important person, not just for the “five years” that Faderman accounts, but throughout Dickinson’s life. The poet sent Sue at least 430 poems and letters, but sent Higginson (after Sue, her most frequently addressed correspondent) only 171, considerably fewer than half as many. Although their situation does not fit our twentieth-century notions, the two women lived close together and shared intimate details of one another’s lives for decades.

Gaps like that created by Faderman, inevitable in the enterprise of criticism, can be filled. And when they are, Dickinson’s expressions of love for Sue become less mysterious. Indeed, building on the pioneering work of Rebecca Patterson published in 1951, Faderman’s study is part of an ongoing project to fill the gap created by downplaying Dickinson’s erotically charged relationships with women during the first half-century of critical responses to her work. Significantly, this project has been countered and marginalized by Millicent Todd Bingham’s publication of the “Master” letters in full in 1955 and the predictable critical fascination with those three indeterminate documents (*Home* 422–432; “Master” is reproduced in facsimile). Though there has been no formally organized “School of a Lesbian Dickinson,” the critics contributing to this body of work over the last four decades have been investigating lesbian connotations of Dickinson’s writings. In the sixties and seventies poet/critics who identify themselves as lesbian like Adrienne Rich and Judy Grahn claimed her as a literary forerunner, while throughout the seventies and eighties critics interested in gay/lesbian history and criticism like Faderman and Paula Bennett substantially developed aspects of Patterson’s interpretations—Faderman convincingly expanded Patterson’s critique of Bianchi’s editing while Bennett extensively tested Patterson’s hypotheses about Dick-

inson’s use of images and colors to depict homoeroticism. Other critics like Adalaide Morris have interrogated the “essential bonds” of “passion and poetry” between Emily and Sue, while poet/critics like Susan Howe have speculated to what degree Sue fueled Emily’s imagination. *Tulsa Studies* closed 1990 with an issue featuring an article by Judith Farr exploring Dickinson’s relationship with Sue and its effect on her appropriation of others’ writings as well as one by Ellen Louise Hart exploring their relationship and possible influences on Dickinson’s formulations of her own literary endeavors.³⁷

Most of these interpretations tend to read Dickinson’s writings to propose stories of reading that frame the poems and letters as autobiographical accounts of a woman in what DuPlessis has called “romantic thralldom.” Some go so far as Nadean Bishop and argue that interpretations of Dickinson’s marriage poems must be revised to account for what she argues was a consummated relationship with Sue. As such, these postulations are interpretations appropriative of heterosexual plots which script Dickinson’s love for Sue as a variant of the “conventional heterosexual narrative script,” thralldom.³⁸ As we shall see throughout the chapters on Emily and Sue’s correspondence, to read their passion for one another as a story of “totally defining love between apparent unequals” in which “the lover [Emily] has the power of conferring self-worth and purpose upon the loved one [Sue]” is, however novelistically entertaining, oversimplifying. Nevertheless, even stories of lesbian thralldom are important steps in our achieving a better understanding of Dickinson’s passionately poetic relationship with Sue.

Other gaps concerning erotic expressions can also be filled. Readers contemporary with Dickinson expected a woman writer to be especially capable of profound emotion but to remain undefiled by eros. And “Austin” was not just anxious about Dickinson’s affection for his wife. The drafts of letters that “he” brought to Mabel Loomis Todd and said had been intended for Judge Otis P. Lord show that “he” sought to silence more than his sister’s erotic woman-for-woman desire. He sought to silence all her erotic desire, apparently even her heterosexual desire. Sacrilegious and sexy, a letter that declares “when it is right I will lift the Bars, and lay you in the Moss –” has a whole top of a sheet cut off just before she writes: “. . . to lie so near your longing – to touch it as I passed, for I am but a restive sleeper and often should journey from your Arms through the happy Night, but you will lift me back, won’t you, for only there I ask to be –” (A 739; L 562). The passionately affectionate yearnings in the correspondence to Sue and these bawdily flirtatious remarks in the letters

said to be to Lord show, like long overlooked works by Fanny Fern and Louisa May Alcott, that many women's real sensibilities challenged idealized patriarchal molds of proper, chaste femininity. Thus awareness of her unabashedly erotic expressions, as well as of subversive literary strategies in the "American Women's Renaissance," creates a context casting suspicion on overly literal-minded interpretations of Dickinson's works like the "Master" letters and the many poems used to confirm her lovelorn despair. Imbued with the rhetoric of "secret sorrow" and the "literature of misery," such documents should be interpreted in light of Dickinson's cultural context, especially that created by the explosion of literary works by other American women. Readers would do well to admit the possibility that "for Dickinson, all woman's stereotypes," including that of the disappointed spinster given to renunciation and seeking emotional compensation in dedication to her art, "become matters of literary theater and metaphorical play."³⁹

Other Gaps

Still other gaps in Dickinson's poetic record contributing to one-dimensional conclusions drawn by those who read her pose in white dress without irony, some of which existed for more than sixty years, can be and have been filled. Yet few have noticed that these erasures of blasphemies of idealized womanhood existed in the first place and few have pondered the significance of such shushings. The publication history of the following shows what I mean:

A solemn thing – it was –
 I said –
 A woman – white – to be –
 And wear – if God should
 count me fit –
 Her blameless mystery –

hallowed
 A timid thing – to drop
 a life
 Into the *purple* mystic well –
 Too plummetless – that it
 come back – *return*
 Eternity – until –

I pondered how the bliss would
 look –
 And would it feel as big –
 When I could take it in
 my hand –
 As hovering – seen – through
 fog – glimmering

And then – the size of this
 "small" life –
 The Sages – call it small –
 Swelled – like Horizons – in my
 breast – *vest*
 And I sneered – softly – "*Small*!"

(F 14; P 271)

A nineteenth-century lady would never utter the final two stanzas, would not be likely to sneer, and, although Thomas Higginson had written "Let us alter as little as possible" during his and Loomis Todd's editing of the first posthumous volumes of Dickinson's poetry in the 1890s, when Loomis Todd printed the poem in 1896 she edited those stanzas out and titled it "Wedded." In the version produced by Loomis Todd, to be married is a holy thing for women, and that "Solemn thing" is a "hallowed" mystery.⁴⁰ In Dickinson's version, marriage is a solemn state indeed, and, she is careful to mention, one for which women cannot be blamed. Loomis Todd's changes—omitting stanzas and inserting the variant "hallowed" in a different position than Dickinson's sardonically suggestive placement—are gender-determined in that she edits out the erotic woman poet who blasphemes the social order. As Amy Lowell observed a couple of decades later, to commodify Dickinson and her writings, "the editors of the first three series compiled the books with an eye to conciliating criticism" (FF xi). By contrast, in Dickinson's poem, the unmarried speaker ends, not pining to be "A woman – white," but, by comparing her unwed state to what she imagines bridal "bliss" to be, she sneers at those who would pity her. Unapologetic, unashamed, the spinster is made huge and powerful by her unorthodox contentment.

Like Emerson's eye—"the first circle" and "the horizon which it forms," "the primary figure repeated without end"—the speaker's way of seeing makes her "Swell" so "Horizons" are "in" her breast, not somewhere far off, at some rainbow's end. This powerful "She" who snickers at romantic conventions that would usher women through life and make

them brides would never make a poetess who celebrates husband and “Wedded” domestic circumference. Like the speaker of “Wild Nights,” a woman who says such things is out of society’s control. Unlike the ballerina who cannot dance upon her toes (P 326), this woman does not even pretend to be conventionally coy. Nor is her message heavily coded. This voice, like that which utters the breathless sexuality of “Wild Nights,” is unequivocal and champions female power.

When the poem was printed in the *New England Quarterly* in 1947, then more widely disseminated by Thomas Johnson in his variorum edition in 1955, that gap created by Mabel Loomis Todd was filled (as many of those created by Johnson himself are now being filled by Ralph W. Franklin). Other gaps, like those imposed by “Austin,” can only be partially filled. Although we can see that someone sought to silence her powerful sexuality and produce in print a more conventional woman than Dickinson’s written record would allow, we must live with the fact of these gaps. Their context shows what was the nature of the excised expressions, and sometimes, as in the case of “One Sister have I in the house,” we can know exactly what is beneath the blot. Yet we must be careful when studying erasures, which, like the elder Hamlet and the nine lost books of Sappho, call out to us though we cannot quite see them. It is well known that Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* was one of Dickinson’s favorites, and it offers, perhaps, the best advice to keep in mind when pondering such forced silences. When the poem’s Marian Erle learned to read, she had to depend on a “pedlar” to provide mutilated volumes. He would

toss her down
Some stray odd volume from his heavy pack,
A Thomson’s Seasons, mulcted of the Spring,
Or half a play of Shakespeare’s torn across
(She had to guess the bottom of a page
By just the top sometimes,—as difficult,
As, sitting on the moon, to guess the earth!)

(111, 972–978)

When forced to sit on “Austin’s” moon to guess Dickinson’s earth, our crescent of reading lacks (P 909).

When something is cut out of a letter, there is not the same there *there* anymore. Yet to ignore the imposed silences now there is to create another erasure. We do not ignore the “Master” letters because they create more gaps than they fill. In fact, critical attention lavished on them

perpetuates the erasures and widens the gaps initiated by “Austin.” With the exception of the just-published *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, the most recent anthologies, for example, indicate that Dickinson’s primary correspondences were with Higginson and Master, while, by ignoring it, they devalue her most prolific correspondence with Sue.⁴¹

The Primary Correspondence

So Dickinson’s primary correspondence is most often slighted while attention is lavished on the letters written to or about (as in the case of Charles Wadsworth) men; and the word of the other woman, Mabel Loomis Todd, about the wife, “dear Sue,” has been treated as fact and, as Oberhaus notes, has worked “to obscure Sue’s close relationship with Dickinson.” Dickinson’s most powerful relationship—personally, poetically, even politically—was with her beloved friend and sister, Sue.⁴² Intimate for nearly forty years, their relationship knew anger as well as joy, ambivalence as well as clarity in feeling, periods of intense daily interactions and periods of separation. This singular relationship makes, therefore, a good standard of comparison for all of Dickinson’s other relationships. Yet over the past century, one misrepresentation has led to another, and the cycle continues.⁴³ So many gaps in her texts have been created by efforts to hide Dickinson’s blasphemy, be it lesbian or disrespectful of the patriarchal bastion of marriage. And those gaps have been imposed on our reading.

Reminding us that Mary Wollstonecraft was much maligned for exercising sexual freedom and that “Barrett Browning was praised for her blameless sexual life,” Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note the eroticism of Dickinson’s “A Word made Flesh” and say that traditionally “genius and sexuality *are* diseases in women, diseases akin to madness.”⁴⁴ From the beginning, those who have loved Emily Dickinson or found themselves somehow invested in her virginal image have sought to excise her powerful sexuality and, by reading the expression of her eroticism as submission, helplessness, and feminine, unrequited emotion out of control, have sought to spiritualize and “normalize” what she says. As the inordinate attention to the “Master” letters evinces, these attempts to hide the range of Dickinson’s love and sexuality have not helped to further our understanding and reading of Dickinson. On the other hand, recognizing Dickinson’s love as lesbian desire suggests not only different stories about her life, but can clarify and enhance our reading so that her cross-dressing characters

and speakers, her impassioned rhetoric to Sue, "Austin's" responses to those inflamed expressions, and the rhetoric of similarity in many of her love poems make a new sense: the "Garnet to Garnet –" and "Gold – to Gold –" of "Title divine – is mine!" (P 1072), images glittering and enticing but hardened and cold, are perfect for articulating lesbian desire thwarted in a heterosexist culture and are both more intelligible and complex when read with that possibility allowed.⁴⁵

Read with Dickinson's love for Sue in mind, Dickinson's "Calvary of Love" poems, replete with a rhetoric of similarity, long noticed and of late getting considerable attention, are no longer so mysterious.⁴⁶ In fact, for a woman who was in love with a woman whose exotic religious interests are well known, the poems are most befitting. "Title divine – is mine," the most famous of these, is usually discussed when one is proposing Samuel Bowles as a lover or as a candidate for "Master" because he was one of only two Dickinson correspondents whom we know received the poem. Yet when Dickinson sent Bowles a copy, she appended it with a note of entreaty—"You will tell no other?"—clearly asking him to keep one of her secrets. I propose that, if readers construe the poem as referring to an actual situation, then when she sent Bowles the poem, she was confiding in him, telling him about another situation, not about her feelings for him. Sue was the other recipient of a version of this poem; and Dickinson simply signed that copy "Emily":

Title divine, is mine.
The Wife without
the Sign.
Acute Degree
Conferred on me –
Empress of Calvary –
Royal, all but the
Crown –
Betrothed, without
the Swoon
God gives us Women –
When You hold
Garnet to Garnet –
Gold – to Gold –
Born – Bridalled –
Shrouded –
In a Day –
Tri Victory –

"My Husband" –
Women say
Stroking the Melody –
Is this the Way –
(H 361; P 1072, 1860s)

Obviously this poem is about a love not sanctioned by public vows. Titles are filed in the clerk's office, not worn around one's finger or atop one's head like a crown, that public ornament signifying royalty. Anyone who could write such a poem is self-conscious about certain expressions of love and Dickinson acknowledges that her speaker is not like a woman

. . . in swoon,
To whom life creeps back in form of death,
With a sense of separation, a blind pain
Of blank obstruction, and a roar i' the ears
Of visionary chariots which retreat
As earth grows clearer . . . slowly, by degrees . . .
(AURORA LEIGH 1, 559–565)

Hers is not the deathlike state that she attributes to conventional marriage where women are enamored with the sounds of their title—"My Husband," Mrs.—and stroke the melody, caressing those rather than the corporeal spouse. Nor is the relationship she describes a completely uncomplicated, blissful union. Wedlock is also deadlock, and the speaker says she is "Born – Bridalled – / Shrouded – ." Using terms reflecting her apparent ambivalence, in but a day the speaker is both born again and dressed for death when she is adorned like a bride. Juxtaposed here are life and death with the "Bridalled" state sandwiched between them. *Bridal* connotes a wedding feast or festival and the jollity associated with brideale. Yet it puns on *bridled*. The newlywed woman may swoon, but in accepting the vows of a nineteenth-century wife—to love, honor, and obey—the bride already has a bit in her mouth. Her desires must be curtailed to meet the approval of her husband. Faced with such circumscription, many a woman bridles. Shroud's connotations are multifarious as well. Women are shrouded behind their wedding veils; the dead are shrouded in winding sheets. Here nuptial images, supposedly full of life, are synonymous with those of death. In "I'm 'wife'— I've finished that —" (F 9; P 199), Dickinson declares women eclipsed by their husbands, and, with shroud, she also calls to mind Polonius hidden behind the arras. In

this poem, love is not a happy, publicly celebrated affair, but a secret and a crucifixion.⁴⁷

A Calvary Experience

It is nothing new to recognize that Dickinson depicts love as a Calvary experience. Sewall, among others, has suggested that "Title divine" is possibly a poem in which she is "the imagined wife of Samuel Bowles" (*Life* 2:405), a poem in which a love that can never be realized crucifies her. Sewall observes, "There are scores of poems from the late 1850s, many of them clearly love poems, that Emily did not send to Bowles" (*Life* 2:496). Her loving remarks of the late 1850s and the early 1860s were to Sue. In spite of his intimacy with the Dickinsons, Bowles may or may not have understood the poem that Dickinson forwarded to him. More surely Sue understood the poem when Dickinson forwarded it to her; for in context of their correspondence, the poem makes sense.

In Sue's version, an odd line appears. For her beloved, Dickinson adds "Tri Victory - ." By itself, this alteration befuddles: is Dickinson punning on "try" and recommending that Sue attempt to celebrate her wifely circumference, or is she speaking of some three-way triumph? Considering the line in context of some of her other writing offers illumination, if not an answer.

Around February 1861, when Dickinson tells Bowles that Vinnie, Sue, and she all hope he is recovering from his sciatica, she proclaims it a "tri-Hope" (L. 229). If she uses a similar formula in the poem, are the three people involved Bowles, his wife Mary, and Emily? If so, why is the "Tri" line not included in his copy? The most intense triangle in which he was involved was with his wife and her cousin, his intimate, Maria Whitney. Since the poem articulates the reality of secret betrothal, of that which cannot be publicly acknowledged, and since the imagery is, as in "Like Eyes that Looked on Wastes -" (F 32; P 458), where Queens make each other Queens (not Kings), a rhetoric of similarity, not difference, this "Tri" may be punning off the fact of her triangle with her sister-in-law and brother. To speak of a situation of homoerotic/incestuous bonding, such rhetoric is apt, as is the metaphor of crucifixion.

Like Jesus, who had to be nailed to a cross to become a messiah, and like the Queens, who find only a wasteland for their love and "reign" by "perish[ing]," the Empress proclaims her royal realm the site of the Cross.

Thus do crucifying images accompany this rhetoric of sameness. In "Title divine," the poem's speaker says this secret title confers "Acute Degree" and that her Golgotha makes her "Empress." From the columns of the *Republican*, it is clear that Bowles was well acquainted with the women poets of his day, whose work tended to take "secret sorrow" as a major theme. In fact, in 1860 he plainly expressed his doubts about "another kind of writing only too common . . . the literature of misery," written chiefly by "women, gifted women may be, full of thought and feeling and fancy, but poor, lonely and unhappy."⁴⁸ Such private pain made women, who were already assumed to be capable of greater feeling than men, even more sensitive. As Cheryl Walker observes, "By defining the poet in terms of the capacity for pain, they implied that women had a special talent for verse."⁴⁹ When Bowles and Sue read "Acute Degree," they must have known what Dickinson meant by it. Other Calvary poems explicate her phrase. In three of these, this private pain and its heightening of sensitivity are the theme. In "I dreaded that first Robin, so," (F 17; P 348), nearing the bird "hurts a little," "Pianos in the Woods" sometimes have the "power to mangle," and "Daffodils" can "pierce." But the poem's speaker has grown "some accustomed" to the intense feeling and this "Queen of Calvary -" lifts her "childish Plumes" "in bereaved acknowledgment / Of" nature's "unthinking Drums - ." Here, as elsewhere in Dickinson's work, nature is not particularly hostile, nor are its creatures especially cognizant of her speaker's plight and coming near, as they did for Snow White, to take care of her. They are merely separate from her, and going about their business. It is her perception of them that has been profoundly altered and makes her aesthetic "Acute." Acronymically A.D. the phrase signifies that she lives not "in the year of our Lord," but in a time lorded by her grief; when her anguish was born, the speaker's senses were made raw.

If, as Sewall and others have suggested, this is an epistolary poem referring to real events, considering the kind of copies Dickinson sent to each of them, "Title divine" is more likely to be about Dickinson's decades-long love for Sue than for Bowles. Certainly many of the rest of the "Calvary of Love" poems support such an interpretation (the reader might consult F 33, P 313; F 13, P 322; F 20, P 364; F 31, P 549; F 30, P 553; F 27, P 561; F 28, P 568; F 15, P 577; F 32, P 620; F 36, P 725). Dickinson made fair copies of all these poems in the early 1860s; several show lovers who are equals; all emphasize a love crucified. When Dickinson chooses images in these, the crimson and gold colors that reflect the blood of crucifixion as well as the royal weeds of an empress, they do not reflect the

hierarchy and difference of heterosexual relations in patriarchy, but the sameness and equality of lesbian relations. In "There came a Day [perhaps the day she was born, bridalled, and shrouded] — at / Summer's full —" (F 13; P 322), "Each was to each — the sealed church —" and "Each — bound the other's / Crucifix — ." "Each to each" echoes "We learned the Whole of Love —" (F 28; P 568) and the lines

Think of it Lover! I and Thee
Permitted — face to face to be —

of "If I may have it, when its' / dead" (F 15; P 577). As Emily and Sue often mirror one another—in their descriptions of literature's power to make one feel extraordinary (see L 238, L 342a), in Sue's highly allusive obituary of Emily—so do the lovers in these poems. As far as we know, only "Title divine" and "There came a Day" were "published" by Dickinson to any of her contemporaries. Higginson, who received "There came a Day," and Bowles got one poem each; Sue got copies of both poems. This fact, viewed in light of the mutilations to Dickinson's affectionate expressions for and about Sue and of their lifelong intimacy, suggests that, unless Dickinson's *Calvary of Love* was a fiction, Sue was the primary object of Dickinson's erotic desire.

What it confirms, however, is Sue's ultimate importance as a constant audience for Dickinson's poetry. To read "Title divine" as a biographical document referring to Dickinson's imagining herself as the "wife" of anybody runs the risk of reducing criticism to gossip. What is most exciting, therefore, is not identifying the "real" object(s) of Dickinson's most profound erotic attractions, but the ways in which she transformed homoerotic desires into compelling literature. Like many women writers of her day, Dickinson donned conventional appearances to voice radical departure from official rhetoric extolling wives and motherhood. Unfortunately, the will to conceal the nature of Dickinson's personal affections has clouded perceptions of both her powerful ironic play with nineteenth-century cultural stereotypes and the circumstances she found most enabling for her literary production.

If all these letters and poems and especially the erotic and seductive expressions had been sent to a man, little doubt would remain that he was the "Master" so many have spent so much time looking for. Yet the majority, or "Corporation" (L 233), recoils from Dickinson's powerful lesbian eros. Dickinson sent many poems to Sue about perception and its power, and it seems that the various assumptions that label homosexuality as neu-

rotic, maladjusted, and underdeveloped have determined the way that Dickinson's esteem for her sister-in-law has generally been perceived. At best, it has been seen as "a real tragedy";⁵⁰ at worst, it has been denied and erased. Like any lifelong love relationship, the love between these two women knew its ups and downs. Although tension in such an intense involvement is to be expected, any voicing of friction between these two has been used to discount their thirty years of living side by side. Dickinson seemed aware that such love may well call for defenses and for each woman to be a fortress for the other. In "the Dimpled War"

Without a Formula we fought
Each was to each the Pink Redoubt —

(P 1529, ABOUT 1881)

After three decades, when she characterizes their love to Sue, she does not compare it to the adolescent, swept-away passion of Romeo and Juliet, but to the sophisticated, persistent, if tired, love of Antony and Cleopatra. Talking in Shakespeare, Dickinson tells of the problematic relationship of this love between two women, between the woman who claimed to put her dear female friend before all others and the other who loved her friend and sister but took a husband:

Susan's Calls are
like Antony's
Supper —
"And pays his
Heart for what
his Eyes eat,
only —"
Emily '

(H B 24; L 854, ABOUT 1883; SEE
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA II, II, 225–226)

A Persistent Image and Persistent Questions

Many unanswered and probably unanswerable questions persist about Dickinson's relationship with and affection for her sister-in-law; yet it is certain that the poet's expressions to and about Sue provoked censorship. It can probably never be known who ordered whom to do what

when or who did what when; nevertheless, to arrive at some understanding of the nature of the relationship these mutilations sought to occlude is crucial to advance understanding of Dickinson's poetic production and the history of its reception among Dickinson scholars and other readers. These erasures are, in the words of Tillie Olsen, "not *natural* silences" (i.e., neither inevitable nor necessary),⁵¹ and some of the ruptures created by them need not be permanent. From the beginning of the first century of Dickinson study, Sue Dickinson's importance has been downplayed. We are indebted to one of husband Austin's other women, Loomis Todd, for initially editing and translating Emily Dickinson's texts into mass reproducible works. That the adulterous editor would want to deemphasize the importance of her lover's wife to the poet whom Loomis Todd commodified but never met face to face is not at all surprising. Twenty years after the inaugural print volumes, when Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, sought to accentuate the importance of her mother Sue to Dickinson's literary production, the great chain of Aunt Emily's poetic being had already been established.

Willis J. Buckingham recently pointed out that much of twentieth-century Dickinson criticism has misunderstood and mischaracterized the late nineteenth-century responses to her originality as wholly negative, when in fact her *fin de siècle* publication was at a time when many "could feel, and take pleasure in, the alien force of her voice."⁵² However, by writing and editing against the more conservative responses espoused in the "religious family weeklies" which contributed so profoundly to "popular literary tastes," and by writing and editing against Sue's influence on her, certain misunderstandings of Dickinson's first readers have been, as Jaus reminds us, "sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation."⁵³ One of the most comprehensive, finest biographies of the poet, Sewall's National Book Award-winning *Life of Emily Dickinson* is, as he scrupulously reminds us in the preface, the culmination of studies enriching the Higginson-Todd-Bingham line of reception, for it was written at the request of Millicent Todd Bingham to tell "'the whole story' of her mother's involvement . . . but in the setting of the larger story of Emily Dickinson" (*Life* 1: xiv).

At the advent of a second century of reading Emily Dickinson, scholarly attention may now focus on developing understandings of the poet's most frequent contemporary reader, Sue, filling what gaps we can, with readers well aware that some omissions, both foisted on the written record and inherent in the dynamics of language itself, can never be closed.

To fill a Gap
 Insert the Thing that
 Caused it –
 Block it up
 With Other – and 'twill
 yawn the more –
 You cannot + Solder an
 Abyss
 With Air –
 + Plug a Sepulchre –

(F 31; P 546)

Like Gwendolyn Brooks talking about Dickinson's influence, each reader might respond that to fill a gap, then, "is almost hopeless, because Emily [Dickinson] and I are so absolutely different in the details of our lives." As Brooks continues, however, she discovers that she has much to say about Dickinson's poetic artistry, about her powerful combinations of ordinary words to make extraordinary meanings, which, like magic, transform the reader's way of looking at the quotidian by offering revelation in exhilarating juxtapositions of the routine. In other words, when Brooks stops dwelling on the differences of Dickinson's life and concentrates on her forerunner's literary endeavors, she is, like Dickinson reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "absolutely enchanted" (F 29; P 593).⁵⁴ As a feminist literary critic, I view Dickinson's biographical circumstances as important, but only for the ways in which they elucidate her poetic career, the poems and letter-poems themselves, and subsequent reception of those documents. To recover what can be known about Dickinson's most sustained literary relationship begins to supply a long-standing missing link in the chain of her poetic being.

Hiding, overlooking, or ignoring Dickinson's love for women, especially Sue, and privileging her affections and regard for men, especially "Master," cloaks Dickinson in mystery, befuddles critics, confuses issues, and closes texts. Some even maintain that of the more than one thousand letters still extant, "three letters, which Emily Dickinson drafted to a man she called 'Master,' stand near the heart of her mystery" (ML 5). Such a declaration replicates the preoccupations of many a scholar and popular reader who seem convinced that identifying the object of this apparent ardor for "Master" would explain Dickinson the poet. There are many stories of "the second story," captivity narratives seeking to explain her much ballyhooed withdrawal, that subordinate Dickinson's literary pro-

ductions to her personality even as they offer literary precedent for the tale.⁵⁵ The literal second story in the Dickinson Homestead, open to tourists certain days and hours of the week, stands as something of a sanctuary for this widely shared nostalgia for a lovelorn spinster writer. The pictures most prominently displayed on Dickinson's bedroom wall are of those men many have supposed was "Master"—Charles Wadsworth, Samuel Bowles, and Judge Lord—and serve as reminders of a brokenhearted virgin driven to writing verse. With her furniture mostly at Harvard and the pictures with which she decorated her walls—of Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and Thomas Carlyle—counterpointed by those men rumored to be most important to her, it is hard to imagine Emily Dickinson walking those rooms. Thus to the commodification of Dickinson Adrienne Rich responds:

In Emily Dickinson's house in Amherst
cocktails are served the scholars
gather in celebration
their pious or clinical legends
festoon the walls like imitations
of period patterns

(. . . and, as I feared, my "life" was made a "victim")⁵⁶

A century of edition after edition of her poems and letters, numerous biographies, a one-woman-show-of-a-play performed around the country and broadcast for PBS, a sixty-second biographical sketch produced for CBS, a dance by Martha Graham based on her spirit, a place setting at *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, at least two records of readings, numerous musical settings of her poems, a murder mystery, a commemorative stamp, a ceremonial burial in the Poet's Corner at St. John's Cathedral in New York City, a centenary celebration of her work by contemporary women poets reading for two days at Seton Hall University (April 10–11, 1986), a *Peanuts* daily strip all her own (November 21, 1984), *Bloom County* (September 25, 1988) and *Outland* (August 26, 1990) Sunday tributes, a salute on NBC's prime-time comedy series "Cheers" at a Thanksgiving dinner (November 27, 1986), the frequent subject of "Jeopardy" answers, an Emily Dickinson throw pillow, an Emily Dickinson cookbook, and the use of "Because I could not stop for Death" to appeal for organ donors (*Washington Post*, June 3, 1991) all attest to the fact that she is a Hero in American culture. But the Emily Dickinson celebrated often seems to have as much to do with the "type of poetess" as an Ameri-

can "cultural phenomenon" Walker analyzes as it has to do with the flesh-and-blood woman who produced hundreds of poems and letters in a house on Main in Amherst, Massachusetts.⁵⁷

Perpetuating a long-established pattern, editorial license bolsters the image Simon and Garfunkel reiterated of a future Miss Lonelyheart reading her "Em'ly Dickinson" while the seriously agonizing young bard studies his Robert Frost. That one can easily find greeting cards with girlish gushings of a very young woman just beginning to think of herself as a poet hints at what a close look at the two record set, *Emily Dickinson—A Self Portrait*, makes clear: it is the idea of Emily in bridal white (see the cover of *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson*⁵⁸), pining, made especially sensitive by unrequited love, rather than the prolific poet who wrote Thomas Higginson's wife, "I wish you were strong like me" (L 481), who has captured the popular imagination. One of the greeting cards quotes a letter to her brother as if it had been bound and folded into one of her fascicles:

Today is very beautiful
just as bright, just as blue,
just as green and as white
and as crimson
as the cherry trees
in full bloom,
and the half-opening
peach blossoms
and the grass just waving,
and sky and hill and cloud
can make it, if they try.

How I wish you were here.

(L 122, MAY 7, 1853)

Like Thomas Johnson producing "There is another sky" (P 2; L 58, October 17, 1851), the greeting-card editor produces a Rod McKuen-like poem from an early letter that does not feature the unusual line breaks, nor does it, as did so many letters from the 1860s on, look like a lyric poem. A decade later Dickinson herself would begin to experiment with genre and force readers and editors to admit "doubt where the letter leaves off and the poem begins" (L xv). But Johnson produces an early poem from a letter to her brother, while the anonymous editor of the greeting card manufactures a poem befitting a poetess in distress from Dickin-

son's epistolary expression. In doing so, they attempt to create conditions which, not having existed in the first place, are of course irrecoverable.

Though there is, perhaps, a glimmer of hope in an apparently conventional "thirtysomething" version of Dickinson who rather bitchily tells the whiny untenured English professor—"I don't think I like you. You've got a very poor attitude" (April 10, 1990)—nostalgic impulses permeate the culture grown up around the legends and volumes of poetry and letters, biography, and criticism produced in the name of Emily Dickinson. Starring Julie Harris, who for so long headlined *The Belle of Amherst* as the gingerbread-bearing poet finally enthralled with "Master," the *Self-Portrait* recording offers us a lovelorn lady, obsessed with renunciation and the Father God and Father, whose major accomplishment was that she "domesticated heartbreak" (liner notes). The double album featuring a selection of Dickinson's letters and poems devotes most of its energies to her juvenalia and supposed disappointments in love, and, representing her correspondence with Sue, offers only three letters to her "breath from Gibraltar" (L 722, late summer 1881). Spinning the story between two women in the usual way, these meager few are provocatively edited. One letter that talks of the hard and cold hearts both women bear for the young men and proclaims that "there's a big *future* waiting" for Emily and Sue is, listeners are told, addressed to "my sister-in-law to be." One need look no further than Johnson's scholarly transcriptions to see that this is not the case (see L 85, April 5, 1852). One of Dickinson's longest, the letter is mostly about "big tears," "bitter tears," and missing and loving "Susie." Mentioned only as an afterthought, Austin, Sue's future husband, is tucked into the postscript, as if he is not of any particular interest to Sue. In fact, in this letter, Dickinson never alludes to their relationship as prospective in-laws. In a letter to Austin also quoted on this album, there is a sentence that makes it clear that when Dickinson says she will take his place, she means his place beside Sue. But on the album the remark is torn from the context in which it was written and spliced into a letter in which it does not appear so the listener has no clear idea of what place she means (L 115 edited into L 118, both April 1853).

As does Dickinson's room preserved for tourists, so this record tells more about audience fascinations and the nineteenth-century image consonant with preconceived notions of literary history and women's role in culture than it reveals about her actual poetic production and the actual world of nineteenth-century literary women. It is perhaps no surprise that popular culture conventionalizes Dickinson, but of scholarly significance are the many ways in which these productions parallel how she has been

tamed as well by serious biographers and critics who continue to shroud her in sentimental and exclusively heterosexual notions, and see something of a weak, defeated damsel instead of a writer, strong and self-aware. In "The Spirit of Place," Rich continues:

The remnants pawed the relics
the cult assembled in the bedroom

and you whose teeth were set on edge by churches
resist your shrine

escape

are found

nowhere

unless in words (your own)

The examples in this chapter's preceding sections show that in landmarks memorializing her, biographies, and much literary criticism, the shrewd, self-conscious poet who had reasons for her "High Behavior" (L 282, about 1863) is normalized, thus contained for her role as America's premier female poet. As Walker has shown, the white dress, especial sensitivities, unrequited love, and reclusiveness were stock traits of the nineteenth-century poetess widely advertised by real figures like Lucretia Davidson, Lucy Larcom, Anne Lynch, Maria Brooks, Frances Osgood, and even Christina Rossetti, as well as by literary characters like Miss Archer of Longfellow's *Kavanaugh*, a favorite of Austin, Sue, and Emily. Following the masculinizing impact of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917–1921) and D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), women writers were neglected,³ and a cultural amnesia allowed readers and scholars alike to forget just how conventional "stories of the second story," of the withdrawal of the mothlike writer in the white gown, are. Printed in the 1890s to promote the poet, the small, ladylike, white leather gilt-edged volumes with suitable subject categories like "Life," "Love," "Nature," and "Time and Eternity" and the essays by Higginson and Loomis Todd touting Dickinson's reclusion present an image which American audiences were prepared to like. These little books present a woman writer, who, though rather eccentric, was not doing anything especially radical with her poems. These first editors of Dickinson, then, perceived unusual techniques of her poetry as quirks to be amended.

With Jauss and Frost, "knowing how way leads on to way," readers can see that this figure has been reproduced time and again in more or less variant forms to suit the critical moment. In this way, her unusual life and

its many aspects which can never be fully explained have been bound into forms that intrigue even as they enable a perception of Dickinson as, however exceptional, within lines already drawn for nineteenth-century American white upper-class women whose most passionate friendships were with other women. Likewise, her literary productions have been bound into increasingly more sophisticated versions that conform to predetermined ideas of what makes a poem, an edition of poems, a letter, an edition of letters, a book. By reviewing the variously manifested predominance of this “half-cracked” figure, my point has not been to discount those who produced stories of Emily Dickinson’s life and her works for other cultural moments, but to set the stage to discover what a different slant of attention uncovers about her writing processes and objectives in this particular moment. In closing this chapter, more reflections on the two most profound issues for Dickinson study, textuality and sexuality, both of which influenced the perpetuation of the “scribbling” virgin, are warranted.

With sexuality so bound up with notions of her intentions and conceptions of texts “proper” enough for reproduction, current attitudes toward eroticism bear more consideration. In the turn toward the twenty-first century, audiences are more willing to accept sexual desires not necessarily substantiating the myth of an unswerving heterosexual highroad. Therefore, confronted with poems in which she sneers at conventional wifehood or letters in which she proclaims her passionate, sexually charged affections for another woman, readers feel less compelled to explain these away in schemes and terms designed within heterosexist discourse. In analogous ways, with so many gender biases acknowledged, readers today are more willing to accept that, throughout history, and certainly in nineteenth-century America, determined women have learned the power of maintaining the appearance of being domesticated even as they go about their business, subverting patriarchal order. As we are beginning to learn the follies of reading many of the women writers contemporary with Dickinson too simplistically, without recognizing their “shifting literary masks,”⁶⁰ so we should be wary of overly neat interpretations of her erotic appetites. When reading beyond heterosexuality, the prevailing urge has been to discern that which is Not Me from that which is Like Me. Yet such dichotomies may be as overly simple as they are easier and more soothing to read.

As there is for steady demarcation between male and female, there is still a nostalgia, heterosexual and homosexual, which maintains that homoeroticism is entirely different from heteroeroticism and which wants

“natural, fixed” differences in sexual desire as well as between the sexes. Though often a strategy for gay and lesbian will to power, such insistence can also be used to brutalize and oppress homosexuals. It has yet to be seen how, like “the promotion of fixed sexual differences,” the promotion of fixed differences in sexual desire—“whether they are described as natural or culturally constructed—does anything but maintain an all too familiar system of oppositions and stereotypes.”⁶¹ The 1989 legislation stipulating what kinds of artistic enterprises may and may not be funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, approved by a U.S. Senate voice vote on July 26 and passed in slightly modified form in September, justifies itself according to such an ideology of difference. In the first specification of this amendment, which has never been altered, blatant stereotyping equates sadomasochism, homoeroticism, and the exploitation of children: “None of the funds authorized to be appropriated pursuant to this Act may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce—(1) obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts. . . .”⁶² Obviously, the thrust of this proposal is to protect the heterosexually pure from any contaminating deviant body. Key to the assumptions delineated is the belief that homoeroticism and sadomasochism can be readily identified, labeled dangerously different, then prohibited.⁶³ Most dangerous is this faith in consensus and stable definitions that labels the homosexual as Not Like the law-abiding rest of “us.” In fact, heterosexist notions of “normality” persist, even within deconstruction.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, some have wanted to protect Emily Dickinson from the contaminating label of homoeroticism.

This belief in an ability to separate pure from profane bodies parallels yearnings for stable definitions of Dickinson’s sexual desires as well as for *authoritative* printings of her texts. Conversely, though no responsible critic would want to underestimate the significance of homosexual difference, none should make the story of difference the whole, therefore the only, gay/lesbian story. Likewise, none would want to minimize the differences—suggestive dashes, chirography, and lineation—of Dickinson’s texts and the impossibility of translating those to print, but neither should one conclude that, so different from mass-produced typeface, these can be noted as such, then dismissed as trivial or something very much other than what can be shared in critical dialogue. Both her sexual desires and textual productions, so variant in form and with so many variants, challenge audience complacency and force readers to ask, “What are the guidelines for reading these matters of sex and texts?” Instead of insisting on determin-

ing discrete bodies—a sexual being who is definitively heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual and a textual body for which one variant, stanzaic division, or scheme of lineation is definitively preferable—readers, remembering the “heteroglossia” of all forms of communication, might acknowledge that in “unfinished” texts so apparently informal, Dickinson formalizes relationships that already exist between readers and texts.⁶⁵ To put it crudely, while transcription appears to fix texts, and definitions to delimit the realms of sexual desire, different contexts and different readers always augment and destabilize meaning, and the documents bequeathed by the poet with a “Vice for Voices” (A 743a; PF 19), who wrote “A pen has so many inflections and a Voice but one” (L 470), show that she did not need poststructural theories to elaborate her consciousness of this.

At issue for those who want to return to a mythical time when sex was clearly, as H.D. put it, “A₂ or B₃” and texts were simply like Grecian urns is the power over (and of) interpretation. As in so many critical struggles, particularly in disagreements about feminism, “the battleground is representation itself,” for “identity and reality are created within representation,”⁶⁶ and interpretations appear easier to control in realms of definitude. As we have seen, in various ways, editors, critics, and biographers have sought to shore up particular depictions of Dickinson’s poems, letters, intentions, and life. But always multivoiced, representations also tell stories they do not intend as well as those the author and editors mean to convey. For example, by representing Dickinson’s letters and poems with changes to excise affectionate reference to Sue, “Austin” unwittingly yet inevitably points a reader’s attention to the loving expressions that “he” wanted to hide.

This Story of Reading

Joining analyses of her erotic and textual intentions, and explicating various connections between expressions of unconventional passions and productions of anomalous works, my story of reading Dickinson’s primary correspondences is precisely the kind of interpretation her first editors intended to discourage. As we have seen, different kinds of material interventions by others have constituted and created interpretations that obscure Dickinson’s biographical and poetic differences. By changing lineation, punctuation, and spelling (especially her calligraphic orthography), by deleting sections of poems and deleting sections of letters, by titling untitled poems, by selectively regrouping poems into “safe” standard cate-

gories or regrouping the documents to divorce poems from the context of their original presentation in letters or fascicles, and even by redecorating the walls of her room to showcase rumors about love unrequited, editors, critics, and biographers have rearranged Dickinson’s literary and biographical records to emphasize her timidities and to erase her aggressiveness. Instead of closing off Dickinson’s texts and life by translating her irregularities into regular forms easier to read (variously shaped and angled dashes into uniform typeface and reclusion into profound disappointment or neurosis), this study advocates a careful consciousness regarding that which, so obvious, may well be taken for granted: how notions of who the author is (biography) influence the kind of book editors and publishers imagine making from her work (reproduction), and how both in turn influence readers’ perceptions of the poet and her role in presenting such poems (reception), which then influence new biographies and reproductions.

To explore these intertextualities, the last four chapters of this book tell a story of reading what may be called Dickinson’s “major” correspondences. These chapters consider what the surviving documents to her favorite correspondent and to the elusive character “Master,” whom we know only through her writing, suggest about her relationships with her readers and editors and reveal about her creative processes. Since one study cannot examine all the correspondences, I have selected that to Sue, granted the most attention by Dickinson, and that to “Master,” granted the most attention by her audiences, to adduce ways in which the cycle of reception can be illuminatingly broken. Like Dickinson’s relationship with Sue, which resists easy classification, her literary productions that resist translation into print or challenge our wisdom about cultural history have, “just like” traditional attitudes toward “woman,” been devalued. By taking cues from her writing, in this chapter I have outlined collisions between century-old reconstructions of her work and the actual archival record to begin to expand our valuations so that Dickinson herself “mothers” a whole new way of receiving her literary productions. To prepare to interrogate the two correspondences and also to begin to expand our poetic valuations, in the next chapter I shall survey some of the most formidable issues of textual reproduction in light of what can be learned from reading Dickinson reading.

Him –” (A 689; P 494); “Going – to – Her! / Happy– Letter! Tell Her –” (A 197; P 494). Woman’s relationship to patriarchal language has generated many debates, and the focus of this study does not pretend to answer the many complex questions attending those. However, as Andrea Nye observes, “That the categories of patriarchal language distort what she [the woman speaker] might like to say is no longer in question.” See “Woman Clothed with the Sun: Julia Kristeva and the Escape from/to Language,” *Signs* 12 (1987): 665.

5. Rebecca Patterson, *Emily Dickinson’s Imagery*, ed. Margaret Freeman, p. 17.

6. Silvia Dobson, “Woof and Heave and Surge and Wave and Flow,” *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, p. 37.

7. Donna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, p. vii.

8. See Marianne Moore, “Author’s Note,” *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*, p. vii.

9. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reproducing Jacques Derrida in “Translator’s Preface,” *Of Grammatology*, p. xii.

10. See Adrienne Rich, “The Spirit of Place,” *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, p. 42.

11. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, p. 223.

12. Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, p. 121.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 102. The transmissions of Dickinson’s letter-poem prove its own point: no holograph survives and the words have been arranged in various ways when printed (see P 1212n for publication history and chapter 2 for more thorough discussion of its implications).

1. To Fill a Gap: Erasures, Disguises, Definitions

1. Should the reader wonder why I edit out the last sentence of this “paragraph,” she might contrast Johnson’s representation of it in his edition of *Letters* to his representation in *Poems*. The discrepancy between those reproductions indicates the larger problem of decisively paragraphing Dickinson’s prose. To a great degree, beginnings and endings of paragraphs are left up to the reader; in fact, as we shall see in the following chapter, paragraphing her prose may be a misleading strategy for reading.

2. The *Springfield Republican* was Samuel Bowles’s newspaper; editors were J. G. Holland and Thomas Niles.

“The Snake” was printed in both the weekly and daily *Republican*. To the weekly version, which Dickinson sent to Higginson, they added a question mark after the third line; to the daily version, they added a comma. No mark of punctuation appears in either manuscript copy. See David Higgins, *Portrait of Emily Dickinson: The Poet and Her Prose*, pp. 162–163, or John L. Spicer, “The Poems of

Emily Dickinson,” *Boston Public Library Quarterly* 8 (July 1956): 142. See YH 2:110 for a facsimile of the version featuring the question mark. Both the question mark and the comma determine interpretations for the reader that Dickinson did not wish to impose.

Since Johnson completed his edition in 1955, poems have been added to the list of those published during Dickinson’s lifetime: “Nobody knows this little Rose –” (P 35) was published in 1858; “Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple” (P 228), “Flowers – Well – if anybody” (P 137), “These are the days when Birds come back –” (P 130), “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church” (P 324), and “Success is counted sweetest” (P 67) were all published in New York in 1864. See Karen Dandurand, “Another Dickinson Poem Published in Her Lifetime,” *American Literature* 54 (1982): 434–437; and “New Dickinson Civil War Publications,” *American Literature* 56 (1984): 17–27.

3. The variant in *Manuscript Books* (Set 6) reads “His notice sudden is” in the last line, first stanza. As one can see from Johnson’s notes, only the variant to Sue (H B 193) and the version Dickinson saw published read “His notice instant is” in that line. This and “the fact that Sue lacked a copy” of this poem tend “to confirm” that it was Dickinson’s sister-in-law Sue who forwarded a copy to the *Republican* to be printed (see P 986n and chapter 5). For extended analysis of transmission of poems with variant versions and particular problems with lineation, see my discussion of “I reason – / Earth is short –” (F 20; P 301) in chapter 2.

4. As quoted by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, p. 9.

5. Joanne Dobson, *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence: The Woman Writer in Nineteenth-Century America*, p. xiv.

6. Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, ed. and trans. Michael Hays, p. 205.

7. Clark Griffith, *The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson’s Tragic Poetry*, p. 208; Cynthia Griffin Wolff, “The Women in My Life,” *Massachusetts Review* 24 (1983): 438–452; Adrienne Rich, “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson,” *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*, pp. 157–183; John Hollander’s remarks are from “Great American Writers: Emily Dickinson,” *Pen Newsletter* 68 (May 1989): 3–14, esp. p. 8. Comments from Hollander and Rich in the paragraphs that follow are from these articles.

I could have chosen at least another hundred Emily Dickinsons represented by critical commentaries over the last century. These were selected because their range of emphasis—on her sexuality, her psyche, the role of religion in her life, her circumstance as a woman, and her poetic technique—represents the major categories of Dickinson studies.

8. Though this discussion does not pretend to answer the many complex questions raised, thus to “fix” the roles of the reader, the author, and the text, I draw on a large body of reader-response and poststructuralist criticism. The dialogues among those who locate the text in the reader and those who posit a deter-

minate text which induces particular responses, as well as deconstructive assertions that readers play out roles dramatized in the text, serve as clarifying backdrop for my discussion of the dynamic exchange between Dickinson's readers and her texts. See especially Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*; David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism*; Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*; Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth," *Yale French Studies* 52 (1975): 31–113; Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*; Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*; Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*; Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*; Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*; Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti; David H. Richter, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*; Michael Steig, *Stories of Reading: Subjectivity and Literary Understanding*. Cristanne Miller's discussion of compression and ellipsis in *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* attends somewhat to the roles of the reader; however, Miller's critique focuses primarily on the strategies of the author Dickinson.

9. See Hollander, "Great American Writers"; John Updike, "To the Editors," *New York Review of Books* 35 (August 1988): 63.

10. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in His Journals*, ed. Joel Porte, p. 271; see also David Leverenz, "The Politics of Emerson's Man-Making Words," in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter, pp. 134–162.

11. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Women and the Alphabet*, p. 50. It should be noted that though Higginson uses a French example here, he speaks elsewhere in the book of the feminine pronoun following the masculine and is clearly aware of the fact that woman is subordinated in English, too.

12. Both Emily and Sue Dickinson consistently apply this distinction. In three other letters to Ward, Sue uses "print" for mass reproduction and distribution of poetry (H Lowell Autograph, February 8, 1891, March 14, 1891, March 23, 1891). In the 1890s when Sue or her daughter Martha marks one of Dickinson's manuscripts to indicate that the poem has already appeared in print, she writes "printed" (not "published") on the document; see, for example, Sue's copy of "Except to Heaven – she is nought" (H 251; P 154), which had been printed in *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (1890). In a letter to her brother, Emily writes, "I should be pleased with a line when you've published your work to Father . . ." (L 108, March 18, 1853). In "It would never be Common – / more – I said –" (F 19; P 430), the poem's speaker writes that her joy was such that she "felt it publish—in my Eye." One is of course also reminded of Milton's use of the term:

. . . Suppose he should relent
And publish Grace to all, and to his Godhead sing
Forc't Hallelujahs; . . .

(PARADISE LOST 2:237–239)

As late as 1876, book publishers at the U.S. Centennial in Philadelphia were debating the meaning of the term *publish*. See John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865–1919*, 2:36.

13. If this request came from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, as has been suggested, it is probable that she knew about Dickinson from Thomas Higginson; Higginson and Phelps were acquainted with one another and both published in Scribner's in 1871 (YH 2:181).

14. In "The Illogic of Sumptuary Values," a slide lecture presented at "Companions of the Flame: Emily Dickinson–H.D. Dual Centennial Colloquium," San Jose Poetry Center, San Jose State University, October 22–25, 1986, Susan Howe first called my attention to the visual effects of this particular poem. In conversation with Martha Lindblom O'Keefe (who in 1986 privately published *This Edifice*, a study of the structure of Dickinson's fascicles) my reading of this holograph has also been enhanced. See chapter 2.

15. See "Great American Writers," p. 11.

16. According to Thomas Johnson, this is the second Master letter; according to R. W. Franklin, it is the third. See "Introduction" (ML 5–10) for extended discussion of the dating of these letters. The penciled handwriting of what Franklin calls "Letter 2" (L 248; A 820) matches that of drafts supposedly written to Judge Lord (L 559; A 735). Since Johnson said these documents were written at least a decade apart, all sorts of questions arise and need to be addressed about the dating of Dickinson's manuscripts. Dating has been determined in part by the type of stationery used. Yet Dickinson herself points out a problem with this method. Writing her cousin Louise Norcross about 1870, she notes: "This little sheet of paper has lain for several years in my Shakespeare, and though it is blotted and antiquated is endeared by its resting-place" (L 340).

17. Johnson's brackets and parentheses indicate that some lines are crossed out and that some words have alternative readings, hence that the copies we have of these letters do not indicate final choices made ready for posting, but only possibilities drafted. The facsimile of the letter in question here (*Home* 423–429) shows clearly that the copies are drafts, and I knew that Jay Leyda and Richard Sewall were right when they pointed out that the bit of verse printed at the end of this "Master" letter really belongs in the middle of the text. The lines

No Rose. yet felt myself
a'bloom,
No Bird—yet rode in Ether.
(A 828c)

should be printed just after the letter's speaker has mused on the result of Master having given something other than "Redemption" and says, "I forgot the Redemption and tired – no more –" (A 828a). See YH 2:22, *Life* 2:514, and chapter 3.

18. John Cody, *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson*,

pp. 379–381; Richard Chase, *Emily Dickinson*, pp. 158–159; Charles Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise*, pp. 168, 179; see also Rebecca Patterson, *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*.

19. John Crowe Ransom, "A Poet Restored," in *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard B. Sewall, p. 91.

20. Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, p. 27. David Copperfield's nickname, it should be remembered, was, like that of the speaker of the Master letters, "Daisy." Likewise, Margaret Homans has noted "a literary source in the manipulation of power [similar to that evinced by the speaker of the Master letters] in the relationship between Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester." See *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson*, p. 205.

21. See LF 2–7. Wylder suggests that Dickinson appropriated rhetorical notation to make her punctuation more poetically suggestive. This will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 2.

22. Franklin evidently assumes that the stanza is primary, as is shown by his remarks in a June 5, 1985, letter to Susan Howe: "Doesn't much of your argument depend on your assumption that one (she) reads in lines or parts of lines? What happens to it if the form lurking in the mind is the stanza? Personally I am not convinced that the placement of run on lines is more than arbitrary convenience." See Susan Howe, "Some Notes on Visual Intentionality in Emily Dickinson," *HOW(ever)* 3, no. 4 (1986): 11.

23. I examined this fascicle before beginning to study the letters because I was familiar with the facsimile in Franklin's *Manuscript Books* and wanted to see if the extensive mutilations of this poem would yield any clues about the mutilations of the letters to Austin. Franklin's notes on F 2 state: "Intact when transcribed in 1889 and 1891, this fascicle when indexed about August 1891 had been mutilated, apparently by Mabel Todd, and six poems were missing: 147, 56, 14, 1730, 57, and 1729." Several others have discussed Todd's rewriting the record left by Dickinson. See, for example, R. W. Franklin, "Three Additional Manuscripts," *American Literature* 50 (1978): 113–116; Dorothy Huff Oberhaus, "In Defense of Sue," *Dickinson Studies* 48 (1983): 1–25; Anna Mary Wells, "ED Forgeries," *Dickinson Studies* 35 (1979): 12–16. Though she downplays her mother's alterations, even Bingham admits that in preparing them for publication Loomis Todd "did alter the wording of some of the poems" (AB 335).

24. Of the period 1851–1854, seventy-two of Dickinson's letters to her brother survive; of these, twenty-nine are mutilated. Since my primary subject is Dickinson's relationship with Sue, I focus on Dickinson's writings to and about her. There are two important factors for readers to keep in mind: first, Austin saved nearly all of his letters and only parts of them were mutilated, while the plain statements of Sue and her daughter suggest that quite a few of Dickinson's letters to the former were destroyed; second, after their marriage, the record shows that Emily sent only three pieces of her writing to Austin while she sent four hundred and five letters and poems to Sue. See chapter 5, n16.

25. Interpreting this letter, Jane Eberwein states that Dickinson seems "gleeful over his secret engagement to Susan"; see *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation*, p. 52. However, analyzing the various tones of this letter, Eberwein does not consider Dickinson's characterizing herself as fox and Austin as hound, nor the ways in which the letter has been mutilated. In chapter 4 I discuss problems inherent in assessing Dickinson's tone. Of their meeting in Boston Austin within a month writes Sue: ". . . & no one shall know that you have ever given yourself to me—except those of whom you yourself have told—for *I have never lisped it*" (YH 1:268). Whether he refers simply to their engagement (as some parts of the letter suggest) or also to their physical intimacy (as other parts suggest) is debatable.

26. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, p. 39.

27. Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women*, p. 172. See also Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, pp. 239–253, for descriptions of how this attitude changed in the late nineteenth century. Thomas Higginson's remark about the speculations of "the malignant" is quoted by Millicent Todd Bingham (AB 127).

28. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. All quotations are from the "Same-Sex Intimacy" section of "Outside the Family," pp. 121–130.

29. In both her article "Emily Dickinson's Letters to Sue Gilbert," *Massachusetts Review* 18 (Summer 1977): 197–225, esp. p. 213, and *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 175, Faderman edits out the self-conscious ". . . all these *ugly things*." Although I am discussing a problem with Faderman's essay, I consider her work invaluable and essential to lesbian/feminist studies; her analysis of Bianchi's anxious editing is particularly elucidating, as is Patterson's in *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*. For further analysis of Faderman, see also Vivian Pollak, *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*, p. 79n: "Faderman contends that 'Emily's love letters to Sue were not simply an example of Victorian rhetoric, but neither was this a lesbian relationship as such relationships have been lived through much of our century.' Her argument hinges, however, on the assumption that this relationship was free of guilt and anxiety and 'the need to keep secrets from family and friends.' In essence, she represents Dickinson as an asexual woman."

As I point out in the following paragraph, Dickinson uses a calligraphic strategy for underlining here, in effect italicizing "*ugly things*." In both words, an elaborate tail for the *g* underscores the letters that precede it, calling attention to the words as if they were underlined. Both study of the strokes of the pen and reflection on the content convince me that this calligraphic underlining was deliberate.

30. See particularly Faderman, "Emily Dickinson's Letters to Sue Gilbert," pp. 200–201, 207, 209.

31. Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses*, vol. 1 of *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, esp. pp. 90–106; Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and*

Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America. Readers might also consult Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*.

32. One might think of Stimpson and Rich as representing opposite poles of a continuum of lesbian interpretation. See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Women: Sex and Sexuality*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Ethel Spector Person, pp. 62–91; and Catharine R. Stimpson, "Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, pp. 243–259. Estelle B. Freedman, Barbara C. Gelpi, Susan L. Johnson, and Kathleen M. Weston, eds., *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from SIGNS*, is a useful source for beginning to survey recent lesbian literature.

Pollak also considers Stimpson's definitions for *lesbian* and concludes, "'Carnality,' however, was not the major focus of her relationship with Sue" (*Dickinson*, p. 79); however, Pollak does not take into account the carnal desire expressed in many of Dickinson's letters to Sue (two of which I mention in this paragraph), nor does she modify Stimpson's proposals by pondering them in dialogue with those of Rich, Friedman, Farwell (all considered below).

33. This and the subsequent quotation are from Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.*, pp. 45–46.

34. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle*, p. 103. See also Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'I had two loves separate': The Sexualities of H.D.'s *HER*," in *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. Friedman and DuPlessis, pp. 205–232.

35. "In Defense of Sue," p. 4. Oberhaus echoes Sue's obituary for Dickinson (*Springfield Republican*, May 18, 1886). No less than half the memorial depicts Dickinson the writer. The obituary is quoted by Bianchi in *LL* 100–103.

36. Marilyn Farwell, "Toward a Definition of the Lesbian Literary Imagination," *Signs* 14 (Autumn 1988): 100–118.

37. Though this is by no means an exhaustive list, Dickinson critics whose work seeks to develop a better understanding of the poet's erotic relationships with women include, first, Patterson, *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson and Emily Dickinson's Imagery*; and in subsequent decades (listed in alphabetical order), Paula Bennett, "The Language of Love: Emily Dickinson's Homoerotic Poetry," *Gai Saber* 1, no. 1 (1977): 13–17, "'The Pea That Duty Locks': Lesbian and Feminist-Heterosexual Readings of Emily Dickinson's Poetry," in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow, pp. 104–125, her fifth chapter in *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet*, and, though most of her discussion focuses on Dickinson's supposed relationship with a male master, *My Life a Loaded Gun: Female Creativity and Feminist Poetics*, pp. 15–94; Nadean Bishop, "Renunciation in the Bridal Poems of Emily Dickinson" (paper presented at the National Women's Studies Association Conference, Bloomington, Indiana, May 16–20, 1980); Faderman, "Emily Dickinson's Letters to Sue Gilbert" and *Surpassing the Love of Men*; Judith Farr, "Emily Dickinson's 'Engulfing' Play: *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 231–250; Judy Grahn, "A Heart-Shaped

Journey to a Similar Place," *The Highest Apple: Sappho and the Lesbian Poetic Tradition*, pp. 3–22; Ellen Louise Hart, "The Encoding of Homoerotic Desire: Emily Dickinson's Letters and Poems to Susan Dickinson, 1850–1886," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 251–272; Susan Howe, "Women and Their Effect in the Distance," *Ironwood* 28 (1986): 58–91; Adalaide Morris, "Two Sisters Have I: Emily Dickinson's Vinnie and Susan," *Massachusetts Review* 22 (1981): 323–332, and "'The Love of Thee – a Prism Be': Men and Women in the Love Poetry of Emily Dickinson," in *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*, ed. Suzanne Juhasz, pp. 98–113; Jean McClure Mudge, "Emily Dickinson and 'Sister Sue,'" *Prairie Schooner* 52 (Spring 1977): 90–108; Vivian Pollak, *Dickinson*, esp. pp. 59–82; and Martha Nell Smith, "To Fill a Gap," *San Jose Studies* 13, no. 3 (1987): 3–25, and "Gender Issues in Textual Editing of Emily Dickinson," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 19, nos. 3 and 4 (Fall/Winter 1991): 78–111.

38. This and the subsequent quotation in this paragraph are from Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, p. 66.

39. See Cheryl Walker's discussion of this common subject, "secret sorrow," in nineteenth-century women's poetry in *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900*, pp. 87–116. David S. Reynolds uses Samuel Bowles's phrase "literature of misery" to categorize and analyze primarily prose writings by women of this period. Characterizing women's literature in the American Renaissance, he delineates three categories as most important—"Conventional literature, women's rights fiction, and the literature of misery." Most important, however, he stresses the "ironic, stylized" nature of much of the "literature of misery" and discusses how many women writers used conventional poses to mask expressions of radically subversive ideas. See *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*, pp. 387–437, especially his critique of Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Alcott's *Behind a Mask; or, A Woman's Power* (both recently reprinted by Rutgers Univ. Press). The quotation explaining Dickinson's use of stereotypes is from Reynolds, p. 424. See also Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's discussion of the literary significance and "Victorian iconography of whiteness which underlies Dickinson's metaphorical white dress" in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, p. 620.

40. Thomas Johnson says that "Mrs. Todd mistook the alternate for 'timid' as one for 'blameless' in the line preceding." A glance at the facsimile in the *Manuscript Books* calls this point into serious question. Like the variants for "mystic" and "until," "hallowed" is written directly above (and quite close to) "timid." See F 14, p. 289, and P 271n. On Dickinson's "self-mythologizing" in this poem, see Sandra Gilbert, "The Wayward Nun beneath the Hill: Emily Dickinson and the Mysteries of Womanhood," in *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*, ed. Juhasz, pp. 22–44.

41. See, for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., "Emily

Dickinson," in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, ed. Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 867–873. One might compare their selections, which make it seem as if "Master" and Higginson are Dickinson's primary correspondents, with those made by Peggy McIntosh and Ellen Louise Hart for the *Heath Anthology*, ed. Paul Lauter, 1: 2838–2921. However, Gilbert and Gubar's bibliography (pp. 2399–2400) is far more extensive than that supplied in the *Heath* collection.

42. That Sue was a powerful political influence is plausible when one considers the printings of Dickinson's poems during her lifetime. If we compare the printings Dickinson witnessed to the versions that Sue had in her possession after the poet's death and remember that Sue hosted many an editor at her home, the Evergreens, some of whom printed Dickinson's verse (specifically those of the *Drum Beat*, the *Republican*, and the volume *A Masque of Poets*), it is reasonable to conclude that it was Sue who "turned love to larceny" (see Sue's obituary) and "robbed" (see L 316) Dickinson of select poems, forwarding them to publications. The *Drum Beat* was a Civil War publication used to raise support for Union soldiers. This will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

43. In Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *Emily Dickinson*, the degree of Sue's importance is not acknowledged, although the overprivileging of Mabel Loomis Todd is: "This all-too-well documented love affair between Austin and Mabel is of such vivid human interest that it occasionally threatens to obscure the cold truth: Mrs. Todd never met Emily Dickinson face to face . . . and although she played a central role in preserving Dickinson's work for future readers, neither her character nor her relationship with Austin had any bearing on his sister's poetry" (p. 6). The spectre of Mabel Loomis Todd hangs over most responses to Sue. In "The Upper Story," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1989, pp. 70–71, Mary Jo Salter concludes her poem by reminding readers of Dickinson's love for Sue, yet in an earlier stanza Loomis Todd is mentioned as if she was a primary correspondent. Though a primary player in the posthumous affairs of Dickinson, Loomis Todd cannot be considered an intimate of the poet.

44. Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 569.

45. Stressing the erotic symbolism of Dickinson's imagery, Patterson discusses this poem in *Emily Dickinson's Imagery*, pp. 81–82.

46. See Bennett, *My Life a Loaded Gun*, pp. 64–94.

47. See Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, p. 422. In his analysis of this poem, he points out that Dickinson joins peers like Alice Cary and Lillie Devereux Blake in portraying the suffering of wives.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

49. Walker, *Nightingale's Burden*, p. 88.

50. Richard Sewall, as quoted by Patterson, *Emily Dickinson's Imagery*, pp. xv.

51. Tillie Olsen, *Silences*, p. 6.

52. Willis J. Buckingham, *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s: A Documentary History*, p. xii.

53. Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti.

54. Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Celebration of Emily Dickinson and American Women's Poetry," produced by John Harrington, Poetry-in-the-Round at Seton Hall University, April 10–11, 1986.

55. Jerome Loving, *Emily Dickinson: The Poet on the Second Story*. See Dorothy Oberhaus's review in *American Literature* 61 (1988): 661–663.

56. Rich, *A Wild Patience*, pp. 40–45.

57. Walker, *Nightingale's Burden*, p. 87. For subsequent references in this discussion, see pp. 87–116. The one-woman show is William Luce's *The Belle of Amherst*; Charles Kuralt narrated the sixty-second spot for CBS (it has not been shown, though he has referred to the poet on "CBS Sunday Morning," spring 1985); one of the recordings is a reading by Julie Harris, *Emily Dickinson—A Self-Portrait*; the murder mystery is Jane Langton's *Emily Dickinson Is Dead*; and the cookbook is by Guides at the Dickinson Homestead, *Profile of Emily Dickinson as Cook*.

58. Paul Simon, "The Dangling Conversation," *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme*; William H. Shurr, *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson*.

59. See Marilee Lindemann's analysis in "Women Writers and the American Romance: Studies in Jewett and Cather," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers Univ., 1991), pp. 1–71.

60. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, p. 414.

61. For an illuminating discussion about sexual difference, see Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism*, pp. 3–14. Doane and Hodges focus on differences between male and female, but many of their insights enrich analysis when transposed to discuss the uses of ideologies of difference to evaluate heterosexual and homosexual desires.

62. See the Helms Amendment to the Fiscal Year 1990 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, H.R. 2788. In an astounding denial of its own intolerant agenda, Specifications 2 and 3 proceed, by association, to parallel homoeroticism with various bigotries (denigration of adherents of a particular religion or nonreligion and denigration of a group or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin). For a similar argument exposing the ideological oversimplifications of this amendment, see Catharine R. Stimpson, "President's Column," *MLA Newsletter* 22 (Summer 1990): 3.

63. I have neither the time nor space to cite all the literary examples of homoeroticism (some of Shakespeare's sonnets [e.g., Sonnet 33]), Huck and Jim, the *Pequod's* crew) and sadomasochism (the death of Marlowe's Edward II and the tyranny of Captain Ahab, as well as, if we also refer to psychological brutality, Gilbert Osmond) that would be excluded by this amendment.

64. Heather Findlay, "Is There a Lesbian in This Text? Derrida, Wittig, and the Politics of the Three Women," in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed, pp. 59–69.

65. Here I draw on the ideas of M. M. Bakhtin; see especially *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson.

66. Doane and Hodges, *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference*, pp. 3, 12.

2. Rowing in Eden: Reading Dickinson Reading

1. See, for example, Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, The Nation, and The Continent*, or Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters and The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860*. For poems exploring various physical, emotional, psychic, and mental metaphors of exploration, see, on geography, “We pray – to Heaven –” (F 22; P 489), “Volcanoes be in Sicily” (P 1705); on exploration, “Baffled for just a day or two –” (F 2; P 17), “Who never lost, are unprepared / A Coronet to find!” (F 6; P 73), “Soto! Explore Thyself!” (Set 5; P 832), “I play at Riches – to appease / The Clamoring for Gold –” (F 38; P 801); on discovery, “Taking up the fair Ideal,” (F 19; P 428), “Not to discover weak – / ness is” (Set 7; P 1054), “His Mansion in the Pool” (P 1379), “Eden is that old-fashioned House” (P 1657), “The largest Fire ever / known” (Set 7; P 1114), “Had we known the Ton she bore” (P 1124, variant fourth line), “This Consciousness that / is aware” (Set 6a; P 822), “Finding is the first / Act” (Set 5; P 870), “How far is it to Heaven?” (Set 7; P 929), “Because that you are going” (P 1260); and on that undiscovered, “Soto! Explore Thyself” and “You cannot take itself” (P 1351).

2. Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho 1546–1937*, pp. 317–325.

3. See Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, and S/Z, trans. Richard Miller, p. 4.

4. Miller, *Emily Dickinson*, p. 178.

5. Willis Barnstone, *The Poetic of Ecstasy: Varieties of Ekstasis from Sappho to Borges*, p. 1.

6. Gwendolyn Brooks’s remarks are from her reading at “A Celebration of Emily Dickinson and American Women’s Poetry,” Poetry-in-the-Round at Seton Hall University, April 10, 1986. In the sentence about Dickinson that follows, contemporary poet Susan Howe extends Brooks’s observation in *My Emily Dickinson*, p. 29. Highly allusive, Dickinson often uses reference to the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, Barrett Browning, or some other literary work to illustrate or elaborate her own expression. Sometimes she actually cuts others’ texts and glues or fastens them to her own to create new, humorous texts (see chapter 3 for my critique of the “cartoon” she fashioned by attaching engravings from Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* to “A poor – torn Heart”).

7. Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*, p. 11.

8. Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*, p. 139. “Each and all” purposely echoes Emerson’s poem. Betsy Erkkila has recently ar-

gued that “elitist, antidemocratic values were at the very center” of Dickinson’s work. However, Erkkila relies on the Higginson-Todd-Bingham view of Dickinson and predicates her argument on what Higginson reported about his 1870 visit to the Homestead (L 342a). The liberal Higginson’s elitist views regarding culture are well known, and Erkkila may be conflating his projections with Dickinson’s own attitudes. See “Emily Dickinson and Class,” pp. 14, 23.

9. For some basic information about women’s poetry and the publishing industry, see Emily Stipes Watts, *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945*, p. 65. Also, for extended discussion of Dickinson’s clichéd, conventional poetry, see Dobson, *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence*, pp. 3–5, 131–134.

10. Jauss, *Question and Answer*, pp. 200, 207; for purposes of introducing these ideas to students, see also “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” most recently anthologized in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), pp. 1198–1218.

11. Shurr, *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson*, pp. 18–23. Rebecca West also exemplifies literary equation of sexual experience with another, paradisaical realm:

I was amazed at lovemaking. It was so strange to come, when I was nearly middle-aged, on the knowledge that there was another state of being than any I had known, and that it was the state normal for humanity, that I was a minority who did not know it. It was as if I had learned that there was a sixth continent, which nearly everybody but me and a few others had visited and in which, now I had come to it, I felt like a native, or as if there was another art as well as music and painting and literature, which was not only preached, but actually practised, by nearly everybody, though they were silent about their accomplishment. It was fantastic that nobody should speak of what pervaded life and determined it, yet it was inevitable, for language could not describe it.

From West’s novel, *Cousin Rosamund*, quoted in *The Oxford Book of Marriage*, ed. Helge Rubinstein (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 162–163.

12. See, for example, Juhász, “*The Undiscovered Continent*”: *Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind*, esp. pp. 175–178.

13. Commenting on the “dance mix” versions of his own songs, which some of his fans thought violated their integrity, popular poet Bruce Springsteen unwittingly elucidates the situation of Dickinson’s texts: “I was always so protective of my music that I was hesitant to do much with it at all. Now [post-Arthur Baker’s dance mix production of “Dancing in the Dark”] I feel my stuff isn’t as fragile as I thought.” See Dave Marsh, *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 231. So Dickinson’s poetry, remixed by many an editor, biographer, and critic is not so fragile as Thomas Higginson thought. He re-

5. Upon hearing Dickinson described as “a lady whom people call the *Myth*,” Loomis Todd wrote her parents, “Isn’t that like a book? So interesting” (*YH* 2:357).

6. Carol Shields, *Swann*, pp. 269, 26. This novel also renders a lucid, exciting critique of the misguided reverence (in search of originary moments) for manuscripts discussed in my preface and chapter 2; see *ibid.*, pp. 192, 310–313.

7. For brief reference to this, see Patterson, *Emily Dickinson’s Imagery*, p. 167. For a more exhaustive analysis of the Gunderode-von Armin relationship, see Elke Fredericksen and Monika Shafi, “‘Sich im Unbekannten suchen gehen’: Bettina von Arnims ‘Die Gunderode’ als weibliche Utopie,” *Frauenspache—Frauenliteratur?: Fur und Wider einer Psychoanalyse literarischer Werke*, pp. 54–61.

8. In *Comic Power*, coauthored with Juhasz and Miller, I interrogate Dickinson’s “cartooning” at length.

9. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, p. 47.

10. Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” p. 21.

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