"Edited by Her Friends": Claiming Posthumous Poetry in Nineteenth-Century America

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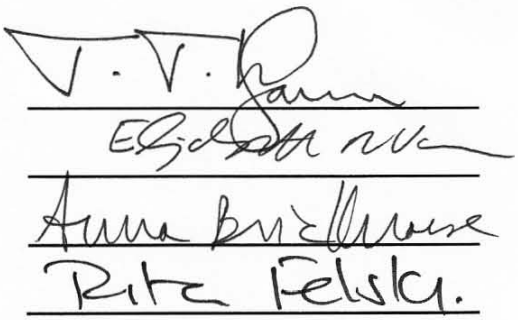

Abstract

"'Edited by Her Friends': Claiming Posthumous Poetry in Nineteenth-Century America" argues that nineteenth-century editorial practice provides a unique window into understanding the literary value of a text for its readers. By reading posthumously published poetry through its editing, my project imagines historical reading contexts for cases where stable poetic transmission seems most challenged, the author most passive, and the editor most powerful. My dissertation uncovers a tradition of posthumous poetry, including the work of Lucretia Davidson, Joseph Kent Gibbons, Ethel Lynn Beers, and Emily Dickinson, and elucidates this under-appreciated strain of nineteenth-century American poetry in which editorial practice and the work of mourning intertwine, not only in elegy and commemorative poetry, but also in the very idea of preserving and extending the memory and voice of the dead author.

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Introduction

Many poets attain their greatest fame after death. Indeed, the idea of fame continuing and growing beyond one's natural life, for many, defines success as a poet. Extreme cases of this include the rare poet whose work is only "discovered" after death, and first published posthumously. Two great poets in the past century gained their fame for work that was published after their deaths: the World War I poet Wilfred Owen, and Sylvia Plath. In each case, the poet had a publishing career and some fame before death, but the author's death has since been assimilated into the reading of the poetry, forming an essential framework within which the work has been received. The phenomenon of the posthumously discovered poet formed a distinct although eclectic tradition in England and the United States in the late 18th and 19th centuries.[1] While acknowledging that every poet is eventually a dead poet, this project documents a flourishing of posthumous poetry throughout the nineteenth century in the United States, connecting this flourishing to historical, social, and aesthetic conditions by reconstructing these poets' appeal to readers.

Posthumous poetry was common in nineteenth-century America, particularly, because of two conditions: the widespread practice of amateur poetry writing and the grim facts of common early death and high general mortality. While references to "the culture of death" or "the cult of mourning" are commonplace in studies of the period, their significance can be easily underestimated. Demographers estimate that throughout the nineteenth century in America "between one fifth and one third of all children died

before age ten" (qtd. in Laderman 24). Overall, eight to ten percent of youth who survived childhood died before the age of twenty-one (24). "For females in Massachusetts in 1849, life expectancy at birth was between 36.3 years and 38.3 years, while for males the age was slightly lower" (qtd. in Laderman 25). While these figures resemble those in Europe at the same time, social historians have suggested that the incidence of "old world" disease had a unique resonance for colonists and early Americans. The suggestion is that antebellum Americans may have been surprised when the terra nova did not seem to inoculate them from the European plagues of tuberculosis and smallpox (Rothman 15). While avoiding exceptionalist thinking, my work here assumes a connection between the incidence of early death and the common metaphors of age and vitality applied to the American republic and its cultural prospects.

Despite the ugliness of disease and suffering, the Euro-American nineteenth century was "the age of the beautiful death," dominated by a Christian view of death as a mere "staging post" toward reunion in the next world (Aries 409). Aestheticizing death offers a measure of human control in the face of the terrifying and unpredictable. Aestheticized death forms part of what Ann Douglas terms "the feminization of American culture," brought about by the cultural influence of increasingly powerless clergymen and increasingly educated women. Part of this "feminization" includes the "domestication of death," which Douglas argues resulted from the efforts to orient American culture around women and toward religion. Although Douglas' overall argument unnecessarily vilifies both sentimental culture and femininity, her concept of the "domestication of death" provides a helpful context for understanding posthumous poetry as particular to nineteenth-century America.

Within this context, posthumous poetry, I argue, straddles the private/public binary, bringing private manuscripts into print, where the poet's familiar circle extends, at least in imagination, to include his or her public audiences. Readers of posthumous poetry are drawn into a fiction of intimacy with the poet while also being limited by the poet's ultimate absence in death. Posthumous poetry also bridges communities, making available the concerns and interests of the poets' family and friends to the interpretive frameworks of the larger networks of region and nation. For example, Max Cavitch has shown in his history of early American elegy the connections between the work of mourning and the work of antebellum nationalism, and the changing economics of the literary marketplace. Posthumous poetry alludes to national narratives as well as intimate ones, echoing cultural anxieties about the developing projects of national growth and of national literature. In the following chapters, I argue that nineteenth-century Americans maintained a special interest in the poetic utterances of the dead because these utterances represented their own experiences of loss, which took the forms of both personal grief and mass death, but also anticipated loss in the fear of political dissolution, twinned loss and continuity in the post-revolutionary relationship to English culture, and anxiety over the development of a native poetic tradition.

A robust tradition of nineteenth-century American poetry did indeed develop, but through the twentieth century much of the range and significance were forgotten, as once-major figures were actively expunged from the canon by modernist reaction against the sentimental.[2] Twentieth-century scholarship tended increasingly to focus narrowly on Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson as hyper-canonical, proto-modernist figures whose ambitious and formally experimental poetry appealed to modern sensibilities, yielded

profitably to New Critical reading practices, and bolstered a progress narrative of American literary history. After some generations of neglect, scholars have now begun to pay more attention to the range and variety of nineteenth-century American poetry. Growing from the 1980s turn to "recover" forgotten women's writing, a spate of anthologies of nineteenth-century American poetry (six published between 1996 and 2001) has made the archive more accessible than ever.[3] Despite the concern that the recovery effort remains "stubbornly locked in the category of anthologies and editions" (Loeffelholz 297), there has been a small renaissance of critical writing about nineteenth-century American poetry beyond Whitman and Dickinson.[4]

My study situates itself within this growing critical field, and shares its interests in recovering popular print culture, historicizing reading practices, and uncovering the social significance of poetic production and consumption. My work also depends upon the shared diagnosis that "early American poetry […] constitutes one of the last truly 'separate spheres' in the study of American culture" (Cavitch 13). Too often, poetry is nearly or entirely left out of considerations of American literary history. Poetry study is widely considered to require more specialized training than does prose study, resulting in the remarkable number of English department colleagues who declare that they don't "do" poetry. This commonplace forms the basis for Joseph Harrington's article "Why American Poetry Is Not American Literature," in which he outlines the frequent but unexamined claim that prose enjoys "privileged access to history." The special intellectual and practical requirements to study any genre, of any period, emerge through contact with the source material and its context. Criticism gives us best access to history when criticism acknowledges the barriers to understanding, and persistently dismantles

them.

Despite recent efforts to recover nineteenth-century American poetry, an uneasy problem persists. Even as scholars of nineteenth-century American literature and culture argue for renewed attention to poetry, those same scholars often acknowledge that real barriers exist for reading and interpreting this material in a historically sensitive fashion. Many critics admit that they cannot claim the poetry they study is "good." They stop short of defending the formal accomplishments of popular nineteenth-century American poets as "great art" and would prefer to read them merely for political content. Many critics admit that often they find it hard to judge the good from the bad, since the sentimentality and formal verse conventions can render all of this material same-sounding to modern ears. The problem of nineteenth-century American poetry, as these critics have articulated it and as I see it, is that even those academics who feel they should read it don't quite know how to.

Many scholars of nineteenth-century poetry, including Bennett, Richards, and McGann, acknowledge that the successful reading of writers like Sarah Piatt, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon requires some kind of aesthetic training on the part of the critic.[5] Frequently this practice is noted modestly as "reading the work on its own terms." The modesty of this claim could not be more misleading. How might a present-day reader discover a historical work's "own" terms? The task gains complexity when, because texts' meanings are socially produced, a historical work's own terms spring not only from "the spirit in which the author writ" but also "the spirit in which its readers read." Indeed, the central challenge of reception studies is the lack of direct

access to readers' thoughts and perceptions, and historic reception studies struggle with inadequacy of documentary evidence. Nonetheless, the efforts to encounter fairly and better appreciate nineteenth-century American poetry proceed through careful and continued attention to the work's initial production and reception, along the way reconstructing the era's implicit conventions and values in order to understand the historical function of poetry. In addition to drawing on period criticism, my work proceeds with attention to editing as the meeting place for textual production and reception, where we can see foregrounded the aspects of poetry that appealed to its original readers.

The move to recover reading conventions along with texts resembles Jane Tompkins' seminal argument in *Sensational Designs*. Tompkins argues that the historical function of sentimentalism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, has been obscured for later twentieth-century readers because the fate of sentimentalism has caused a slippage in signifiers. What sentimentalism meant to nineteenth-century novel readers, Tompkins argues, is difficult but important for modern scholars of the period to understand. A similar argument applies to attempts to read and understand recovered nineteenth-century poetry, although with the added challenge that the reading of verse has moved from its former place in the center of cultural life. Poetry's highly mediated presentation on the page, its form and music, and its insistent reference to convention and tradition signal its distance from the present moment in ways even *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s tearful urchins do not. The cultural work argument intensifies for nineteenth-century poetry, whose estrangement from the contemporary is marked at every turn.

One possible avenue for understanding historic reading conventions has not been much explored by literary scholars, but is quite familiar to textual editors and historians of the book. The work of editing poetry for publication involves numerous judgments about selection, organization, presentation, correctness, readability and appropriateness; all of these judgments have as much to do with cultural forces as with any kind of timeless editorial standards or sheer editorial idiosyncrasy. The view of editing as interpretation elaborated in the work of Jerome McGann suggests that editorial principles—as evinced by the physical instantiation of a text—can themselves be examined as cultural production. Not only does the editor exert certain values in transforming a text from one physical medium to another, but the reception of the eventual form of that text, with its editorial values implicit on the very pages, cannot easily be considered separately, in the mind of the reader, from the author's original production. This means that while editorial work has been understudied in its role as an agent in creating textual meaning, the significance of editorial principles in the reception of individual texts can hardly be overstated.

Nearly all modern scholarship on Emily Dickinson has rejected the early editing of her poems on the grounds of "editorial interference." The 1890s work of Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson renders Dickinson's poetry more regular in syntax, meter, and rhyme; decorous in punctuation, spelling, and visual layout; and conventional in titling, theme, and presentation in book form. These features mask the qualities which 20th-century scholars of Dickinson value most: the startling originality in language; the engaging ambiguities in interpretation; and the prophetic modernity of her vision. The rejection of the 1890s Dickinson has inspired remarkable,

valuable, and necessary work, not least the monumental editions of Thomas Johnson (1955), R.W. Franklin (1981, 1998), and the in-progress *Dickinson Electronic Archives*, under the direction of Martha Nell Smith and Marta Werner. Although the 1890s editions of Dickinson do not meet current standards for a scholarly edition, they are nonetheless important objects of study in their own right. After all, if Dickinson's poems had not been published in just this way, it is possible that we may not even know her name today.

Editorial practice creates texts for readers. When writers like Emily Dickinson die and leave behind unpublished manuscripts, editors (often working at the request of friends and family) act to bring these texts to wider audiences and to preserve the work and memory of the lost person. When scholarly editorial theory was established in the 20th century, it defined itself against the work of prior generations of editors. As a result, a general understanding of nineteenth-century editors grew and has persisted, in which they are typically dismissed or vilified as capricious amateurs who mangled and distorted literary texts as often as they preserved and propagated them. This prevailing notion of nineteenth-century editors has its prime example in Dickinson's early editors, who are sometimes characterized as having done permanent violence to Dickinson's legacy through not only their textual interventions but also through the impressions of her created in those early editions. The work of these early editors, while necessary to bring her to a public audience, has come to be seen as the defining outrage of a century of Dickinson criticism, and the example par excellence of the damaging manipulations of under-theorized, amateur textual editors. However, if one responds to those editions in historical context, principles emerge. Reconstructing these principles--conventions

editors applied to unconventional poems and poets--tell us much about how editors shaped poetry in anticipation of readerly value judgments. Understanding period-specific aesthetic and editorial values provides an important key to understanding the cultural work poetry may have done, or been expected to do.

Editing for publication also comprises the process by which personal poetry becomes public. An edition encodes the editor's response to the poetry as an exemplar first audience, enabling all future readings, if not largely determining them. Although a poetic work may appear in different editions over time, later generations of readers continue to be influenced, often unconsciously, by the work's original moment of contact with a public audience. When Dickinson's first editors published her poetry as "edited by her friends," they characterized their involvement with the work as an extension of their membership in an affective network that included the poet herself. The edition then offers Dickinson's writing to the public through a sort of proxy intimacy. The relationship between editor and author, and, by extension, including the reader, figures prominently in posthumous poetry, which makes especially visible these conditions that exist in all editions.

In my project, I read published nineteenth-century American poetry through its editing, especially choosing cases where stable poetic transmission seems most endangered, the author most passive, and the editor most powerful. In each of my chapters, I explore the intertwining of editorial practice and the work of memorializing, present in not only elegy and commemorative poetry, but also in the very idea of preserving and extending the memory and voice of the dead author. By examining the writings of and criticism on Lucretia Davidson, various real and imagined Civil War

poets, and the early editing and reception of Emily Dickinson, this dissertation outlines a period's grappling with changing responses to loss, grief, and mourning, and a nation consolidating and extending its literary and cultural identity in concert with all of these.

Because of my focus on the physical form a text assumes through its editing, I proceed with awareness of poetry's print and non-print media in nineteenth-century America. While conventions of literary study tend to privilege the single-author volume, which asserts the coherence of an author's writing and the identification of the poet with her poetry, the majority of poetry encounters occurred in the disparate and overlapping forms of manuscript, performance (pedagogical or otherwise), ephemera (like almanacs and broadsides), periodicals, anthologies, commonplace books and scrapbooks.[6] These different media frequently offer a contrasting or parallel sense of authorship in comparison with the single-author print volume. Manuscript circulation of poetry forms the background to the cases of Davidson and Dickinson, scrapbooks for Civil War poetry, and anthologies, periodical circulation, and reviewing for all three chapters. My work attends to the physical state in which a text finds its readers, and strives for sensitivity in considering the nuances among poetry's various media.

My first chapter, "Lucretia Davidson's Posthumous Poetry," studies the writings and reception of Lucretia Davidson, who died at seventeen a prolific but unpublished poet. Davidson's writing was published posthumously in 1829, and enjoyed a few decades of transatlantic reputation, only for the author to be later remembered most acutely as a prototype for Twain's marvelously parodic Emmeline Grangerford. Davidson's presentation in print continually emphasizes her youth, precocity, illness, and, especially, her early death from tuberculosis. Editorial insistence on biographical

framing devices in *Amir Khan and Other Poems* leads to a compounded sense, for readers, of the aesthetic importance of the doomed female poet conflated with the speaker of her poems.

I read the reception of these poetic remains as continuous with a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English "dead poet" tradition delineated by Robert Southey in his editorial work and essay *The Uneducated Poets.* Southey promotes the poetic riches of this rougher school, advocating readerly generosity in light of posthumous poetry's unmet potential and lack of polish. The spirit of Southey's counsel, as well as his influential writing on Davidson's own biography, animates the continuing conversation over the place of Davidson's poetry in an emerging American canon. Identification with European tradition is reinforced by editor Samuel Morse's choice of the orientalist epic "Amir Khan" to head the collection, an association continued by Southey's early review of the volume.

Between 1835 and 1850, Davidson's repackaged and anthologized poetry contributes to the period's consolidation of a native poetic tradition. I argue that the figure of the dead girl with her unrealized potential offers a fitting analogy to the plight of the nation struggling to sustain its own idealistic endowment, even as the circulation of her poetry attests to the productions of its native talent. Later patriotic reading of Davidson's poetry can also be seen as a response to lingering anxiety over the loss of the mother country through the Revolution and the War of 1812, a decisive battle of which was actually fought during Davidson's girlhood in front of her Plattsburg, NY, home. The imaginative connection with a historic time and place, offered by the "speaking dead" of Davidson and her poetic personas, provides one of the chief pleasures of reading

posthumous poetry. Davidson's poetry prompts the construction of riddles or puzzles, in response to the paradox of the speaking dead, a feature which recurs in later examples of posthumous poetry.

The appeal of the "speaking dead" figures largely in my middle chapter, "Newspaper Waifs and the Fallen Poet-Soldier: Claiming Civil War Poetry." This chapter examines the construction of the figure of the fallen poet soldier, and the related matter of poems anonymized and "orphaned" by the processes of wartime periodical republication. In the memorial volume of one actual fallen poet-soldier, Joseph Kent Gibbons, biography frames and guides interpretation of the few poems, exemplifying what Alice Fahs termed "the sentimental soldier" and codifying private mourning in order to assign national meaning to the soldier's death. Civil War poetry's particular framing narratives (about inspiration, composition, and discovery) and authorial misattributions suggest the creation of a mythic subject who speaks from the grave, conveying essential information about the emotional experience of war.

I focus on the poem "The Picket-Guard," written by New Yorker Ethelinda Beers and first published under her initials in 1861*;* in subsequent periodical and anthology reprintings the poem was attributed to various "fallen poet-soldiers." Dispute over the correct provenance of the poem played out in letters and opinion pieces in periodicals into the early 20th century. This controversy exemplifies not only a sectional culture war, and how a woman was denied the authorship of her poem, but also the editorial means by and affective ends to which that denial occurred. Editors in effect re-author the poem with the framing fiction that enhances the poem's perceived subject matter. Such poems are suggestively named "newspaper waifs" for the way re-publication separates them

from their author/parent. This anonymized poetry of the war circulates through periodicals and personal exchange in ways that draw attention to the concern for both the anonymous dead and the orphans of war. The genre of the "dead soldier poem," I argue, serves as a cultural proxy for the displaced war dead in the minds of mourners. The analogizing of war orphans and anonymized periodical poetry supports my argument that nineteenth-century poetry's circulation operates meaningfully with reference to affective ties and emotional work at the level of the personal and the communal.

My final chapter, "Emily Dickinson's Posthumous Poetry," examines the work of Dickinson's early editors, and argues for the significance of their editorial choices in Dickinson's early reception. Despite the modern characterization of Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson as the ultimate bowdlerizers, their work brought Dickinson before an enthusiastic public, made her writing available to subsequent generations, and set the horizons for how Dickinson's difficult writing could be widely appreciated. Higginson aptly names Dickinson's art "poetry of the portfolio," placing her within a tradition which normally would have excluded the readers of a mass-market volume, enacting again posthumous poetry's offering of imagined intimacy. The need for such strong editorial influence resulted from the fact that Dickinson died without making provision for the publication of her manuscripts. Posthumeity constructs Dickinson as a necessarily "edited" author, even though her case simply makes obvious the mediated condition of all writing.

I argue for the significance of Dickinson's participation in a tradition of posthumous poetry, with which readers would have associated her. Aspects of her 1890 *Poems* and of their reception suggest correlations with earlier posthumous poets: an

investment in the fantasy of the speaking dead; a fascination with the possibilities of biographical reading; frustration at the inaccessibility of the lost author; and pleasure in the discernment and solving of mysteries or puzzles, termed in Dickinson studies "the omitted center" or "impacted poems."[7] This study aims to provide new contexts for understanding not only Dickinson's early reception, but to shed new light on her well-known thematics of death and the abiding interest scholars have taken in her manuscripts.

My work contributes to a growing wave of publications interested in contextualizing the major poets—Whitman, Dickinson, and Poe--of nineteenth-century American poetry. Edward Whitley's study *American Bards* examines alternative possibilities to Whitman's claim to the title of national poet. Meredith McGill and Eliza Richards re-cast Poe's reputation in the context of his participations in transatlantic periodical publishing and poetess culture, respectively. A number of studies of Dickinson have explored the ways she was representative of her time and place. Rather than stressing Dickinson's undeniable exceptionality, these studies use her as a vehicle to explore neglected corners of nineteenth-century American culture. Dickinson's relationship with popular poetic culture has been partially documented through source and influence studies such as Jack Capp's *Emily Dickinson's Reading* and Barton Levi St. Armand's *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture.* More recent books seek to situate Dickinson in relation to her contemporaries. Petrino connects Dickinson with other poets in use of genre (Sigourney and the child elegy), symbolism (Osgood and the language of flowers), or politics (Jackson and the challenges of female authorship). Loeffelholz's *From School to Salon* features a chapter on Dickinson and Jackson among chapters on other nineteenth-century American women poets, rendering Dickinson one of many.

These studies have found that Dickinson resembles other nineteenth-century poets, and, perhaps more interestingly, that they resemble her. What began as an effort to understand Dickinson more fully has resulted in an effort to recover nineteenth-century American poetry, especially that of women poets. Anthologies edited by Walker (1992) and Bennett (2003), among others, attest to this renewed interest. There are factors besides individual genius attendant on the positive reception of Emily Dickinson's poetry in the 1890s. By reading poets whose life, publication, writings, or reception provide analogies to those of Dickinson, this dissertation begins to flesh out a context within which the poet we know now as Dickinson was created for public consumption, as well as delineate the unexamined tradition of posthumous poetry in nineteenth-century America.

My interventions in Dickinson studies depart from this desire to first understand Dickinson as one of many. My effort is to think about how her original readers would have encountered her, not just as something novel, but also how they might have classified her and grouped her with known categories. The fact of her posthumous publication is pivotal in later critical understanding of her attitude toward publication, the status of her manuscript circulation, and the meaning of her poetry, yet none to my knowledge have considered how her posthumeity might have influenced early reading of her. Indeed, early reviews show an interest in the Dickinsonian qualities which were closely associated with posthumous poetry: curiosity about her life and her biography's relationship to her poetry; the perception of the prophetic qualities in her poetry which carries her voice past her lifetime; the status of her publication as keepsake and material culture of mourning. My work sees Dickinson as part of continuities prior to her, not

through influence study or thematic concerns, but in terms of the categories and conventions by which readers might have made sense of and enjoyed her poetry.

Placing Dickinson in a longer tradition of manuscript circulation can help us understand the ways in which she was representative of her time as well as better perceive her true innovations. The category of posthumous poetry depends on the separation of manuscript and print poetry, and their associations with private and public, ephemeral and permanent, idiosyncratic and conventional. Deeper engagement with particular editorial practices can illuminate for scholars of nineteenth-century poetry not only the relationship between manuscript and print, but also the period-specific values shaping poetry for public consumption. Unpacking the implications of Dickinson's place as a special manuscript poet opens up new possibilities for understanding the cultural work of nineteenth-century American poetry more generally.

Dickinson's posthumeity works more subtly than that of Davidson or the fallen poet soldiers, but it is only against their backdrop that we can start to clearly see it. Dickinson's way of death did not itself have special meaning in her early publication and reception, although she has since been thoroughly autopsied by scholars seeking to explain her work in part by reference to her ailments, real or perceived.[8] Dickinson we now consider a poet who had coherent career of her own fashioning, but this view was not instantly available upon her first publication. Instead, the perception of Dickinson's self-fashioning emerged gradually through the tradition of generous reading advocated early by Southey and reinforced by Emerson and Higginson. When seen in context, Dickinson's editors appear in their textual interventions both continuous with prior

editorial practice yet also mild, sensitive, and thoughtful in their choices. Similarly, the interest in Dickinson's anonymous publication of "Success," one of her Civil War poems, becomes noteworthy when considered against the backdrop of the creation of the fallen poet soldier and the newspaper waif. Dickinson's heretofore unexamined participation in the "culture of reprinting" gives us a further way to see her as part of her time.

My work's trajectory angles through disparate areas of the field, connecting them in new ways. Contextualizing Dickinson within a tradition of posthumous poets allows new views of a well-studied canonical author, while using her as a lens onto less known areas of the archive of American poetry. My work on nineteenth-century American poetry contributes a new method for reading works "on their own terms," through their editing, yoking awareness of media and editing to considerations of the aesthetic hurdles involved for contemporary readers looking back. Recovering not only forgotten poetry but also lost ways of meaning, my work aims to restore understanding of the social function of poetry in the past. While the focus on posthumous poetry practically isolates the domains of manuscript and print, author and editor, living and dead, it also enables a fresh understanding of the cultural work of sentimentalism, the aesthetic expressions of the "culture of death" and "cult of mourning," and the participation of the memorial impulse in personal, literary, and national contexts.

Chapter 1

Lucretia Davidson's Posthumous Poetry

"The name of Lucretia Davidson is familiar to all readers of poetry."

--Edgar Allan Poe, *Graham's Magazine,* 1841.

Lucretia Davidson is one of the many ghosts of American literary history. Once widely known and well regarded as an important American poet, she has been forgotten as a result of the processes of literary history and cultural change. Even when we remember her name, as certain feminist and historicist scholars have done in efforts to recover women and/or popular writers of the past and restore them to their rightful place in literary history, such recovery comes with but a shadow of its former meaning, lacking the substance and familiarity with which her initial audiences embraced the original work. To say Davidson, who died young and became famous posthumously, is a ghost is more than an inevitable pun. I argue that current understandings of the canon of nineteenth-century American poetry are haunted, and that her absence is a faint, indistinct presence that disturbs our status quo. Appreciation of Davidson's posthumously published poetry, defined by its author's death as both evidence of her absence and of her lingering presence, reveals some of the aesthetic preoccupations of nineteenth-century American poetry, which are in many ways distinct from those of contemporary academic readers.[9] To attempt to read Davidson's poetry on its own terms, to attempt to discover those terms, is the project of this chapter.

Reading Davidson on her own terms substantiates a number of claims. Davidson, like Emily Dickinson, was constructed as an author chiefly through the posthumous

publication of her poetry. In fleshing out prior analogues to Dickinson's seemingly peculiar publication scenario, I hope to clarify the ways in which the public construction of Dickinson authorial persona participated in a recognizable tradition of posthumous poetry. Reading Davidson also provides an outline of the likely pleasures of reading posthumous poetry, much of which materialize through the work of editors who bring these texts before the reading public. The meanings of "Lucretia Davidson," both her writing and her persona, changes over time. They initially reflect a European-identified, orientalist Romanticism; later, an allegory of post-revolutionary national grief and anxiety; lastly, Davidson's figure evokes a fascination with the "speaking dead," who can connect the present day with a historical time and place.

For most, reading Davidson today is likely to result in a quick cycle of morbid fascination, uncomfortable laughter, and critical dismissal. Like her co-regionalist and near contemporary Lydia Huntley Sigourney, Davidson wrote many occasional poems, such as "On the Death of an Infant," published in 1829:

> Sweet child, and has thou gone, for ever fled!
> Low lies thy body in its grassy bed;
> But thy freed soul swift bends its flight through air,
> Thy heavenly Father's gracious love to share.
>
> And now, methinks, I see thee clothed in white,
> Mingling with saints, like thee, celestial bright. –
> Look down, sweet angel, on thy friends below,
> And mark their trickling tears of silent woe.

The initial exclamation, the reliable Christianity of the body/soul dichotomy, actual angels, silent tears, and (don't forget!) the overwrought sentimentalism of the subject matter: poems like "On the Death of an Infant" practically exemplify "bad poetry" to most academic readers nowadays. Many readers of nineteenth-century American literature will immediately be reminded of another poem written by a girl, on the death of another child: "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd."

> And did young Stephen sicken,
>
> And did young Stephen die?
>
> And did the sad hearts thicken,
>
> And did the mourners cry?
>
> […]
>
> They got him out and emptied him;
>
> Alas it was too late;
>
> His spirit was gone for to sport aloft
>
> In the realms of the good and great.

"If Emmeline Grangerford could make poetry like that before she was fourteen, there ain't no telling what she could a done by and by," the protagonist tells us in Chapter 17 of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In fact, many scholars to whom I initially describe my research interests associate Davidson with Emmeline Grangerford, the parodic poetess of Mark Twain's novel.

The association of Davidson with Emmeline Grangerford is more than coincidental, and shouldn't be too easily dismissed. I, like others, have been tempted to assume that Twain modeled Emmeline in part at least on Davidson, but scholars hold that

Julia A. Moore, the "Sweet Singer of Michigan," was the likely direct inspiration. Nonetheless, the resemblances are striking. Emmeline Grangerford has served as a helpful placeholder for contemporary efforts to "recover" the general figure of the nineteenth-century poetess. In Cheryl Walker's *Nightingale's Burden*, Twain's parody signals the cohesion of the poetess figure in public understanding, and a consensus about the character and quality of her poetry (23-4). Mary Louise Kete notes in the opening to *Sentimental Collaborations,* which is in part a serious consideration of nineteenth-century amateur poetry of mourning, that "for all intents and purposes, Twain's parody had fully replaced the original" (xiii). As Kete notes, Twain's poetess-persona has been anthologized separately from its prose context (I recall reading the "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd" in my undergraduate American literature survey), appears in the Library of America's two-volume anthology *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* (ed. John Hollander), and also warrants an un-ironic bibliographic entry in Laura Mandell's expansive digital project, *The Poetess Archive.* In addition to functioning anthologically like a real poet, Emmeline Grangerford serves variously as critical shorthand for, and self-critiquing example of, sentimentalism, the cult of mourning, the cliché of consumptive literature, the poetess, bad poetry, or just poetry itself.[10] As an important gateway to these subjects for contemporary readers, both academic and lay, it remains to be seen how we can read fellow poetess Davidson alongside or through the satirical impulse that forms many contemporary readers' point of access to the world of poetic convention she inhabited.

I. Life, Death, and the Davidson Family

Lucretia Maria Davidson was born in 1808 in Plattsburg, New York. Her family's house was situated on the western shore of Lake Champlain, next door to a prominent local family, the Kent-Delords. Living so near the Canada border, both families experienced hardship during the War of 1812, including British occupation of their homes, witnessing decisive navy battles fought just beyond their front yards. According to published biographies, even very early in Lucretia's life her family was aware of her artistic potential, and of her need for formal education.[11] Unlike most of the other women in her large family, Lucretia was sent to school. From the age of four she attended Plattsburg Academy. At age nine she wrote her first poem, "Epitaph on a Robin." She wrote constantly, with great improvement, and by fifteen was writing ambitious, long poems and romances set in the past of the upstate New York landscape. Her achievements and abilities came to the attention of family friend Moss Kent, an area circuit court judge, who petitioned her parents to allow him to provide for her education. Kent arranged for the sixteen-year-old to enroll in the fall of 1824 at the rigorous and progressive Emma Willard Seminary in Troy, New York. She thrived intellectually but her health suffered, and in the spring of 1825 she was again pulled out of school. She recovered and went back to school, this time to a boarding school, closer to home in Albany. She didn't finish the term, returned home, and was sick until her death a few months later.

Most of the major biographies portray this history as an implicit critique of female education, a struggle between the cultivation of intellect and maintenance of health that Judge Kent, Davidson's parents, and educators are felt to have mismanaged. Despite her frequent illness and her scholastic engagements, Davidson wrote prolifically until her

death. When she died of pulmonary tuberculosis in August 1825, just shy of her seventeenth birthday, she left behind a grieving family and a mass of unpublished poetry manuscripts.[12] It is unclear which, if any, of those original manuscripts survive.[13] At her parents' instigation and with the help of Moss Kent, Samuel F.B. Morse was enlisted to write a "biographical sketch" of Davidson and make a selection from her writings for publication. *Amir Khan and other Poems* was published in 1829 by Carvill in New York.

The Davidson family was to know more loss after their daughter Lucretia's death. The elder Davidsons had ten children, and survived eight of them. Another daughter, Margaret, was a toddler when Lucretia died, and eerily followed her older sister's fate. Margaret reportedly spoke in verse from a young age, and, in a parental response to the tragic case of Lucretia, was kept away from school and educated at home to protect her health. She was greatly encouraged in her writing by her family, and even struck up a literary correspondence with famed novelist and columnist Catharine Maria Sedgwick, who had written a biography of Lucretia. Despite parental attempts to keep her healthy, Margaret experienced repeated illness and eventually died of pulmonary tuberculosis at the age of fifteen, also leaving a huge number of unpublished poetry manuscripts. A biography written by Washington Irving and selection of her poetry were published in 1841. Thereafter, the two sisters' volumes were frequently gathered in a single binding, and they were often written of and anthologized together, as if they were one person.

The coincidence of the two sisters becoming posthumously famous poets has drawn attention to the influence and character of their mother, Margaret Miller Davidson. The Morse-authored biography gives ample, perhaps even apologetic, credit to Mrs. Davidson for much of its information. Indeed, a few critics credit Mrs. Davidson as the

true editor of her daughters' works. The first prominent review of *Amir Khan and Other Poems*, by Robert Southey in the *Quarterly Review,* turns Lucretia's death into a cautionary tale for parents of "overexcited" but weakly constituted geniuses, implying that Mrs. Davidson should have done more to limit her daughter's physical and mental exertions.[14] In a similar vein, critics in the modern era condemned such sentimental figures as the Davidsons with assessments such as this (Pattee 376):

> [T]wo sensitive, highly wrought children with a neurotic, overreligious, oversentimental mother, they needed not so much a diet of the English poets as a life of exercise in the open air. Two hothouse plants killed by a hothouse regime.

Even in the recent era of sentimentalism recovered, Mary Loeffelholz picks up this strand of criticism by titling her chapter "Who Killed Lucretia Davidson?" Suspicions about "a stage mother" seem to receive confirmation with the knowledge that Mrs. Davidson had her own literary ambitions. In addition to shepherding her daughters into print, she published a volume of her own writing in 1843. Finally, according to her daughters' biographies and her own writing, she was chronically ill most of her adult life. This fact might have been interpreted in the nineteenth century as due to the genetics of diseases like tuberculosis, and might in ours be interpreted similarly as a symptom of mental illness like hypochondria, Munchausen syndrome, or Munchausen-by-proxy. Of course, these are at best tantalizing speculations, and, at worst, gendered interpretations that would unlikely ever be crafted to explain a male poet's successes or to criticize an ambitious father. Mrs. Davidson certainly influenced her daughter's poetry and

posthumous publication, and the perception of her and their relationship does, ultimately, form an important aspect of the Davidson daughters' reception history.

It's easy, tempting, and arguably appropriate for critical and scholarly attention to come to rest on the irresistibly suggestive Davidson family biography. Indeed, the Davidson publication and reception history shows that "[t]he Davidson female triad was ripe for representation, offering up sensational and sentimental possibilities: lovely, sickly women; the omnipresent gleam of the afterworld; and a feverish devotion to poetic production" (Ashworth 420). Representations indeed proliferated, from the biographical sketches prefacing their editions and dominating their reviews, to the actual packaging of textual "remains" as a memorial to the dead. Biographical sketches nearly always accompany the poetry, or stand alone in its stead, in periodical or anthological representations of Lucretia Davidson. With few exceptions, these biographical facets occupy the majority of recent scholarly considerations of Davidson by Walker, Loeffelholz, Ashworth, Vincent, and Lawlor. Critical pre-occupation with Davidson's biography is unsurprising, given its "interesting" nature (the word most frequently applied to Davidson's life story by her contemporaries) and by the bibliographical prominence of the "biographical sketch" in nearly all of her published works.

A final point about Davidson's affective life and its significance in her success as a posthumous poet: publication of her poetry was brought about through the agency of "friends."[15] The affective network among author, editor, and intermediaries is foregrounded in the use of the term, which in the nineteenth century connoted "people who act in your best interest," and included family members as well as those not necessarily on intimate terms. Chief among these "friends" was Mrs. Davidson, whom

Morse credits with supplying him with the biographical information for the 1829 edition. The title page of the 1841 edition, with a biography by Catharine Maria Sedgwick, declares its contents to have been "selected and arranged by her mother." This edition preserves and builds on many of the choices made in the Morse edition of 1829. Even if Mrs. Davidson's name is not listed as editor on in 1829, she clearly had a large role in the editing. Mrs. Davidson gave the manuscripts to Moss Kent, Davidson's educational benefactor, who solicited help from Morse.[16] In Samuel Morse, Davidson may have even acquired a friend without ever having met him. In the 1820s, years before his invention of the telegraph, Morse was becoming known as an important neo-classical painter. Morse agreed to make selections "such as her friends might deem proper to meet the public eye" ("Preface" [iii]-iv). Working on the Davidson volume may have been "resonant for" Morse, since Morse at the time was grieving the recent death of his young wife, also named Lucretia (Silverman 90).

Why might Morse have taken on this job? This seems like an interesting question to ask about "amateur" editors. It's unclear whether or how much he would have been paid, though probably there was payment of some kind. My suspicion that there was pay is based on the knowledge that Edgar Allan Poe was traveling to Philadelphia to edit a volume of posthumous poetry when he died, for a lady poet he'd never met, a task I cannot imagine the perennially destitute Poe doing for the love of it. Morse also went to the trouble of publicizing the volume by sending review copies to Washington Irving, Sir Walter Scott, and Robert Southey. Perhaps he was to receive a portion of the sales, or he desired to see his name associated with a successful product.[17] What were Morse's motivations? In addition to whatever payment he might have received, would appearing

as an editor offer him prestige? His contributions to the volume veneer such motivations, if any, with sincere admiration. "The time devoted to the task, (if it may be called a task, where the attendant pleasures have so greatly exceeded the pains,) has necessarily been those moments of relaxation from the duties of a profession which scarcely admits of leisure" (iv). Despite this, though, his involvement with the Davidson edition ended after the first printing, and subsequent editions and reissues proceeded without his help. In later editions of the Davidson sisters' writing, editors and biographers kept up the appearance of "friendly" editors undertaking this project for the interest and love of it, making sure to mention their prior encounters with the Davidson family and stress high opinion of their writing.[18]

II. Reading Posthumous Poetry: "In Memory of Henry Kirke-White"

Lucretia Davidson lived at least two lives: one biological and another textual. As a living girl, she wrote poems in response to her reading and her environment, and shared them in manuscript with her friends and family. In the text of *Amir Khan and Other Poems,* Davidson posthumously "speaks" in print. The author constructed in the pages of her own book seems to know all about, and speak to, her own demise and future fame. While Davidson the living writer responded to an identifiable tradition of posthumous poetry, the posthumously published Davidson participates in it. Antebellum poetry readers would have identified Davidson as a participant within a tradition or subgenre of posthumous poetry. When biographies and reviews call Davidson "interesting," they are in part responding to the overlay of these two Davidsons. How much did the living girl know what her fate would be? And how much of it did she betray, knowingly or not, in

her poetry? The play between these two lives can be seen in her poem "In Memory of Henry Kirke-White."

In or around 1821, Davidson encountered *The Remains of Henry Kirke White*, edited by Robert Southey, which appeared in five volumes between 1807 and 1822.[19] Kirke White, an Englishman, died in 1806 at the age of twenty, having just glimpsed his own potential literary skills and fame. Thirteen-year-old Davidson wrote a short elegy for him, in which we can see her thoughts about the relationships among early promise, premature death, and enduring poetic fame, reflecting the well-worn English lyric convention of seeing an author's own writings as his key to defying mortality. The endurance of the author's writing past his lifetime enhances the poet's fame beyond what it could have been while he lived. In the end, this logic implicitly argues that an author's reputation can only be enhanced by his death. Davidson, however, breaks with this traditional view of the effect of a poet's demise on his writings' enduring fame:

> In yon valley where the cypress spreads
> Its gloomy, dark, impenetrable shades,
> The mourning Nine, o'er White's untimely grave
> Murmur their sighs, like Neptune's troubled wave.
>
> There sits Consumption, sickly, pale, and thin,
> Her joy evincing by a ghastly grin;
> There his deserted garlands with'ring lie,
> Like him they droop, like him untimely die.

The poem moves in heroic couplets through four different figures (cypress, muses, "Consumption," garlands), each in some way unsatisfactory stand-ins for the memory of Kirke White. The graveyard tableau is first established by the cypress (and enhanced by the bleak echo of the sound of the word "spreads") which stands broadly for the locale of death and commemoration, the cemetery. Can the grave stand in for the lost one? Then we hear the Muses, the attendant mourners of the poet. Can enacting grief substitute for the lost one? The appearance of the victorious allegorical figure, Consumption, denotes both its content (the fatal illness of Kirke White, and of Davidson herself; the "poet's disease") and its ultimate supremacy, sitting triumphantly "over" the poet's mortal body, on his very tomb. Though Consumption resembles the lost object in the appearance of illness and even of death (her grin is "ghastly"), it is this resemblance that actually makes her an unfit substitute, since his illness is not the aspect of Kirke White a mourner might wish to replace. The final figure of "garlands" is invoked in an unusual way. The accolades and glory the poet won with his writing, his power of authorship, threaten to follow him closely in death. These garlands of poetic fame are not like the laurel, crowning the immortal author, but instead the garlands droop, losing their vitality as soon as they are bestowed. The garlands and mourning muses are relics of poetic culture which can no longer function without the sustaining presence of the poet. Davidson's mourning tableau for Kirke White betrays the anxiety that not only might we be deceived in thinking that poetry can make one immortal, but that poetic production itself is unsustainably dependent on the living author.

"In Memory of Henry Kirke-White" comprises not only the reception of a minor English poet by a minor American poet, but also shows how Davidson might have

reflected on the tradition in which she herself would be read. Davidson and her contemporaries would have been attuned to the phenomenon of the precocious poet who dies too young and gains fame only after death. English precursors include the above-mentioned Henry Kirke White; Thomas Chatterton (aka "The Marvellous Boy," 1752-1770), a talented poet and forger; and Thomas Dermody (1775-1802), an Irish poet of early promise and self-destructive habits.[20] Robert Southey, in his 1836 work *Lives of Uneducated Poets*, summarizes the lives and careers of a number of "naïve" poets, many of whom exhibited early prodigiousness and "true spirit of poetry" despite their technical shortcomings and lack of social advantage:

> "Persons of quality" require no defense when they appear as authors in these days: and, indeed, as mean a spirit may be shown in traducing a book because it is written by a lord, as in extolling it beyond its deserts for the same reason. But when we are told that the thresher, the milkwoman, and the tobacco-pipe-maker did not deserve the patronage they found,--when it is laid down as a maxim of philosophical criticism that poetry ought never to be encouraged unless it is excellent in its kind,--that it is an art in which inferior execution is not to be tolerated,--a luxury, and must therefore be rejected unless it is of the very best,--such reasoning may be addressed with success to cockered and sickly intellects, but it will never impose upon a healthy understanding, a generous spirit, or a good heart.

Southey advocates readerly generosity in consideration of a poet's biographical circumstances. This generosity was available enough that occasionally living poets took advantage of it, inventing posthumous poetic personae for their own ends. Percy Bysshe

Shelley authored *The Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* in 1810, while he was still a student at Cambridge University. The masque of "the woman who attempted the life of the king" allowed Shelley to explicate the social role of poetry in a period of moral decline. Around the same time Thomas Moore published his own juvenilia as *The Posthumous Works of Thomas Little, Esq.*, in an effort to distance himself from expected critical censure.[21] When Davidson addresses a poem to the memory of Kirke White, she invokes the recent memory of this "uneducated" tradition, and makes available the readerly fantasy of the poet fashioning herself within a contemporary tradition of precocious, posthumous poets.

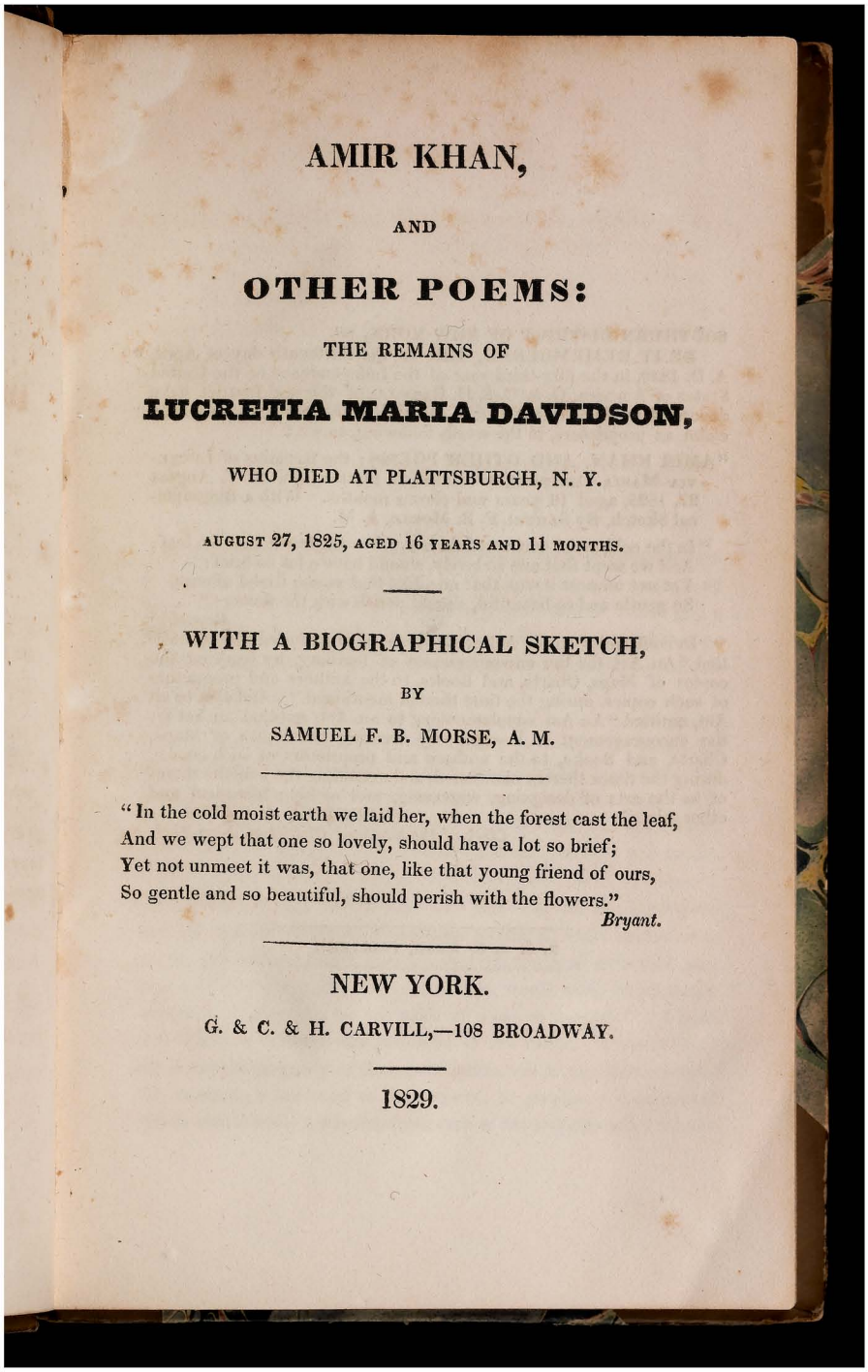
Generosity in reading is rewarded, Southey argues, by allowing voices into poetic discourse that might not otherwise be heard. Discovering now the appeal these voices held (and hold) enriches scholarly understanding of the poetic culture of the past. A key to making sense of Davidson's appeal is the repeated word "interesting" applied to her by biographies and reviews. Finding her interesting means being curious about her, stimulated by possibilities she represents, and perhaps even finding a personal "interest" or investment in her. There are particular pleasures of "interest" for the reader of posthumous poetry like Davidson's: one sort of pleasure involves the discernment of a puzzle or mystery, and another involves the solving of a puzzle or mystery. When the author writes an homage to a posthumous poet, and then herself becomes a posthumous poet, a reader may solve the puzzle of the relationship between the two: the poet's homage becomes an act of self-fulfilling prophecy. The author is imagined to have known, or brought about, her own fate by her interest in the subject of early death. Another response is to dwell on the puzzle itself: did Davidson's writing of the homage

have anything to do with her eventual fate? Did she have foreknowledge of her own death? To take pleasure in these questions, without the satisfaction of a conclusion, suggests, especially in the context of a "culture of mourning" as developed in nineteenth-century America, the open-endedness of Freud's "melancholia." While mourning entails a healthy process that ends in a replacement for the lost object, the melancholic resists replacing, or fails to replace, the lost object. To wonder at Davidson's living knowledge of her own death is not unlike the unresolved character of incomplete mourning, and to "take an interest" suggests that the reader invests something emotionally in reading Davidson's text. The place of posthumous poetry in a "culture of mourning" is suggested then not only by the actual subject matter, but by the processes of readerly engagement with it. Because biographical reference is essential to this kind of reading, the pleasures of posthumous poetry depend heavily on the editor's presentation of biographical information in mediating access to the dead poet.

III. Editorial Agency in Posthumous Authorship

Southey refers throughout his review to Davidson's "narrative," implying that consideration of the book and of the poet's life are synonymous. There is a fairly neat correlation between the early reviewers' (and later academic criticism's) fixation on the Davidson biography and the choices made by the first editor, Samuel Morse, in presenting the poems in print.[22] Morse describes his duties: consulting with Davidson's "friends" about the overall fitness of the material for print; writing a short biography; and choosing, with the help of her family, which pieces should appear. Morse drew on both convention and invention in order to present the material in its best light. The resulting

volume locates Davidson's poetry firmly within the context of her short life and early death. The title page sets the tone.[23]



AMIR KHAN,

AND

OTHER POEMS:

THE REMAINS OF

LUCRETIA MARIA DAVIDSON,

WHO DIED AT PLATTSBURGH, N. Y.

AUGUST 27, 1825, AGED 16 YEARS AND 11 MONTHS.

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH,

BY

SAMUEL F. B. MORSE, A. M.

"In the cold moist earth we laid her, when the forest cast the leaf,
And we wept that one so lovely, should have a lot so brief;
Yet not unmeet it was, that one, like that young friend of ours,
So gentle and so beautiful, should perish with the flowers."

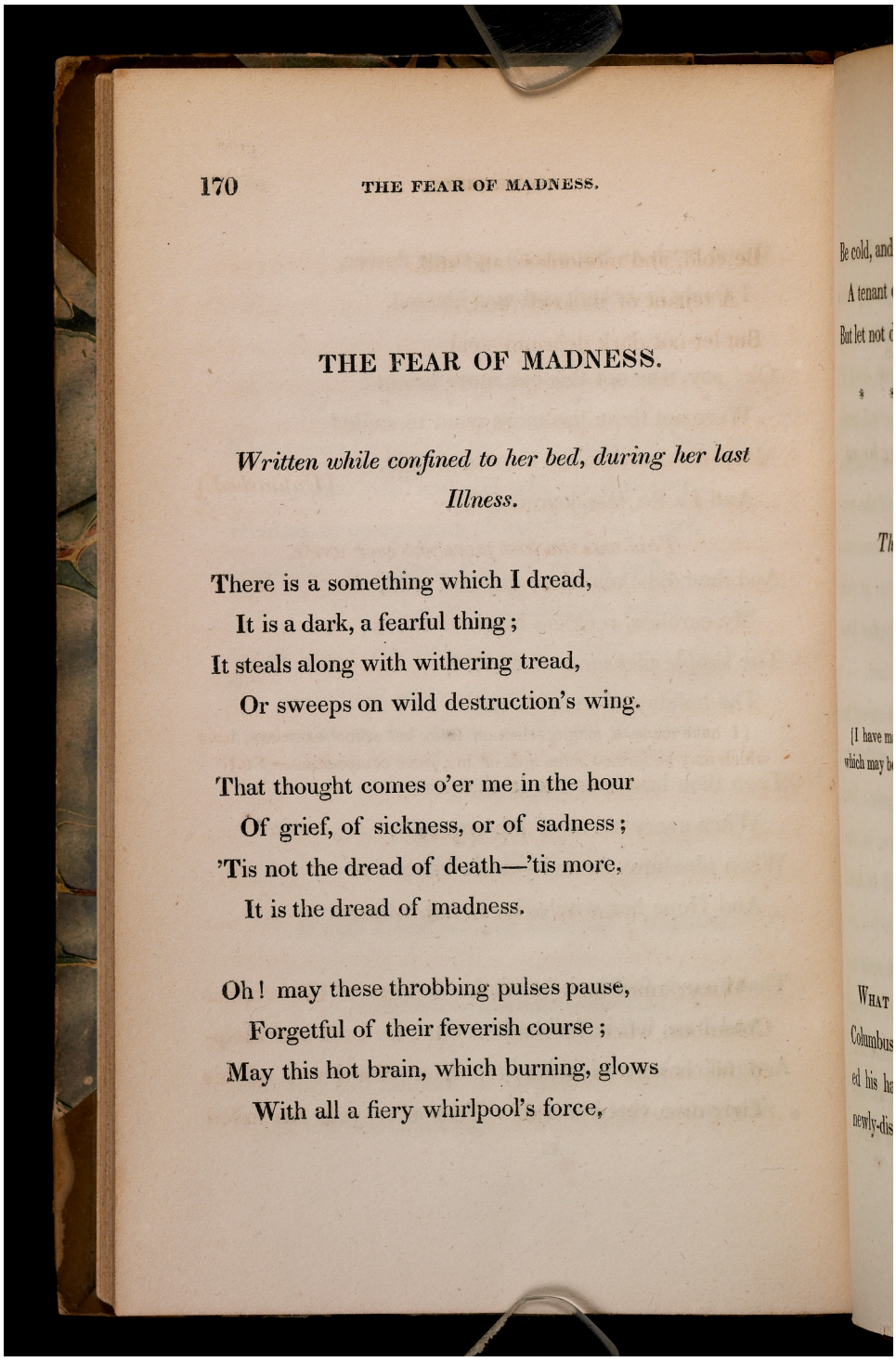
Bryant.

NEW YORK.

G. & C. & H. CARVILL,—108 BROADWAY.

1829.

The poems are her "remains." The title page states place of death and age in years, months, and days, as one might see on a gravestone; indeed, the title page's epigraph is the same Bryant verse that appears on her actual tomb. Apart from the title page, the dominant features of *Amir Khan and Other Poems* are the 26-page memoir (out of 176 pages total), introducing and framing the following poems; bracketed subtitles added to nearly every poem, placing it in the trajectory of what the reader knows are Davidson's short number of years; and other editorial notes about the composition situation of certain pieces, which are meant to guide the reader's interpretation of the poem. Several poems are included in their unfinished state, and so labeled. The last poem in the book offers a rich example of all of these features.



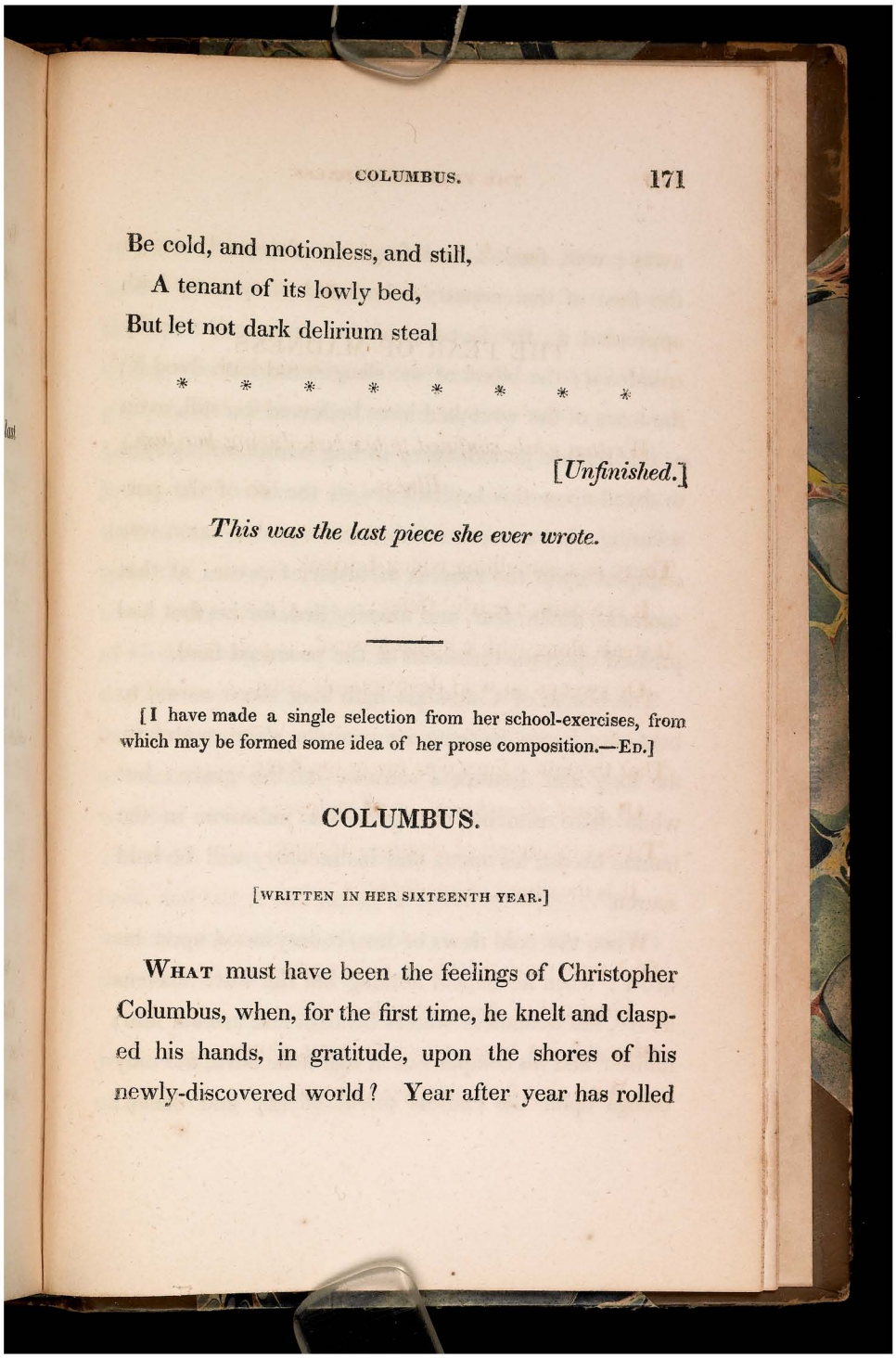
THE FEAR OF MADNESS.

Written while confined to her bed, during her last Illness.

There is a something which I dread,
It is a dark, a fearful thing;
It steals along with withering tread,
Or sweeps on wild destruction's wing.

That thought comes o'er me in the hour
Of grief, of sickness, or of sadness;
'Tis not the dread of death—'tis more,
It is the dread of madness.

Oh! may these throbbing pulses pause,
Forgetful of their feverish course;
May this hot brain, which burning, glows
With all a fiery whirlpool's force,



COLUMBUS. 171

Be cold, and motionless, and still,
A tenant of its lowly bed,
But let not dark delirium steal

* * * * * * * *

[*Unfinished.*]

This was the last piece she ever wrote.

[I have made a single selection from her school-exercises, from which may be formed some idea of her prose composition.—Ed.]

COLUMBUS.

[WRITTEN IN HER SIXTEENTH YEAR.]

What must have been the feelings of Christopher Columbus, when, for the first time, he knelt and clasped his hands, in gratitude, upon the shores of his newly-discovered world? Year after year has rolled

The poem "The Fear of Madness" combines a poetical fragment and editorial glosses, presenting a particular experience of the poem Davidson left behind in manuscript. One of these editorial glosses is the subtitle, introducing the poem and

placing the scene of its composition: "written while confined to her bed, during her last illness." Morse offers this gloss, it seems, as both boast and pardon, encouraging us to read with Southey's suggested generosity of spirit in order to find something poetically extraordinary. The chronological subtitles throughout the volume reference the idea that in reading Davidson's poetry, we are tracing her life and development, and, in this case, the approach of her death. The fragment consists of four quatrains, the final one missing its last line, breaking off mid-sentence.

The speaker relates that, in her "hour/Of grief, of sickness, or of sadness," what haunts her is not the specter of death but the idea that she might lose her mind. Inversely, this "fear" denotes a desire for the good Christian death, witnessed at home by loved ones, undertaken with a peaceful awareness of the soul's sure destiny in the afterlife.

> O! may these throbbing pulses pause,
> Forgetful of their feverish course;
> May this hot brain, which burning, glows
> With all its fiery whirlpool's force,

When she wishes that she can keep her sanity when her "hot brain, which burning, glows with all a fiery whirlpool's force," she casts her painful fever and mental anguish in a figure that strongly resembles the Christian hell.

> Be cold, and motionless, and still,
> A tenant of its lowly bed,
> But let not dark delirium steal—
> * * * * * * * * *

She prays for protection from self-mutiny when she chants "Be cold, and motionless, and still," but this line, continued from the prior stanza, starts a stanza that breaks off. When she pleads to herself and God to "let not dark delirium steal—" a line of asterisks marks her incomplete prayer. The reader is left to wonder how the struggle was resolved. Did she in her final moments in fact succumb to an unchristian rebellion against her own suffering? Did she cry out in despair over the state of her soul? Can physical pain cause an otherwise spiritually intact soul to disintegrate? Readers might imagine themselves at the very side of Davidson's death-bed, where they, in a sense, are tempted to assume the worst, but also provide comforting witness to her ultimate suffering. Two editorial notes conclude the poem: "Unfinished" and "The last piece she ever wrote," provoking both readerly pleasures by dwelling on the inaccessibility of the lost object (what might she have meant to say next?) and imagining the self-fulfilling prophecy (did she actually die while writing this poem?). This poem, the words Davidson wrote framed in this way by Morse, exemplifies the particular way editorial actions construct the posthumous poet, making available the reading pleasures of posthumous poetry. This is the rare poem in the book which does not exist in manuscript. Because of this, we cannot be at all sure of the extent of Morse's interventions, which may include more than I've identified here.

Rather than finding value in the mediatory and arguably limiting work of the editor, one could easily conclude, perhaps more satisfactorily in other examples than this one, that in trying to explain the poem Morse has interfered with it. This would certainly be the opinion of New Critical scholars who eschewed biographical interpretation (among other common reading methods) and thus dismissed a large swath of nineteenth-century poetry's significance. This dismissal has necessitated re-readings such as those

by Cheryl Walker, Jerome McGann, Paula Bennett, and many others who have rejected the New Critical's ahistorical tendencies, in favor of reconstructing the significance of popular nineteenth-century poetry held for its original audiences. To re-discover the aesthetic appeal and cultural work of non-canonical popular poetry of the nineteenth century, scholars have returned to biographical readings of the kind Morse makes so visible in *Amir Khan and Other Poems.*

However, when Cheryl Walker argues forcefully that women poets found a contradictory agency in speaking from a place of feminine woundedness, her method of reading Davidson is to try to read around or behind the editorial interferences. This reading method assumes a view of editorial work as obstructing the "true" (authorial) meaning. Walker follows the lead here of twentieth-century editorial theory, typified by Fredson Bowers and G. Thomas Tanselle, which would criticize the work of nineteenth-century editors as Morse as too intrusive and subjective. This consensus about editing has been successfully challenged by the "social text" approach advanced by Jerome McGann and others, which finds a work's range of cultural meanings in the forms in which texts found their original audiences, and not in some ideal or authorially intended version.

Perhaps a better critical approach is to read Davidson, as presented by Morse, through the contemporary aesthetic expressed by Poe:

> Now, never losing sight of the object supremeness, or perfection, at all points, I asked myself—'of all melancholy topics, what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?' Death—was the obvious reply. 'And when,' I said, 'is this most melancholy of

> topics most poetical?' From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious—'when it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.[24]

According to Poe's dictum, "The Fear of Madness" could hardly be a more perfect poem in terms of its subject matter: the death of a beautiful young woman. (Davidson's beauty is abundantly extolled in Morse's biography.) It becomes more perfect yet if one considers the role of the editor in his "friendly" capacity: Morse's glosses betray the intimacy of a deathbed witness, framing the poem interpretively as "heard" by a trusted bystander, and then re-voicing Davidson's poem in print, as a lament for her loss. Morse as reader, in making his interpretation of Davidson's poem legible, authorizes identification between himself and the reader, and may also possess "lips best suited" for the topic. Invoking Poe's problematically gendered dictum and imaging the editor as "the bereaved lover" lamenting his loss does nothing to dispel a critique of gender in nineteenth-century America, but it does begin to help us read the poem more accurately. Often interest in nineteenth-century editing focuses on the social power differential between the author and the editor; think of the critical struggle to parse the voices of Nat Turner or Harriet Jacobs from those of their amanuenses.[25] These are by no means misplaced criticisms, and I am grateful that these analyses have been made. Social power differentials are no doubt significant in the actions editors take and in the ways readers perceive the resulting texts. The fact remains that a recovery of nineteenth-century ways of reading will also recover the unattractive ideologies that thread them through.

Applying Poe's dictum to "The Fear of Madness" reveals the sexualization of Davidson by poetic reading practices, and reinforces the signal importance of Morse as editor in the presentation of Davidson's posthumous poetry.

IV. "Amir Khan" as Representative Poem

Morse chose to title the book after its longest poem, "Amir Khan," which he also chose to head the collection, thus implying that it might be usefully judged Davidson's greatest literary achievement. Later Davidson collections, however, demoted "Amir Khan" from its place as most representative poem. In his choice to highlight "Amir Khan," we thus glimpse Morse's larger judgment about Davidson's writings. "Amir Khan" embodied the best qualities that Morse saw in her writing and presumably sought to promote in his edition:

> Of the literary character of her writings, it does not, perhaps, become me largely to speak; yet I must hazard the remark, that her defects will be perceived as those of youth and inexperience, while in invention and in that mysterious power of exciting deep interest, of enchaining the attention, and keeping it alive to the end of the story; in that of adaptation the measure to the sentiment, and in the sudden change of measure to suit a sudden change of sentiment, in wild and romantic description, and in the congruity of the accompaniments to her characters, all conceived with great purity and delicacy, she will be allowed to have discovered uncommon maturity of mind; and her friends to have been warranted in forming very high expectations of her future distinction.

Excusing her unnamed "defects," Morse highlights Davidson's effect on the reader ("deep interest," "enchaining attention," engaging liveliness of her sustained narrative), while also interpreting any irregularities (change of measure, change of sentiment, wildness) as signs of her "uncommon maturity of mind." "Amir Khan" is a strong example of all of these qualities, and seems to be the poem he had in mind as both Davidson's best work and the one which should represent her.

Davidson's initial review by Southey makes no mention of the title poem, but an unsigned 1834 review in the *Southern Literary Messenger* gives it some consideration:

> ["Amir Khan" is] a simple oriental tale, written in her sixteenth year, and is worked up with surprising power of imagery for one so young. The most fastidious and critical reader could not fail to be struck with its resemblance to the gorgeous magnificence of Lalla Rookh; a resemblance, to be sure, which no more implies equality of merit than does the brilliancy of the mock diamond establish its value with that of the real gem.

Few speak of "Amir Khan" without reference to its "defects," as seen in Morse's comment and implied here (it falls short of *Lalla Rookh* in merit while being comparable in "brilliancy").

A poem of far-flung geography and transatlantic influences, "Amir Khan" connects Davidson to wider networks of nation and reputation. The above review resembles Southey's call for generosity in considering a poet's biography in reading, but with the important addition of national polarization. The nationalist argument, that Americans should read American poets regardless of their flaws, is one Poe confronts

with characteristic gusto in his 1841 *Graham's Magazine* review of the Davidson sisters' combined output. American literature, he argues, will not benefit from the eager inclusion of such authors as Davidson, with reviewers and readers too ready to forgive flaws in the name of national cultural consolidation. Perhaps because of its uneven reception, Morse's gambit with "Amir Khan" did not endure through new editions. The 1841 edition removes Morse and "Amir Khan" from the title page. The volume, retitled *The Poetical Remains of the Late Lucretia Davidson*, includes a new biography by Catharine Maria Sedgwick, who alludes to the same neglect and criticisms of Davidson's long poem as the prior reviewer:

> Amir Khan has been long before the public but we think it has suffered from a general and very natural distrust of precocious genius. The versification is graceful; the story, beautifully developed; and the Orientalism well sustained. We think it would not have done discredit to our best popular poets in the meridian of their fame; as the production of a girl of fifteen it seems prodigious.

In response to this, "Amir Khan" becomes the focus of Poe's enumeration of Davidson's defects, calling the poem "upon the whole […] feeble, vacillating, and ineffective." Poe expends particular effort to refute each of Sedgwick's notes of praise, and offers this final word on "Amir Khan":

> It is a creditable composition; nothing beyond this. And, in so saying, we shall startle none but the brainless, and the adopters of ready-made ideas. We are convinced that we express the unuttered sentiment of every educated individual who has read the poem. Nor, having given the plain

> facts of the case, do we feel called upon to proffer any apology for our flat refusal to play ditto either to Miss Sedgwick, to Mr. Irving, or to Mr. Southey.

As Mary Loeffelholz points out in her chapter on Davidson in *From School to Salon* (2007), Poe's technical criticism of Davidson's verse and of her nationalistic or sentimental apologists belies the fact that the author and her writing in many ways participate in his own aesthetic agenda.[26]

Loeffelholz's chapter "Who Killed Lucretia Davidson?" offers the first sustained critical engagement with Davidson's writing and, particularly, "Amir Khan," since Poe. She identifies the poem's fashionable orientalism and its imitation of models such as Southey's "The Curse of Kehama" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Identifying the female protagonist with the poet, Loeffeholz reads the poem as dramatizing the emergence of the female lyric within the then-forming context of "disciplinary intimacy," a phrase coined by Richard Brodhead in his work on early American fiction and social subject formation. According to Loeffelholz, "Amir Khan's" portrayal of the protagonist/poet's decision to speak breaks with the received tradition of the garden-enclosed female, Milton's Eve. Loeffelholz's argument persuades, but leaves us wondering how to account for the pleasures of the poem for contemporary readers.

"Amir Khan" draws one in, despite whatever a reader might perceive as its defects. It is a long poem, 24 pages plus notes.[27] The poem is divided evenly into Parts I and II, with an initial preponderance of description, and in the second half a discernable narrative haste. The lines are four-beat rhymed couplets, grouped in end-stopped verse paragraphs varying in length from six to thirty lines. The overriding feature of the poem

is its ambition: as the positive reviews note, it seems to be quite an accomplishment for a young and relatively unworldly girl to write.

The poem opens with a textured description, setting the tone before drawing our attention to the principles of the narrative:

> Brightly o'er spire, and dome, and tower,
> The pale moon shone at midnight hour,
> While all beneath her smile of light
> Was resting there in calm delight;
> Evening with robe of stars appears,
> Bright as repentant Peri's tears,
> And o'er her turban's fleecy fold
> Night's crescent streamed its rays of gold,
> While every chrystal cloud of Heaven,
> Bowed as it passed the queen of even.

"Peri's tear" is an allusion to Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh.*[28] The imitation of Moore, remarked on in some of the contemporary reviews, is somewhat overlooked by Loeffelholz, but I think it offers a window onto the significance of Davidson's poem. Between its publication in 1817 and 1835, Moore's poem sold 25,000 copies in the United Kingdom alone.[29] The book was also enormously popular in North America, appearing in half a dozen editions in its first year alone,[30] and is widely credited with inspiring both important literary figures like Poe, as well as a popular fashion for things "oriental." By setting out to imitate this new but already influential work, Davidson

shows her ambition. By placing the imitation front and center in the volume, Morse makes a case for Davidson's likely appeal to a mass audience.

The opening continues, and a feature of the "oriental" style becomes apparent:

> Beneath—calm Cashmere's lovely vale
> Breathed perfumes to the sighing gale;
> The amaranth and tuberose,
> Convolvulus in deep repose,
> Bent to each breeze which swept their bed,
> Or scarcely kiss'd the dew and fled;
> The bulbul, with his lay of love;
> Sang 'mid the stillness of the grove;
> The gulnare blushed a deeper hue,
> And trembling shed a shower of dew,
> Which perfumed e'er it kiss'd the ground,
> Each zephyr's pinion hovering round.
> The lofty plane-tree's haughty brow
> Glitter'd beneath the moon's pale glow;
> And wide the plantain's arms were spread,
> The guardian of its native bed.

This passage characterizes the poem's efforts at exoticism, especially through the use of unusual vocabulary. Descriptions dwell on gems and luxurious draperies, and are permeated with evocations of scent. If one really could smell all these things—and I'm not sure I'd know the smells of "amaranth and tuberose,/Convolvulus"—in proximity it

could make one nauseous. Both of these features ("riches" and scent) partake of a formal strategy of evocative vocabulary. Rather than connoting something the author and the reader have direct experience of, the words themselves are offered up as dazzling objects or intoxicating sensations: "zephyr's pinion" "convolvulus…bulbul…gulnare." Loeffleholz makes the point about "schoolgirl erudition," which seems apt, but one cannot miss the actual texture these features give the poem, the way the words are to the poet like the sensational objects and experiences might be to a character within the poem.

"Gulnare" is the queen of the harem in *The Arabian Nights* and, influentially for nineteenth-century women poets, the patriarchy-avenging murderess of Byron's 1814 poem *The Corsair.* In stark contrast to Byron's heroine, Davidson's gulnare (literally, a pomegranate flower, and glossed by Davidson in her own note as "Gulnare, or a Rose") assumes a personality through the implied emotion of her active "deeper" blushing and her delicate trembling. The gulnare's personification makes her a main character in this scene of somewhat static description, and the unconscious motion of her "shed[ding] a shower of dew," like a woman emerging from her bath, seemingly blesses the surroundings with her purity when the each drop of drew "perfumed e'er it kiss'd the ground." The modest treatment of the association-laden flower skirts the edge of sensuality, drawing attention as much to what it avoids as what it embraces.

There are only three characters in the poem: Amreta, a lovely, chaste young woman imprisoned in a bower, under coercion to declare her love for Amir Khan, the powerful "Subhadar" or governor of "Cashmere"; Al Shinar is a kind of prophet-advisor to Amir Khan who performs some of the narrative function of the apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet.* (A similar narrative episode with a sleeping spell also occurs in the third book

of *Lalla Rookh.*) Al Shinar devises the sleeping spell in order to trick Amreta into declaring her love for Amir Khan:

> "Mark me!" he cried: --"this pensive flower,
> Gathered at midnight's magic hour,
> Will charm each passion of the breast,
> And calm each throbbing nerve to rest,
> 'Twill leave thy bounding bosom warm,
> But set death's seal upon thy form;
> 'Twill leave thee stiff, and cold, and pale,
> A slumberer 'neath an icy veil,
> But still shall Reason's conscious reign,
> Unbroken, undisturbed remain,
> And thou shalt hear, and feel, and know
> Each sigh, each touch, each throb of wo!"

Amir Khan breathes in the flower's scent, and goes into the sleeping spell, an occasion for more description which suggests the fiery life inside his motionless exterior:

> The chrystal's and the diamond's rays
> Kindled a wide and brilliant blaze;
> The ruby's blush—the coral's too,
> By Peris dipp'd in Henna's dew,--
> The topaz's rich and golden ray,
> The opal's flame,--the agate grey,
> The amethyst of violet hue,

The sapphire with its heavenly blue,
The snow-white jasper sparkling there
Near the carbuncle's deepening glare;
The warm carnelian's blushing glow,
Reflected back the brilliant flow
Of light, which in refulgent streams,
O'er hall, o'er bower, and fountain beams.

The narrative hinges on how Amreta will react to the Subadhar's apparent death. Al Shinar predicts that "if her bosom's icy frame/Hath ever warmed 'neath passion's flame,/'Twill heave tumultuous as it glows/Like Baikal's everlasting throes." Amreta's appearance, though, leaves the reader in suspense over whether she will succumb:

Her brow, as Parian marble fair,
Was glittering bright with many a gem,
Set in a brilliant diadem;
Her long dark hair was floating far,
Braided with many a diamond star;
Her eye was raised, and O that eye
Seemed only formed to gaze on high!
For O more piercing bright its beam
Than diamonds 'neath Golconda's stream;
That angel-eye was only given
To look upon its native heaven!

Eventually, Amreta does betray her sorrow at Amir Khan's apparent death with first a "brilliant tear," then weeping, with her dawning realization of his loss. The loss of the one who loved her prompts Amreta to a seven-verse song in which she resolves to join him, as a lover, in death: "My grave in thy bosom shall be!" Amir Khan's spell allows him to still hear and respond to all that is occurring, and the drama heightens.

O! would the magic charm had pass'd!
Would that the morn would break at last!
But no! it will not, may not be!
He is not, nor can yet be free!

Now Amir Khan is the one who is imprisoned, as Amreta was initially in the bower (one assumes she was liberated as part of Al Shinar's plan, but the text never makes this clear). While Amir Khan's wish has come true, he is also trapped by the spell.

She bowed her head, and deeply sighed,
"Yes, Amir Khan, I am thy bride!
And here the crimson hand of Death
Shall wed us with a rosy wreath!
My blood shall join us as it flows
And bind us in a deep repose!"

Beneath her veil a light is beaming,
A dagger in her hand is gleaming,
And livid was the light it threw,
A pale, cold, death-like stream of blue,

Around her form of angel brightness,

And o'er her brow of marble whiteness!

Amir Khan's will triumphs over the lingering spell, and he awakes in time to prevent Amreta's suicide, and her tears confirm that his goal has been achieved. The poem closes with the two embracing, as the language of cold, silent brilliancy yields to warmth, touch and vitality.

To the eye of the reader, Amreta's beauty, virtue, and inaccessibility suggest a ready analogy to the poet herself. Paralleling Morse's accounts of Davidson's beauty and virtue in her biography, Davidson's descriptions of Amreta emphasize her conventional European beauty (fair skin, golden hair), and a Christian ideal of chastity, to an extent that Amreta hazards not to speak or look at her would-be lover, Amir Khan, until he is (to her eyes) impotent. The heroine defies stereotypical orientalist depictions of the harem and of the dark temptress. Amreta's signal action in response to Amir Khan's advances is refusing to speak or give any sign of communication (much as the dead poet herself cannot). Apart from her brilliant, deflecting exterior, we get precious little glimpse of her personhood, until she assumes the mantle of poet in singing her song. When she is introduced, it is by an interrogation of her absence: "Where was Amreta at this hour?," a question in part sustained throughout the poem. Her song moves Amir Khan, but it is her threat of suicide which finally breaks his spell. Even when she acts to plunge the dagger, she is stopped. Amreta represents not only the difficult emergence of the female lyric voice, but also the sexualized image of the virtuous, inaccessible young poet herself.

Morse's choice to highlight "Amir Khan" in his edition endorses an aesthetic that aligns Davidson more with European Romanticism than with a native poetic tradition.

The orientalism of "Amir Khan" is uncharacteristic of Davidson's other poetry, which often takes domestic or patriotic themes. Even in terms of its length and scope, "Amir Khan" has a close competitor in "Chicomico," an equally long verse re-telling of the Pocahontas story set in the woods and along the lakes of upstate New York. The choice for the orientalist poem over the "Indian" one comes as no surprise when one connects the promotion of Davidson's orientalism with Morse's own artistic struggles. Though Morse trained as a painter in England and was well respected in both countries, he was failing to support himself through the kind of itinerant and commissioned portrait painting American artists did at the time. His letters at the time place the blame for his failures on the economically unsupportive American arts environment. According to his standard biographies, in the early 1830s he turned to science when he was frustrated at the meager living he made as an American painter, even as one of the best and most commissioned of his generation. Morse's allegiance to European artistic traditions likely led him in his choice of title poem, as well as to solicit reviews from Robert Southey and Walter Scott.

Morse's choice to foreground "Amir Khan" as representative of Davidson's poetry certainly made an impact on her initial reception. Although Robert Southey doesn't mention the poem in his early review, other reviewers and biographers considered "Amir Khan" a litmus test for Davidson's poetry. The long poem was considered ambitious, exciting, and narratively engaging, but also metrically flawed, derivative, and unpolished. The position of "Amir Khan" in Davidson's oeuvre would change with successive publications. The ambitious, European-identified Romanticism

would give way in later editions and anthologies to shorter poems on domestic and patriotic themes.

V. An American Poetess

The Southey review of Davidson helped her gain a significant European audience. There is evidence of reception not only in England, but also in France, Germany, Italy, and Russia.[31] Southey's review came at a time when favorable British notice of American authors was rare, and his endorsement helped Davidson's poetry to participate in transnational Romantic culture. However, Davidson also had a significant afterlife as an exceptionally American poet. Around early American criticism of Davidson hovered the question of American literature's position in the larger cultural landscape. These questions sometimes settle into determined pronouncements about American exceptionalism, of which Davidson is taken as an example. The emotional excesses of Davidson's reception may serve as an index of cultural anxieties, along the lines identified by Julia Stern in *The Plight of Feeling.* Stern argues that the excesses of Revolution-era sentimental, melodramatic, and gothic writing reflect unresolved feelings over the recent history of the War for Independence, including grief over separation from England and over the foreclosed possibilities for enfranchisement for all people within the American nation. I would like to suggest that along these lines, the work of mourning set out by the textual construction "Lucretia Davidson" becomes a partner to a cultural anxiety that the young nation itself, so youthfully full of promise, may not survive.

The question of American literature's position in the early nineteenth century is usually glossed by the well-known quote by Sidney Smith, an English clergyman writing

in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1820: "Who in the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?" One imagines it is this attitude against which American critics sought to defend the productions of their native authors. One such critic found that simply lacking the label "British" was enough to cause otherwise viable work to be overlooked:

> We venture to assert that if Thomas Moore had written Amir Khan at the age of sixteen, there are thousands by whom it would be read and admired who would hardly condescend to open Miss Davidson's volume; and that too, without being able to assign any other or better reason than that Moore is a distinguished and popular British bard, whereas the other was an obscure country girl, who lived and died in the state of New York (*Southern Literary Messenger,* 1834).

Critics sought various grounds upon which to excuse the defects of Davidson's poetry. Here the American reviewer assumes that the defects of youth might be more readily excused by a known, male, English author, than by an unknown, female, and American one. The reviewer implies that Davidson's poetry deserves higher estimation, even if that estimation merely entails excusing American faults as readily as British ones.

The tendency to excuse faults of immaturity and praise precocity suggest a fixation on nurturing potential, lest it go unfulfilled. These strains continue in print discussions of Davidson's value:

> Much of her poetry, especially her earlier productions, it is true, cannot stand the test of a critical examination. But when we consider the circumstances under which these, the first warblings of her infant muse,

> were penned—the many disadvantages against which she labored, both in point of education and a weak and feeble constitution—the extent of her writings, and the time employed in their composition—'tis enough to stay the shafts of criticism, and force us almost unconsciously to drop a tear of regret, that one so young, so lovely, who was so devoted and successful a worshipper of the Muses, should thus have been cut off in the spring of life, ere she gained that summit to which she was hastening with such rapid flight (*Southern Literary Messenger,* 1843).

Here included in the familiar narrative is the idea that the young poet was fixated on a guiding ideal (a "devoted and successful […] worshipper of the Muses"). One can as easily imagine similar "disadvantages" facing the ambitious but not quite established literary tradition of the young nation. The notion of being constituted by shared ideals (the Constitution) and by shared trials (the Revolutionary War) makes a fitting analogy between the plight of the young nation and the young poet.

This last review forms an intertext with other pieces in the same volume. This issue of the *SLM* announces the death of its founder and former editor, Thomas W. White. In addition to the obituary and the Davidson review, there is a poem by Caroline Southey to Mrs. Davidson, an example of public expression of sympathetic grief:

> O lady, greatly favored, greatly tried!
> Was ever glory, ever grief like thine,
> Since hers, the mother of the Man divine,
> The perfect One—the Crowned—the Crucified?
> Wonder and joy, high hopes and chastened pride

Thrilled thee; intently watching, hour by hour,
The last unfolding of each human flower,
In hues of more than earthly brilliance dyed.
And then—the blight, the fading, the first fear,
The sickening hope, the doom, the end of all:
Heart withering, if indeed all ended here.
But from the dust, the coffin, and the pall,
Mother bereaved, thy tearful eyes upraise,
Mother of angels, join their songs of praise!

The printing of the poem stages a sympathetic encounter between the wife of the English Poet Laureate and the bereaved mother of the American poetesses. Completing the Davidson inclusions in this one issue, there also appears a poem by a Davidson brother, a frequent *SLM* contributor, along with a notice of his death. The particular griefs of the Davidson family mingle with the grief of a (British) stranger for her imagined losses in the Davidson family. The repeated exposure of the Davidson family's talents and losses opens up a framework within which to vicariously experience one's own feelings in a different context. The various griefs in the issue are a suggestive grouping, highlighting the similarities of feeling between the staff and readership losing their editor, and between the loss-enduring family and its public.

Davidson as American poet is best represented in Rufus Griswold's *The Female Poets of America* (1849). Interspersing the Davidsons' collective biography with their poetry, Griswold follows the lead of prior Davidson publications that mix biography and poetry, and deviates from his own practice elsewhere that separated the two. In his

opening to the Davidson entry, he makes the case for the Davidson sisters' early prodigiousness as a distinctly American trait:

> Those who are familiar with our literary history may remember that a remarkable precocity of intellect has been frequently exhibited in this country. The cases of Lucretia and Margaret Davidson are perhaps more interesting than any which have received the general attention; but they are not the most wonderful that have been known here. A few years ago I was shown, by one of the house of Harper and Brothers, the publishers, some verses by a girl but eight years of age—the daughter of a gentleman in Connecticut—that seemed not inferior to any composed by the Davidsons; and other prodigies of the same kind are at this time exciting the hopes of more than one family. Greatness is not often developed in childhood, and where a strange precocity is observable, it is generally but an early and complete maturity of the mind. We can not always decide, to even our own satisfaction, whether it is so, but as the writings of these children, when they were from nine to fifteen years of age, exhibited no advancement, it is reasonable to suppose that, like the wonderful boy Zerah Colburn, of Vermont, whose arithmetical calculations many years ago astonished the world, they would have possessed in their physical maturity no high or peculiar intellectual qualities.

This move is not at all uncharacteristic of Griswold's volume, which accompanied a small flurry of American poetry collections coming onto the market in the 1850s, all making claims, chiefly by sheer quantity of poems and poets represented, to the

flourishing of a native poetic tradition distinct from that of England. Griswold re-interprets Davidson's biography, dating her first poetic inspiration to her attendance at the age of twelve at a celebration of George Washington's birthday. He includes the poem "Washington" among the few he reprints, cementing his claim on Davidson as a figure of American nationalism.

> And does a hero's dust lie here?
> Columbia! Gaze and drop a tear!
> His country's and the orphan's friend,
> See thousands o'er his ashes bend!
>
> Among the heroes of the age,
> He was the warrior and the sage:
> He left a train of glory bright,
> Which never will be hid in night.
>
> The toils of war and danger past,
> He reaps a rich reward at last;
> His pure soul mounts on cherub's wings,
> And now with saints and angels sings.
>
> The brightest on the list of fame,
> In golden letters shines his name;
> Her trump shall sound it through the world,

And the strip'd banner ne'er be furled!

And every sex, and every age,
From lisping boy to learned sage,
The widow, and her orphan son,
Revere the name of Washington.

The opening of the poem evokes the mourning depicted in the Kirke White memorial poem, but here the hero's name endures unquestionably. The poem focuses on the positive valence of the nation's memory of Washington, particularly of his name imagined to be shining in golden letters, a grander version of that of an author on a book's spine. Here the memory of the name of Washington interchanges with other symbols of the nation, like the flag that will "ne'er be furled." The final stanza asserts the democratic distribution of the sentiment across the population, but with particular focus on certain demographic markers: age, sex, and the vulnerable bereaved. Davidson's poem "Washington" ties itself to her own eventual "narrative" and posthumous reception by the evocative selection of these categories of identity.

V. Speaking Death

Despite the unrealized sensuality of "Amir Khan" and the morbid fascination of "Fear of Madness," Davidson's girlhood writings are unmistakably innocent about human physicality. According to the dominant narrative of Davidson's development posited by Southey's influential review, Davidson's poetic genius thrived at the cost of her physical well-being. Along those lines, readers are encouraged to encounter the

poems as evidence of the author's own destruction. Through her participation in a recognizable tradition of posthumous poetry, the poems also seem to evidence the author's uncanny foreknowledge of her own "narrative's" end in young death. A chief offering of the work is that of the author's vulnerability. To what end might a reading public take pleasure in such vulnerability? Davidson's vulnerability ties her to the imagined vulnerability of the nation, and imagining her family's grief serves as a proxy for other griefs, personal and collective. Lucretia Davidson's poetry, like all posthumous poetry, appeals to the desire that the dead might speak to the living. "Feats of Death" features Davidson speaking through persona as the bringer of death, a heightened example of the way her posthumous poetry addresses the reader from beyond.

While "Feats of Death" appeared in *Amir Khan and Other Poems,* later Davidson collections, and periodicals, it was also printed in an anthology, *Gems of American Poetry by Distinguished Authors* (1840). The compiler's identity is unknown, and likely to have been an in-house employee of the publisher, A. & C. B. Edwards of New York. *Gems* is a modest book, covered in the ubiquitous cheap brown cloth of antebellum American books, stamped with a gilt urn, much like *Amir Khan and Other Poems.* There are four tipped-in engravings, and the frontispiece features the Sleepy Hollow cemetery, overlooking the Hudson River, with Washington Irving's Tarrytown home, Sunnyside, in the background. These places functioned in the public imaginary as the birthplace and home of American literature, before it was somewhat displaced to Massachusetts in the following decades. The idea that American literature started in, and continued to spiritually inhabit, a graveyard is reflected in the volume's contents.

The *Gem* authors are made somewhat anonymous (all the better to fall under the title of "Distinguished American Poets") by the table of contents, which lists the 153 poems (roughly) alphabetically by title only. However, each of the full poems appears not only with author line, but, in some cases, with death date and age. Nine such authors, including Davidson, account for one fifth (31 of 153) of the volume's poems. Death dates range from 28 down to 17 (Davidson and another young woman, Elizabeth Clinch). The preponderance of poems by those who died young is striking, but suggests that such authorship scenarios may not have been all that uncommon, and that knowledge about a poet's age at time of death was widely accepted as important to the experience of reading his or her poetry.

Although editorially framed texts like "Fear of Madness" emphasize death's interruption of the speaker's voice, "Feats of Death" is the exceptional poem in which Davidson speaks from beyond the grave. Davidson rarely assumes a persona which differs greatly from the character constructed in her biographies: observant, thoughtful, emotionally invested in the world around her, but also innocent, vulnerable, and likely to be overwhelmed. In "Feats of Death" the speaker, Death personified, projects herself across a sublime landscape. She is all-powerful and, with supreme detachment, able to identify with, but remain unswayed by, humans experiencing extremes of emotion:

> I have passed o'er the earth in the darkness of night,
> I have walked the wild winds in the morning's broad light;
> I have paused o'er the bower where the infant lay sleeping,
> And I've left the fond mother in sorrow and weeping.

The opening stanza is marked by an incantatory pattern of clauses all starting with "I have," suggesting the speaker's ultimate position of entitlement. The speaker describes the recent past, without beginning or endpoint, a shallow eternity of temporal death, always in the moment. The first two lines mix time ("night" "morning") and light ("darkness" "light") in a conventional way, which is then paralleled by the separation of infant ("sleeping") and mother ("weeping"). The speaker's entrance to the infant's bower causes the baby's death and the mother's grief, and is related in a completely passionless but powerful way through the parallel construction.

> My pinion was spread, and the cold dew of night,
> Which withers and moulders the flower in its light,
> Fell silently o'er the warm cheek in its glow,
> And I left it there blighted, and wasted, and low;
> I culled the fair bud as it danced in its mirth,
> And I left it to moulder and fade on the earth.

The speaker's open mantle ("pinion" or wing) coincides with, and perhaps causes, night to fall. The lack of light and warmth kills the flower, which stands in for all things young and beautiful. When the flower's "cheek" is left "blighted, and wasted, and low" we're reminded of Davidson's "I" in the "Fear of Madness" who was herself left "cold, and motionless, and still." To pick a flower ("cull the fair bud") is to enjoy its beauty, but also to kill it. The repetition of "moulder" and "earth" evoke the macabre image of a corpse in its grave, undergoing an interminable process of transformation.

The bringer of death is affectless. The speaker notices but does not react to the mother's weeping or the flower's mirth. While the tone conveys power, there is neither joy nor effort in her movements[32]:

I passed o'er the valley, the glad sounds of joy
Rose soft through the mist, and ascended on high;
The fairest were there, and I paused in my flight,
And the deep cry of wailing broke wildly that night.

In stanza four the speaker makes her first statement of intention:

I stay not to gather the lone one to earth,
I spare not the young in their gay dance of mirth,
But I sweep them all on to their home in the grave,
I stop not to pity—I stay not to save.

The "lone one" she leaves could be the discarded flower from above, but it also suggests the unburied corpse, or perhaps a last mourner left behind in life. Expressed in fitting negative ("stay not" "spare not" "stop not") she evokes the expected or typical reactions. The taking of the "young in their gay dance of mirth" echoes the flower that "danced in its mirth," and reminds us again that the author herself was such a victim of this speaker. The penultimate stanza represents the climax, in which the speaker "pauses" in her otherwise inexorable yet casual progress:

I paused in my pathway, for beauty was there;
It was beauty too death-like, too cold, and too fair!
The deep purple fountain seemed melting away,
And the faint pulse of life scarce remembered to play;

She had thought on the tomb, she was waiting for me,

I gazed, I passed on, and her spirit was free.

Here the bringer of death is a welcome figure to the one who waited. In her "death-like" beauty, however, the dying female provokes hesitation and emotion from the speaker. This scene is sensual in its detail about the body of the dying female, and sexual in its dramatization of the encounter between the desirous dying female and the suddenly moved and engaged speaker. The mutual satisfaction of the encounter liberates the dying and validates the speaker. The final stanza opens with what seems like a pastoral heaven of the newly "free" spirit, where the faintly moving "purple fountain" has given way to the "glad" and energetic "clear stream":

The clear stream rolled gladly, and bounded along,

With ripple, and murmur, and sparkle, and song;

The minstrel was tuning his wild harp to love,

And sweet, and half sad were the numbers he wove.

I passed, and the harp of the bard was unstrung;

The minstrel was not! And I passed on alone,

O'er the newly-raised turf and the rudely-carved stone.

However, the pastoral scene gives way as well to the presence of the speaker, when the harp came unstrung and the minstrel "was not!" The speaker symbolically castrates the minstrel, undoes the possibility of the poetic voice, and interrupts the fantasy of the speaker's union with her victims in an untroubled afterlife. Finally, the loneliness of the speaker resonates as a negative, after the possibilities of union of with the dying female

and the interruption of the pleasant afterlife by the seemingly unintended muting of the minstrel.

"Feats of Death" reminds modern readers of Dickinson's graveyard poems, "I died for Beauty," "Because I could not stop for Death," and "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers." The speech from within the tomb in "I died for Beauty" has the same quality of supreme knowledge which falls short only momentarily when the speaker has to find out that "Truth" and "Beauty" as respective causes of death make them "brethren." The supreme power of the speaker of "Feats of Death" is called into question briefly, when the speaker is revealed to not actually have any power to not be the bringer of death (again, a Dickinson echo with having "the power to live/but not the power to die"). The speaker, surprisingly but inevitably, annihilates the poet figure, causing frisson for the reader who wants to identify Davidson the poet with her poem's persona. "Because I could not stop for Death" shares with "Feats of Death" the sense of momentum with which death moves across the landscape to encounter his victims, the sense with which the encounter between the mortal and the bringer of death is like a seduction, and a resting image of "a house that seemed/a swelling of the ground." "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" has "rafter of satin and roof of stone" as the central location of the poem, and an image strongly evoked by the end of the Davidson poem with "newly-raised turf and the rudely-carved stone."

The commonalities between the Dickinson and Davidson graveyard poems do not so much suggest Davidson's influence on Dickinson (there's no evidence that Dickinson read Davidson, though the former was known to read widely and could certainly have encountered Davidson's poetry in a number of ways) but mutual participation in a culture

of imagining the speaking dead. Davidson, once regarded as an important American poet, now speaks to us in the guise of recovered woman or popular poet. Understanding what made her famous might help us explain what people thought made good poetry in the past, and what was the cultural work of poetry. Taking Davidson's cultural significance as an "omitted center," the answer to an elaborate poetic riddle, this chapter attempts to discover the terms on which Davidson can be read now, without dismissing her as a sentimental cliché or a laughable example of bad poetry. Understanding how Davidson functioned as a posthumous author can help us construct an understanding of Dickinson, and others, as posthumous authors. Reading Davidson also provides an outline of the likely pleasures of reading posthumous poetry, such as appreciation of European Romantic orientalism, allegorization of anxieties and grief over the nation's founding period, consolidation of a native poetic tradition, and a fascination with the speaking dead. Examining past editorial work like that of Samuel Morse, Rufus Griswold, and the anonymous *Gems* anthologist reveals how these qualities connect the dead author's work with her posthumous publics.

Chapter 2

Newspaper Waifs and the Fallen Poet-Soldier: Claiming Civil War Poetry

> "The following poetic gem was found in the pocket of a volunteer who died in camp on the Potomac months ago."
>
> --*Hinds County Gazette,* July 23, 1862

When Whitman wrote "the real war will never get in the books," he expressed accurately an abiding concern of many in the generations who lived through the American Civil War, and provided later scholars of the period's poetry with its most enduring interpretive framework. Civil War era poetry faced a special challenge in the perceived insufficiency of literary expression to describe, preserve, and make meaning from the various experiences of war. Attempts at rendering "the real war" found expression not only in poetry books but also in periodicals and personal writing. Periodical editors, working within the "culture of reprinting" described by McGill, increased the readership of certain poems as well as created and promoted certain ideas about poetic authorship.

In efforts to render "the real war," these poems were reassigned from a civilian woman's authorship to a male soldier's. Editors of poetry invested in the creation of an archetype of the fallen poet soldier, a figure who was authorized to speak firsthand about the experience of war, even about his own death in battle. As a result of this process of re-printing and re-attribution, certain popular poems were eventually deemed too estranged from their actual authors. These beloved poems, termed "newspaper waifs," necessitated a project of identification and reunification, in parallel with the social movements to provide for war orphans. In these examples of wartime poetry editing,

textual circulation encodes the same issues as poems themselves. These issues include the ideological work of assigning meaning to personal death among the thousands of wartime dead, and properly mourning and memorializing on both the personal and national scales.

In *Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry*, Cristanne Miller discusses the editorial detective work involved in assigning the correct authorial attributions to poems with conflicting provenances. In offering an example, she mentions in passing an interesting generalization based on her wide reading: that many Civil War poems were claimed to have been found on the body of a dead soldier, who was also sometimes understood to be the poem's author. Implied in Miller's comment is that this story was usually--if not always—invented. Such fictions are exactly the sort of textual trappings that most modern editors take as their duty to remove, in order to preserve and transmit what is imagined to be the correct, original text. This practice conflicts somewhat with the view, often held by these same modern editors, of the "social" text as a material artifact reflecting the impress of not only the author, but also the editor, the means of production and circulation, and even the desires and expectations of readers. If we restore these fictions (and facts) to our reading of Civil War poetry, we can more clearly see the figure of the fallen poet-soldier, an archetype and author-type, sometimes real and sometimes imagined, sometimes faked and sometimes fiction and sometimes a combination fraud and real person. The fallen poet-soldier is a literary creation worked out in collaboration among found text, editor, and reader. Appreciating a poem written by, or imagined to have been written by, a soldier who dies in war becomes a significant aesthetic element of Civil War poetry.

I. Civil War Death and Civil War Poetry

The Civil War period has long been recognized by historians as a turning point in American attitudes toward death. This thesis has been elaborated in Drew Gilpin Faust's recent book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (2008):

> The Civil War matters to us today because it ended slavery and helped to define the meanings of freedom, citizenship, and equality. It established a newly centralized nation-state and launched it on a trajectory of economic expansion and world influence. But for those Americans who lived in and through the Civil War, the texture of the experience, its warp and woof, was the presence of death.

This view is borne out if one looks at the poetry that circulated about and during the war. Soldier death is a recurring concern and matter for poetic treatment. In a related process, poems frequently lost their association with their actual authors through periodical reprinting, and were labeled "newspaper waifs," analogizing them to war orphans. In this chapter I argue that poetic production, circulation, and reception form part of what Faust terms the "work of death," which requires "participation and response; it must be experienced and handled" (xiv). The "work of death" entailed the logistical complexities of separating the dead from the wounded, identifying the dead, notifying the next of kin, transporting and disposing of the remains, and memorializing the dead. It also entailed the ideological work of rendering these deaths meaningful, and carrying out mourning rituals on both personal and national levels. The poetry of the fallen poet soldier and the poem as "newspaper waif" each contribute to these efforts, especially in rendering

individual deaths meaningful, imaginatively re-connecting the dead with his loved ones, and analogizing the issues of anonymity and identification.

The experience of mass death brought about social, political, and philosophical changes in American culture, and poetry was one of the tools for articulating, coping with, and even bringing about these changes. The poetry of nineteenth-century America in general has lately come up for re-consideration, and one of the most lively areas of current study is that of Civil War poetry. Contemporary scholars have sought to reclaim the neglected or maligned poetic output during this time. Franny Nudelman, in her study *John Brown's Body: Slavery, Violence, & the Culture of War,* sets a precedent for later studies in her chapter "'This Compost': Death and Regeneration in Civil War Poetry." Setting aside for a moment the question of hierarchical value that seems to always attend considerations of poetry, Nudelman instead valorizes the simple idea of poetry as a cultural production by looking at both the prominent wartime poetry of Whitman and at relatively anonymous poems in wartime and post-war anthologies. The anthology *Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (2005), with its voices of North, South and West, abolitionist and anti-abolitionist, female and male, black and white, soldier and civilian, slave and free, prominent and obscure, is but the first of a growing number of articles and chapters which explore the varied poetic responses to the war.[33]

Despite the evident plurality of voices and perspectives in recent work on Civil War poetry, perhaps the most significant single one is that of the soldier, and one can readily imagine reasons readers might have been interested in the soldier's point of view. In *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*

(2001), Alice Fahs devotes an entire chapter to what she terms "The Sentimental Soldier," a set of behavioral and representational conventions created to address the problem of imaginative identification between the individual and the mass, and between the civilian and the soldier. War, as a challenge to dominant sentimental ideology, pressured literary producers and readers to apply their conventional beliefs about death and sacrifice to these new situations to create meaning. Along these lines, Fahs writes, "the most popular Civil War songs and poems [in contrast to the expected focus on action] were those that turned away from battle and imagined the thoughts of individual soldiers" (103). The sentimental soldier is significantly represented in the "hundreds of poems and songs written in the first person, for instance, imagined the dying thoughts of soldiers on the battlefield" (12). While an investment in capturing the imagined speech of the self-sacrificing soldier plays an important part in the literature of prior and later wars, the dying soldier poems of the American Civil War, argues Fahs, "performed the difficult cultural task of making those often anonymous deaths appropriately meaningful" (101):

> It was widely assumed during the war that soldiers' deaths held great meaning; the idea that such deaths might be senseless only fully emerged in the wake of World War I. Yet it was also widely assumed that for soldiers' deaths to be meaningful, that meaning needed to be communicated, and it was only through the creation of appropriate representations--whether funeral rituals, monuments, or poems--that the fallen soldier could be appropriately memorialized. The inverse of the apparent Victorian obsession with individual representation was the fear that a lack of such representation threatened nonexistence.

Among the expressions, real or imagined, of dying soldiers, are “the soldier’s thoughts at the moment of death” (95), “wartime poems that softened the brutal realities of war by aestheticizing death” (99), and poetry as a “form of communication between the imagined soldier and his listener—in reality, a reader on the home front” (101). Several other points Faust makes in *This Republic of Suffering* are useful to note for my purposes here. First, among the philosophical developments in response to dealing with mass death in wartime are two significant changes in religious ideas. In a move that follows the developments also traced by Laderman in *The Sacred Remains*, "the traditional notion that corporeal resurrection and restoration would accompany the Day of Judgment seemed increasingly implausible to many Americans who had seen the maiming and disfigurement inflicted by this war" (xvi). Even as Christian faith in the essential integrity of the body in the afterlife was significantly challenged, many Americans clung to the idea of the “good death.” To die a “good” Christian death was to be at peace in the knowledge that the relationship between the soul and God assured one a place in heaven. The good death ideally occurred at home, in one’s own bed, surrounded and witnessed by friends and family, who could attest to the peaceful passing. A recurring theme in Faust’s book, the good death is also a recurring theme in period discussions of the war: "So diverse and numerous were these representations of the Good Death that they reached a wide spectrum of the American population at mid-century, and they would become a central theme within the songs, stories, and poetry of the Civil War itself" (7). Imaginatively participating in this particular scene of death becomes a driving concern for wartime writing.

> The *hors mori*, the hour of death, had to be witnessed, scrutinized, interpreted, narrated--not to mention carefully prepared for by any sinner who sought to be worthy of salvation. The sudden and all but unnoticed end of the soldier slain in the disorder of battle, the unattended deaths of unidentified diseased and wounded men denied these consolations. Civil War battlefields and hospitals could have provided the material for an exemplary text on how not to die (9).

Because of these norms and beliefs, Faust argues, dying away from home was possibly the most distressing aspect of Civil War death. Since "family members needed to witness a death in order to assess the state of the dying person's soul, for these critical last moments of life would epitomize his or her spiritual condition," writing and other cultural production sought to imaginatively bridge that distance (10). Consolation letters written from the front to grieved family members, for example, generically aimed "to make absent loved ones virtual witnesses to the dying moments they had been denied" (15). Dying soldier poems create these moments, offering imaginative access to those who need it, and the vicarious pleasure of relief and meaningfulness to members of the culture who were denied by the actions of war the sense of union and peaceful presence.

II. The Fallen Poet Soldier

The Poet Soldier: A Memoir of the Worth, Talent, and Patriotism of Joseph Kent Gibbons, who fell in the service of his country during the Great Rebellion is a memorial poetry volume published in 1868 in honor of a Union soldier and former newspaperman

who died in camp of illness before ever seeing battle. By examining the textual construction of this particular poet soldier, I hope to anchor more liberal constructions of the "fallen poet soldier" which I discuss later in the chapter. Gibbons' volume contributes to "the work of death" by memorializing the man, blending his two professional identities of poet and soldier into one persona, and participating in the broader culture's efforts to render individual deaths meaningful.

Like Davidson's, Gibbons' volume was assembled and published as a memorial volume arranged by friends, in order to commemorate the author's life and preserve the author's writing and memory. Unlike Davidson's, however, Gibbons' volume had the added purpose of asserting the meaningfulness of its author's death. P.L. Buell, the book's editor, gives the reasons for putting together the book and publishing it:

> Thus, at the early age of twenty-two, Joseph Kent Gibbons, patriot and poet, passed away from earth. The simple story of his life and the verses he left behind him, are his best epitaph. Nor can any hero of this war whether he carry the musket or lead an army, have a prouder record than his—that *he did his duty.* […] He lives still in many a heart and home, and the works of his life survive him. And thus it came to pass, that some loving hearts gathered these memorials, and shaped them into the semblance of his beautiful life. Being dead they hoped he yet might speak. As bread upon the waters, this little book is sent out to do its work. It may teach some hesitating heart, or make some timid soul to become of giant strength, by its record of a life of duty well performed. God speed it on its mission.

The Poet Soldier falls neatly into two parts: the first 48 pages, including all the front matter, are devoted to the biography. Written by Buell, the story is stitched together from Gibbons' personal and published writings, including 14 of his poems, which are listed in the table of contents. The second half of the book consists of publisher's ads and a somewhat lengthy discourse, with illustrations, on "the new phrenology," written by the publisher, Samuel R. Wells. This dual nature of the book is not hinted at in the cover, front matter, or table of contents. Indeed, the page numbering in the phrenology piece indicates these pages were part of another volume, and were simply inserted to round out the volume. Despite this, the yoking together of "the new phrenology" and the poet soldier is not totally without significance. The connection between editor-biographer Buell and Gibbons is somewhat elucidated by Gibbons' last pre-enlistment poem, presumably to the girl he left behind: an acrostic spelling out the name "Sarah Naomi Buell," likely the biographer's daughter. The editorial and commemorative work was undertaken by a family member of someone who may have been exceedingly grieved by the loss of Gibbons; *The Poet Soldier* resembles the posthumous publications of Lucretia Davidson and Emily Dickinson in the "friendly" relationship between author and editor.

Less clear, though, is the connection between Buell and the publisher, Samuel Wells. The publisher is undoubtedly responsible for the configuration of the book, including the ads and his own article on phrenology. Buell's biography of Gibbons is introduced by Nelson Sizer, a noted phrenologist. The enlistment of Sizer to write the introduction suggests the possibility that Wells saw the publication of *The Poet Soldier* as an opportunity to promote his phrenological ideas and his publications. Buell, acting as agent for Gibbons' work, may have even paid the publisher to produce the volume, and

the inclusion of the phrenological material perhaps balanced the commercial debt. The conjunction of these texts into one volume suggests the possibility of interpreting the details of the frontispiece and the poet's biography through the diagnostic lens of phrenology.

However incongruous the two different texts may seem to be, the interpretive availability of Gibbons' physicality and mind through phrenology maps onto the biography's posthumous readings of him as "poet soldier." *The Poet Soldier* resembles Davidson's *Amir Khan and Other Poems* in a number of ways. The two volumes share this interest in reading the deceased's fragile health, poetic potential and moral goodness, as well as orienting the subject's writings in a firmly biographical narrative context. Unlike Davidson's volume, however, Gibbons' book seems not to have been a commercial venture (apart from the possibility of its promotion of phrenology), or at least not a successful one—contemporary periodicals do not seem to cite the book, which suggests it was not offered for sale or publicly reviewed. Instead, it was likely distributed to family and friends, perhaps through subscription.

Gibbons' poems are few and are embedded in his biography to elucidate his mental journey through life and into war. That journey can be summarized by looking at the first and last poems in his volume. Many of Gibbons' poems were first published in the newspaper where he worked until his enlistment. The first poem appears in late April 1861, its newspaper publication coinciding with both the beginning of Gibbons' work at the printing office and the early flush of war, ushered in by Lincoln's March inauguration and Virginia's early April declaration that it would be following seven other southern states in seceding from the Union. This poem, "Liberty Song," typifies the outpouring of

amateur periodical verse the early days of the war occasioned: "Inspired by the war, numbers of ordinary citizens, both male and female, contributed a profusion of patriotic poetry to newspapers, a fact that many observers at the time found striking" (Fahs 29). Although the biography stresses Gibbons' early and abiding appreciation of poetry, this is the first evidence of his writing it. Like so many of his countrymen poets, he seems to have been inspired to write by the unfolding secession, just as Davidson was claimed by Griswold to have been first inspired by the birthday celebration of George Washington.

"God save our Union!" let us sing;
And while our notes spontaneous ring,
Let each their choicest offering bring
To Freedom's holy altar!
Our Stars and Stripes are overshaded;
How have their former glories faded!
Our very hearth-stones are invaded!
Then rise and never falter!
Shall rebel hordes of reckless traitors,
Our "Southern Arnold's" imitators,
Of fiendish broils the foul creators,
Infringe our sacred right?
No! Union, Justice, Liberty,
Our watchword evermore shall be;
Then let us make our Nation free,

Or fall in Freedom's fight!

This poem concerns itself with voice and speech, and the pressing need to declare the wish for God's help in the crisis. The second stanza transposes the space of the military encroachments: "our very hearth-stones are invaded"—where the southern militias have mustered to hold captured, distant Union forts. The language of the third stanza, the phrases "reckless traitors" and "imitators," label the inauthenticity of secession. These imitators, "Southern Arnolds," create unruly conflicts ("fiendish broils," which also conjures up images of hellishness with heat and devils). The final stanza re-iterates the theme of words "Union, Justice, Liberty,/Our watchword[34] evermore shall be." And the final image, "let us make our Nation free,/Or fall in Freedom's fight!" forebodes Gibbons' own fate as we know it and as he, at this point, does not glimpse.

Gibbons' few post-enlistment poems were not published before his death, nor before their appearance in the memorial volume. In October 1862, the month of his final illness and death, he wrote "The Soldier's Grave." Buell prefaces the poem in a way that is similar to Morse's editorial glosses in *Amir Khan and Other Poems*, drawing attention to the poem's position in the author's biography and its enhanced meaning after its author's death. The verses, according to Buell, "foreshadow [Gibbons'] own fate, but rise grandly above any thought of despondency. They have the ring of the death-song of the Indian warrior, chanted in the presence of his foe."

Underneath a hillock fair,
Where the ever-weeping willow
Chants a weird and dirge-like air,
O'er the streamlet's rippling billow,

Freedom's martyr, freed from care,

Slumbers on his lonely pillow.

Shrine, nor pillar's honored mound,

Decks the Hero's silent dwelling,

Deeds of valor to unfold,

Admiration's thought excelling:

And his praises manifold

From his bitter foes compelling.

Human fabrics such as these,

Time's destroying sway soon crumbles;

Whose fell power, by Heaven's decrees,

Mightiest monarchies oft humbles,

And earth's proudest pageantries

From their lofty stations tumbles.

But a more enduring praise

Thy brave actions shall inherit;

Which the hearts of men shall raise

O'er the deeds' exalted merit,

Till eternal glory's rays

Consecrate thy hallowed spirit.

There he sleeps, from trouble free,
Life's dark strife in peace forsaking,
Till the final reveille
Of our new creation's waking,
Calls him with the just to be,
Heavenly joys for aye partaking.

Signs of conventional mourning mingle with particulars of the wartime setting. Elements of "The Soldier's Grave" exemplify arguments made by Faust in *This Republic of Suffering*. First, Buell's preface appeals to the fantasy of this poem as an index to the mind of the speaker on his deathbed. Gibbons-as-dying-soldier here displays awareness of death and an emotional calm in encountering it; the poem's rationality suggests the author's preparation to die "a good death." Another important feature is the subject matter of the known and marked grave. Faust devotes considerable discussion to the incomplete, unsatisfactory, and chaotic nature of death observances and burial during the war. The ideal of the orderly, appropriate, and marked soldiers' grave represents an important fantasy that was far from likely for most casualties. Here the soldier's grave is imagined as decorous, proper, and making sense of the death through Christian interpretation of the good deeds of life and the soul's reward in the afterlife.

Although Gibbons' volume did not have anything like the popular audience Davidson's had, we can observe similarities between the books in their likely effect on readers. *The Poet Soldier,* though grave and less self-consciously artful than *Amir Khan,* performs cultural work by engaging the particular aesthetics of posthumous poetic

reading. Like Davidson before him, Gibbons in his completed short life becomes a moral example to future readers, and the consolidation of his writings and life into a published volume provides a material stand-in for grieving loved ones. Readers are invited to witness the death of the author, and mourn him, either for himself or as proxy for other deaths and other objects of mourning. The volume renders Gibbons' loss meaningful, even satisfactory, by encoding his death with its wartime context, intertwining his soldier narrative with his poetic responses to it. The biography follows the wartime mourning convention of figuring soldiers' deaths as Christian sacrifice. Memorial volumes helped make this case for deaths as sacrifice to higher meaning. *The Poet Soldier* can be classified alongside martyrologies, such as those for Colonel Ellsworth, who was famously the first Union man killed and was the subject of dozens of tribute poems. The creation of the figure of the dead poet soldier reclaims pyrrhic heroism, death that needs rhetoric to make it meaningful. The book is dedicated to those who "rendered eminent but undistinguished services," especially those suffering and dying not on the battlefields but in camp, prison, and hospital, where in fact two thirds of the Civil War's at least 620,000 casualties resulted.

Gibbons' poems also participate in a growing dialectic between periodical and codex publication. While poems were published in newspapers both North and South, in the North it was more common for verse to come out in volumes; the South lacked the industry for book publication. The commemorative volume asserts its Unionism by its very typicality and existence. While his volume is occasioned by, and thus remains strongly constituted by, his individual identity (see his name and capsule biography in the very title), Gibbons' poems originally were published as newspaper ephemera, first

without any signature at all and later with his initials. The sectional quality I suggest above, of the anonymities and permutations of periodical poetry publication versus the relative stability of poetry collections in books, will become significant in my next example, where I consider the publication history of an invented "fallen soldier poem."

III. Reprinting "The Picket-Guard"

Fallen soldier poetry and periodical circulation are equally well-represented in the publication history of one of the more popular poems of the war, "All Quiet Along the Potomac," or "The Picket-Guard," as it was first published in *Harper's Weekly* on November 30, 1861.[35] Only one major battle, First Bull Run or First Manassas, had occurred by the time of this printing. The poem offers the perspective of a soldier on patrol who succumbs to a sniper's shot. The lonely death is imagined, and the poem outlasts, just barely, the consciousness of the soldier. The author, New Yorker Ethel Lynn Beers (here, "E.B.") lifted the phrase, "All quiet along the Potomac to-night, except now and then a stray picket is shot" from contemporary newspaper accounts and ironizes it with this tight focus on an otherwise inconsequential death. The refrain of "All quiet" is first spoken by the soldier, and then by the narrator; in its final repetition the "quiet" includes the death of the picket-guard who originated the phrase.

"All quiet along the Potomac," they say,
"Except, now and then, a stray picket
Is shot as he walks on his beat to and from,
By a rifleman hid in the thicket.
'Tis nothing--a private or two, now and then,

Will not count in the news of the battle;

Not an officer lost--only one of the men

Moaning out, all alone, his death-rattle."

All quiet along the Potomac to-night,

Where the soldiers lie peacefully dreaming;

Their tents, in the rays of the clear autumn moon

Or the light of the watch-fire, are gleaming.

A tremulous sigh, as the gentle night-wind

Through the forest-leaves softly is creeping;

While stars up above, with their glittering eyes,

Keep guard--for the army is sleeping.

There's only the sound of the lone sentry's tread,

As he tramps from the rock to the fountain,

And thinks of the two in the low trundle-bed

Far away in the cot on the mountain

His musket falls slack--his face, dark and grim,

Grows gentle with memories tender,

As he mutters a prayer for the children asleep—

For their mother--may Heaven defend her!

The moon seems to shine just as brightly as then,

That night, when the love yet unspoken
Leaped up to his lips--when low-murmured vows
Were pledged to be ever unbroken.
Then drawing his sleeve roughly over his eyes,
He dashes off tears that are welling,
And gathers his gun closer up to its place,
As if to keep down the heart-swelling.

He passes the fountain, the blasted pine-tree,
The footstep is lagging and weary;
Yet onward he goes, through the broad belt of light,
Toward the shade of the forest so dreary,
Hark! Was it the night-wind that rustled the leaves?
Was it moonlight so suddenly flashing?
It looked like a rifle—"Ha! Mary, good-by!"
And the life-blood is ebbing and plashing.

All quiet along the Potomac to-night,
No sound save the rush of the river;
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead--
The picket's off duty forever!

"The Picket-Guard" was immediately and repeatedly reprinted throughout the war: searching for the poem's key phrases in online periodical databases, I have found thirty-

three wartime printings, and a significant number postwar as well.[36] Like a game of telephone, the story picks up and drops various bits of information in transmission. Within a year, the poem was re-titled with its refrain, "All Quiet Along the Potomac To-Night," and so it remained in nearly all subsequent references, including when it was set to music, and when the author herself, in 1879, titled her collected poetry volume after it. In the first few months of reprinting, the authorial initials "E.B." are preserved only a few times; more frequently there was no indication of authorship. Around the same time that the title effectively changed for good, the poem also started to appear with various accompanying lines about its origins.

The weak identification of the author (the soon-lost initials "E.B.") leaves the poem ripe for reattribution in a manner that fits and extends the subject of the poem. The story of the anonymous dead soldier-poet, tendering what might be imagined as an account of his own death, arises and persists. The soldier as author provides the ideal witness for the actual experience of war, fulfilling a craving for "the real" on the part of homefront readers. The soldier who leaves after his death the record of his own emotional experience offers a way to imaginatively bridge the distance between himself and the people he left at home. Related to this idea of "bridging the distance," reading this poem as if it is the record of its author's dying moments offers a proxy for the loved ones' witnessing of the "good death." Finally, the image of the dead soldier-poet, identified chiefly by the poem he holds in his hand, offers a poignant conflation of the ideas of anonymity in death and in textual circulation.

The poem was indeed written by Ethel Lynn Beers, who seems to have terminated her authorial rights by allowing *Harper's* to enter copyright on the poem when she sent it

to them in 1861. The Library of Congress' copyright catalog shows Harper Brothers Publishers as the only registered claimant to the poem. In the thirty-three wartime reproductions of the poem I've identified, there are also a number of different claims of authorship. These misattributions repeatedly claim the author as a (male) soldier, and many of these attributions come attached with a sentimental claim about the author's death in battle. In the following pages I consider several of these different publications to show how the poem's meaning evolves with its reappearance, the misattributions, and the subsequent periodical debates over its authorship.

"The Picket-Guard" signed by "E.B." was reprinted in late 1861 or early January 1862 by the *Pittsburg Christian Advocate*. *Littell's Living Age* credits the *PCA* in its reprinting of January 1862; two other newspapers reprint the poem in early 1861 without the author's initials. We can see here how easily the authorial initials can slide into true anonymity in these quick and vast reprinting cycles. For the remainder of the dozen reprintings in 1862, the poem does not appear with the author's initials.

From unattributed to misattributed is a short jump. As the action of the war began to increase, an abbreviated, 4-stanza version of "The Picket Guard" was reprinted in the May 15, 1862 San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* with this prefatory note:

> Our New York correspondent writing on 11th April, in his letter published in the *Bulletin* of May 8th, mentioned the death of Fitz-James O'Brien, the poet, who recently received his death-wound in a brilliant skirmish on the Upper Potomac, during which he fought the rebel leader hand to hand and killed him on the spot. The last lines of O'Brien were the following[.]

O'Brien was also an Irish immigrant, an eclectic writer of journalism, drama, fiction and poetry, and a regular of the lower Manhattan pub Pfaff's. Pfaff's was home to a bohemian artistic community including Whitman, a world brilliantly documented by Ed Whitley's digital archive, *The Vault at Pfaff's*. O'Brien's character as a bohemian somewhat preceded his reputation as a poet; his enlistment in the army seems to have been inspired more by his pugilism than his patriotism:

> When the Civil War began, O'Brien enlisted in the Union Army, producing patriotic verse and participating in recruitment. Albert Parry speculates that it was not the subject of the conflict that attracted O'Brien, but his nature as a fighter […] In February 1862 he was cited for bravery in an engagement in West Virginia, but a few days later he was shot by a Confederate soldier while on a scouting mission. Though he was able to kill his attacker and ride twenty-four miles back to the Union encampment, he died two months later from tetanus brought on by improper medical care of his wound (Whitley).

In the *Bulletin* item O'Brien's heroism and immediate death are both exaggerated and less specific than the later historical record would show. The news of O'Brien's death appeared in many newspapers, but in this case it was paired, either accidentally or designedly, with the story of the soldier picked off by a sharpshooter. The poem fits a trend of imagining soldiers as dying rather than killing: Faust argues that this "enabled soldiers to mitigate their terrible responsibility for the slaughter of others" (6). The poem treats a scenario that was typical of this early part of the war: the killing of solitary guardsmen by a sharpshooter. The nature of death by sharpshooter, where one does not

face one's killer, was sometimes read as characteristic of each side's cowardice or lack of valor. The use of sharpshooters by each side in the war came in for complaint in the early press on the conflict.

"All quiet along the Potomac," they say,
"Except, now and then, a stray picket
Is shot, as he walks on his beat to and fro,
By a rifleman hid in the thicket."
'Tis nothing—a private or two now and then,
Will not count in the news of battle;
Not an officer lost—only one of the men
Moaning out, all alone, the death-rattle.

There's only the sound of the lone sentry's tread,
As he tramps from the rock to the fountain;
And he thinks of the two in the low trundle-bed,
Far away in the cot on the mountain.
His musket falls slack—his face, dark and grim,
Grows gentle with memories tender,
As he mutters a prayer for the children asleep,
For their mother—may Heaven defend her!

He passes the fountain, the blasted pine-tree,
The footstep is lagging and weary;

Yet onward he goes, through the broad belt of light,
Toward the shade of the forest so dreary.
Hark! Was it the night-wind that rustled the leaves?
Was it moonlight so wonderously flashing?
It looked like a rifle—"Ha! Mary, good-bye!"
And the life blood is ebbing and plashing.

All quiet along the Potomac, to-night!
No sound save the rush of the river;
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead—
The picket's off duty forever!

In omitting the second and fourth stanzas, the editor has excluded some of the scenic and emotional development of the original, and favored the opening irony, the victim's misperception of the gunfire, and his abrupt death. Although the poem itself does not claim to describe its author's death, the invitation to read it as such is implicit in its presentation here. Although abridging two stanzas is a significant rewriting, arguably more radical is the way it recasts the performative speech of the poem as the "last lines of O'Brien," which he apparently wrote in some temporal proximity to the here-fabled hand-to-hand combat that lead to his death. The poem's scenario—of a watchman being shot while on patrol—more closely matches the actual circumstances of O'Brien's wounding than it does the one presented in the note. Indeed, the convention of "dying soldier" poems "maintains a distance from the plausible speech of an actual dying person, and thus from the voyeuristic implications of intruding on an actual deathbed" (Garvey

170). The poem and its framing narrative share the imagined instant death, one the imagined author could not himself narrate, but in a much more poetic and ideologically satisfying way than a death from infection like the one O'Brien actually experienced. O'Brien as poet gives the poem a doubly authorized speaker, who can both versify and speak from wartime experience as a soldier.

The attribution to Fitz-James O'Brien did not stick, but something of his story did. In 6 of the 7 printings in the second half of 1862 and very early 1863, the poem is published without an author line but with the following source statements:

> The original was found in the pocket of a volunteer who died in camp on the Potomac (*Fayetteville Observer,* July 17, 1862; *Daily Southern Crisis,* January 1, 1863).
>
> The following poetic gem was found in the pocket of a volunteer who died in camp on the Potomac months ago (*Hinds County Gazette,* July 23, 1862).
>
> This beautiful—and it is to us, very beautiful—little poem was sent by a member of the 49th (N.Y.) Regiment to his wife (*The Wisconsin Farmer*, 1862).
>
> [These lines] were found, it is said, in the pocket of a volunteer who died in camp on the Potomac (*Southern Literary Messenger,* September 1, 1862).
>
> Taken from the pocket of a picket, who was found dead on the Potomac (*Macon Weekly Telegraph,* November 7, 1862).

> The original manuscript having been found in the pocket of a volunteer, who died in camp on the Potomac. Who he was, or where from, was not said. It is fair to infer, however, from the poem having found its way into print in the West first, that the writer was from that section, and was one of the Federal army (*An Errand in the South in the Summer of 1862* by the Reverend William Wyndham Malet).

Each of these reprints the poem's refrain as its title. Like a game of telephone, the story picks up and drops various bits of information in transmission. Saying a copy is found in the pocket, or that a poem was sent from the front in a letter, does not necessarily mean that person wrote it; however, it is easy to see how the fantasy of conflating speaker and author at work leads to the assertion that "the original manuscript" is sourced from the body of its author, in fact representing an artifact of that dead person's voice. In her article "Anonymity, Authorship, and Recirculation: A Civil War Episode," Ellen Gruber Garvey traces two other poems' similar re-attributions through re-publication: "anonymity allowed publishers and readers to participate in, and even take over, some of the functions that authorship with a name attached occupies" (160). She goes on to suggest that "the soldier's authorship and 'his' death are crucial to the poem's value" (168).

One can see from the papers in which the poem appears that textual equivalence could occur across sectional lines as well. War poetry performed different sectional cultural roles. The South's poetry sounded the "keynotes of literary war" while in the North poetry was "only a fraction of the [literary] outpouring" (Fahs 53). This difference was largely due to the North's dominance of not only industrial printing but also

professional writing; there was simply much more publishing, of all sorts, in the North. Poetry was at the center of Southern literary output, which in a sense made much Northern poetry available to be marked as Southern. The actual content of poems, regardless of their origin, however, could (and did) largely "pass" as the other. Northern poems and Southern poems shared many political statements, a concern over the geographical distance between the homefront and the battlefield, and, most of all, the need to make individual deaths meaningful. The focus on individual death could best be shared when a poem did not necessarily involve particular identities.

> Reprinting had the capacity to increase greatly the circulation of a news item, poem, or story and give readers the impression that it originated in their own region. In the hands of reprinters, for example, "Somebody's Darling," a poem about a dying soldier, appeared as both a Northern and Southern poem (Garvey 161).

Fahs and others relate instances of the same poem being "used" by each cause, North and South. Generic scenes of discovery become the main way of particularizing an author, who wrote something "shortly before 'his fall in battle'" or in whose pocket a poem was found after his death. What we see here is the textual equivalence of one death with another, one dead soldier with another, and of any anonymous poem with any likely speaker/author.[37]

In January 1863, the *Fayetteville Observer* published the poem again, but this time with a new preface: the "Remarkable Narrative" of the heroism of Lamar Fontaine, and the claim that Fontaine was in fact the author of this poem. The poem is prefaced with a call

> for a monument to the unknown dead […] the Unknown Heroes […], among them a cavalry man from Texas, who, unable to walk a step, carries a pair of crutches on horseback, and with them has continued to perform all the arduous duties required of him […] We little dreamed that this unknown dragoon would prove to be not only the most heroic of all the heroes of the war, but a poet of a higher order beside […] The following letter […] reads like a romance, yet bears upon its face the evidence of truth.

The poet-soldier gains notice as an "unknown hero," someone without a name but with instead an identifying story, one that admittedly may strain credibility ("reads like a romance") but fits the bill for the paper's ideological project to wrest control of the war's cultural record. Though not mentioned, it seems evident the "letter" was written by Fontaine himself. The letter introduces Fontaine, gives his background and military resume; asserts his skills as a rider and marksman; presence at significant battles and alongside significant military figures; his wounds and his triumph over them; daring feats and unlikely successes in battle and in espionage; the number of horses killed under him in battle (6); the fact that his merit has been overlooked and heretofore unrewarded; and, finally, the claim that "Lamar Fontaine is the author of the beautiful lines which have recently been published in all our papers." The amended poem opens "All Quiet Along the Potomac To-Night / By Lamar Fontaine, Company 1, 2d Reg't Va Cavalry. / Written while on picket on the bank of the Potomac, 1861."

This item in the *Fayetteville Observer* begins an enduring attribution of this poem to Lamar Fontaine. The "romance" of the prefatory letter that "yet bears upon its face the

evidence of truth" resembles the outlandish self-accounting that Fontaine offers in his 1909 memoir, *My Life and Lectures*, where he claims, among other things, to have walked 750 miles home as a boy, after living for three years among the Comanches; survived a confrontation with a grizzly bear; discovered the southwestern Native American cliff dwellings; sailed on a polar expedition; explored Central and South America; fought in the Russian army; and gone with Commodore Matthew C. Perry as part of his historic "opening" of Japan to the West. Fontaine defends his authorship in his memoir by recounting how he wrote the poem to avenge the death of a friend, which he witnessed when the two were on picket together.

Fontaine's Munchausenian persona, despite straining credibility, puts a heroic spin on the poem, and the attribution to him was sustained in part by the force of his own will, as well as the interest of Southern editors who wanted to claim the poem for its own heroic propaganda. William Gilmore Simms' 1866 anthology *War Poetry of the South* is still considered one of the definitive gatherings of its kind (indeed, a facsimile edition remains in print through a historical book series). In the text, this poem is noted as being "By Lamar Fontaine," and between the author line and the first line of the poem appears this editorial note (133):

> The claim to the authorship of this poem, which Fontaine alleges, has been disputed in behalf of a lady of New York, but she herself continues silent on the subject.

The poem appeared in Southern periodicals seven more times during the war with the author listed as "Lamar Fontaine, 'hero on crutches.'"

Authorship of the poem continued to be contested past the end of the war and its attendant commemorative anthologies, and yet another authorial attribution appealed to the memorial impulse to settle the matter. In 1880, Hugh Oliver wrote to the editors of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* with "a lengthy communication in proof of the claim that the poetic gem […] was written by his father (Thaddeus Oliver)." The editors summarize the main points of this argument: that the elder Oliver had expressed the poem's sentiments in speech and writing prior to the publication of the poem; that other examples of his poems show he was "*capable* of writing this one"; and supporting letters from acquaintances of his father's corroborating authorship. In one letter, a friend, John D. Ashton, recounts hearing the poem in camp one evening during a tete-a-tete with Oliver:

> He read the lines without unusual feeling until he came to the picture of the little trundle-bed, when his voice trembled and his eyes filled with tears. That 'touch of nature' was contagious, and I felt the big drops trickling down my own cheeks; and even to this day, when I recall the scene, now that he is dead and gone, I feel again something of the old emotion.

The "touch of nature" is the validating fact; it validates in its transmission from speaker to audience. Over time, Ashton's pathos morphs from shared feeling with the poet to a remembrance of his dead fellow soldier. When Ashton recounts the story of Oliver's tears, he evokes his own grief at the loss of his friend. The support for this attribution appeals to the same post-war reflection on the period's poetry voiced by Oliver Wendell Holmes (qtd in Fahs 101):

> There is a genuine and simple pathos in many of them. I do not know whether it sounds scholarly and critical and all the rest, but I think there is more nature and feeling in some of these [songs] than in very many poems of far higher pretensions and more distinguished origin. If I should read the familiar lines "dear mother, I've come home to die," and could read them as they ought to be read, you may be very sure that the light would trouble a good many eyes before it was finished.

Re-reading the wartime poetry, Holmes asserts, requires the memorial spirit to do it properly; any other criteria, he suggests, are secondary.

Despite the differences among the claims to the poem on behalf of the authorizing identity of Fitz-James O'Brien, the demotic anonymous soldier, the heroic Lamar Fontaine, and the sentimental memory of John Oliver, these attributions share the reassignment of the poem from a civilian woman's authorship to a male soldier's. Although each attribution offers motivation (vengeance for Fontaine; Oliver's true emotion) or some kind of documentary evidence (such as the claims about how the poem was discovered on the body of a soldier), none of these claims include actual scenes of composition. In her 1879 poetry collection, Beers herself, after good-naturedly describing the various attributions her poem has had (and noting mordantly that "it seems to have been a dangerous thing to copy it, as it has so often been found in dead men's pockets"), recounts her motivations, evidence in the form of source material and witnesses, and her own scene of composition when she finally publicly asserts her own authorship:

> Fortunately, I have two credible witnesses to the time and circumstances of its writing. A lovely lady sitting opposite me at the boarding-house table looked up from her morning paper at breakfast-time to say, "All quiet along the Potomac, as usual," and I, taking up the next line, answered back, "Except a poor picket shot." After breakfast it still haunted me, and with my paper across the end of my sewing-machine I wrote the whole poem before noon, making but one change in copying it, reading it aloud to ask a boy's judgment in reference to two different endings, and adopting the one he chose. Nothing was ever more vivid or real to me than the pictures I had conjured up of the picket's lonely walk and swift summons, or the waiting wife and children. A short sojourn in Washington had made me quite familiar with the routine of war-time and soldier-life. The popularity of the poem was perhaps due more to the pathos of the subject than to any inherent quality (350).

Beers' modest but detailed explanation of the poem's composition sheds light on Garvey's assertion that dying soldier poems speak in voices unlikely or impossible for actual dying soldiers. These poems, including the two Garvey studies, are written by women in breakfast rooms reflecting on their reading about the war in newspapers.[38] The poem's setting is distant from its own actual scene of composition. This distance, in part, suggests it for the fallen poet soldier fantasy of authorship and discovery, whereby editors and readers re-imagine the poem's composition in line with its setting.

Despite Beers' modesty, her skillful choice and handling of the refrain contributed significantly to the poem's popularity. The phrase "all quiet along the Potomac" already

had ironic possibilities for Beers when she conceived of the poem, and in her hands it comments effectively on the wartime reporting alongside which the poem itself would appear. The phrase "all quiet along the Potomac" begins as a straightforward report of nothing happening in a heavily anticipated scenario. It appears in September 1861 in the *Boston Investigator*, and in the same month in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*:

> All quiet along the Potomac. Everything has been quiet to-day, with the exception of the occasional picket firing.

The same month the poem was first published in *Harper's*, the phrase is used just like this, to characterize the tense inaction with occasional flares. During 1862, the phrase comes in for commentary when it is used. John Billings Davis writes in his memoir that it was the "byword" of 1862; that same year the *Harvard Magazine* mentions the phrase as shorthand to describe early characterizations of the war and war reporting. The phrase recurs in the press and in private correspondence and journals in this way:

> The phrase has become a by-word, it is used so often (Letter from Oliver Wilcox Norton, February 8, 1862).
>
> The stereotype and succinct report of matters for months in front of Washington, may now be changed to all quiet along the Chickahominy (*New York Herald*, June 20 1862).

The evocation of the place and its isolated sounds associated and even embodied in the phrase are exploited to great effect in the poem. In an undated memoir of James Joseph Williamson: "Nothing so far as they knew had occurred during the night to break the monotony of the cry—'all quiet along the Potomac to-night." Alexander Morrison

Stewart's memoir, *Camp, March and Battlefield; or, Three years and a half with the Army of the Potomac*, contains this entry for September 30, 1862:

> All Quiet Along the Potomac.—An old, familiar, boyish doggerel, which, at the time, was considered not only as very expressive, but also as bordering on the sublime, ran thus:--
>
> "I saw a jay-bird on a limb,
>
> He looked at me, and I looked at him."
>
> For the past week and more, though on a much more extensive scale, the counterpart of this juvenile rhyme has been enacted. The secesh have been looking at us, and we have been looking at them, across the classic and beautiful, though now almost waterless Potomac. The barbarous custom of picket-shooting has, in the mean time, been but little practiced. Our sentinels line one side of the river, theirs, the other—and these often within ready and accurate shooting, even speaking distance, yet but little saltpeter ignited. The river is so low at present, that it can be forded in a hundred different places, yet each sentry seems content to keep his own side. *They look at us, and we look at them* (232).

By October of 1863, it is the "old watch-word" which once again applies; in December of 1863, the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* invokes it as a cliché of war reporting. By war's end, the phrase was employed at least self-consciously if not humorously. From the *Wisconsin Daily Patriot* in August 1864: "The Post's Washington special says it is all quiet along the Potomac, and all reports of the rebels crossing are a humbug."

Post-war, the phrase becomes not a "watchword" for a certain season of the war's violence, but for scenarios of inactive tension and mutual threat under cover of peace. An 1872 war retrospective in the *Little Rock Daily Republican* uses the phrase to damn Union general McClellan's ineffectiveness: "[he] had been digging ditches on the Virginia peninsula, and without much success, except an immense expense to the nation and a periodical cry of 'all quiet along the Potomac.'" In 1868, the *Memphis Daily Avalanche* uses the phrase to describe a veteran moving to town without any particular business. In 1877, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* uses the phrase to title a story about an unexciting election. And in 1909, the phrase appears in a personal letter in the Alexander Graham Bell Family papers: "Nothing doing—all quiet along the Potomac." The phrase ranges over time from connoting tension and pending violence to a cute way to express boredom and lack of activity. The poem's initial popularity no doubt arises in part due to its joining in and commenting on the very chorus of this phrase in the news, and its republications in 1862 and 1863, when the bloodshed increased to previously unimagined levels, the irony of the poem—all quiet, only a picket shot now and then—signals the contrast between this more innocent and more vicious times in the war.

In Beers' anecdote about the composition of "The Picket-Guard," the phrase denotes the paired boredom and vigilance of women on the homefront reading about the war in the newspapers. The masculine attribution of the poem she composed pairs interestingly with other wartime scenes of women composing poems. Julia Ward Howe was asked to write more decorous lyrics for the Union marching song "John Brown's Body."

> I replied that I had often wished to do so…in spite of the excitement of the day I went to bed and slept as usual, but awoke the next morning in the gray of the early dawn, and to my astonishment found the wished-for lines were arranging themselves in my brain. I lay quite still until the last verse had completed itself in my thoughts, then hastily arose, saying to myself, I shall lose this if I don't write it down immediately. I searched for an old sheet of paper and an old stub of a pen which I had had the night before, and began to scrawl the lines almost without looking, as I learned to do by often scratching down verses in the darkened room where my little children were sleeping. Having completed this, I lay down again and fell asleep, but not before feeling that something of importance had happened to me.[39]

This passage from Howe's recollections owes something to spiritualism, and something to "the true spirit of poetry" rhetoric familiar to readers of Lucretia Davidson and many others. The physical details (the dim light, scrambling for "old paper," the stub of the pen), suggesting the domestic limitations on encoding poetic expression, contrast strongly with the automatic, subconscious inspiration, which also in some ways disavows the waking power of the (female) mind.

Another scene of a woman's wartime poetic composition and publication offers a suggestive parallel to the way Beers' text circulated publicly. The Southern poet Mary Bayard Clarke, who wrote her "Battle of Manassas" "in the cars while on [her] way to the encampment of the 14th," found that before she had "had time to do more than copy it out fairly" the poem was "seized by an officer" who "took it to his camp and read it" to his

fellow officers. Not only did they give her "three cheers," but they requested the "liberty of publishing it" and sent it to the newspaper (Fahs 91).

Here a woman has her poem snatched from her upon completion; the conscripted draft is publicized through military intervention and then published without her effort. Fahs comments that "such poetry was an expressive part of the shared public experience--and performance--of war." I would add that this anecdote represents a pattern of women's writing finding its public through masculine—and even martial--intervention. Clarke's poem is "liberated" from her like commandeered property, celebrated for its instrumental utterance but quickly separated from its feminine originator. Specifically, this pattern arises again in the story of "The Picket-Guard." Beers, the rightful author, chose to sign her poem with her initials only, as was customary for many writers, especially women writers wishing to preserve their anonymity. The idea that being known for one's writing was unladylike probably allowed many women's poems to pass for men's, as has been shown in the work of Meredith McGill, Eliza Richards, and Ellen Gruber Garvey. Imaginatively re-authoring women's works, the processes of anonymous publication, readerly projections, and editorial interventions colluded to deprive Beers of the credit for her poem and ascribe it to a man. Even dying, the soldier figure is imagined as a more powerful and authentic author than a living woman.

IV. Newspaper Waifs

Late during and after the war, "The Picket-Guard" had many claimants to its authorship; the unsettledness of the matter led to the mystery of its authorship becoming a central aspect of the poem's aesthetic offering. Perhaps in recognition of the poem's

republications, Beers adopts the refrain as title both for the poem and the collection; her claim of authorship does not disregard or reject the re-authoring her poem underwent through periodical re-publication. Instead of focusing on particular claimants, she seems curious about the poem's meaning in its anonymous state, referring, evocatively, to her poem as a "newspaper waif."

I first noticed the term when Beers uses it four times in short space to describe the fate of a few of her poems. She writes in the preface to her 1879 collection:

> The poems now collected for the first time have been contributed during several years to various publications—[…] Copied by other papers, with due credit given, perhaps, at first, some of them have become nameless waifs floating on the sea of print. […] If some gentle heart shall find within this sheaf some treasured waif or song remembered, or if words yet unfamiliar bring to me one new friend, I have not rhymed in vain.

She repeats it in the endnote on the poem "All Quiet Along the Potomac":

> As it bore only the initials E.B., the poem soon became a nameless waif, and was attributed to various pens. […] I have been at some pains to gather up these dates and names as one of the curiosities of newspaper-waif life.

Further searches in nineteenth-century periodical databases show common usage of the phrase, usually to refer to a poem or some other piece of text which has become separated from its original context, and has recirculated and been republished on its own, sometimes with alteration. The association, of anonymized periodical poetry with the waif, is a suggestive one to arise in a period that saw the creation of an entire generation

of war orphans. A waif is "a person who is without home or friends; one who lives uncared-for or without guidance; an outcast from society; an unowned or neglected child" (OED). Invoking this definition, the usage "newspaper waif" is a metaphor of dislocated, de-contextualized, unknown-authored poem as waif, a wayward child. This suggest the poem has a dependent relationship with its author, and that without one, the poem is embattled or endangered, but also free and a possible object of sympathy.

The term may have originated with the 1876 collection *Newspaper Poets*; *or Waifs and their Authors*, by Alphonso A. Hopkins. Hopkins offers biographies of 21 poets, 12 of them women, who authored poems that became popular and widely and anonymously reprinted. Of "The Picket-Guard" he writes (239)

> It has not lost interest, even now. War is only a memory, but to many it is intensely vivid; and there are thousands, in Southern homes as around Northern hearthstones, whose hearts will throb with a quicker pulsation as the read anew.

And of Beers (257):

> [Mrs. Beers] carries her conscience into all of her work, her chief desire, as she has once expressed it, being to write no word or line that should mislead an earnest soul. She finds life's pathos along its traveled ways, and beneath the common speech, and says when she brings her poems all together into a book she shall christen them "Burdocks and Daisies," since they have been gathered by the highway's dust, and within life's trodden

> courts. Mrs. Beers is of medium stature, with dark hair and eyes, and lives in Orange, New Jersey.

Hopkins points out that he has focused his efforts on living authors who had not published their own poetry books. Although an effort to set history straight, *Newspaper Poets* also provides an aesthetic category of "orphaned" work, suggesting these poems share qualities and provoke certain kinds of responses in readers based in part on their apparent anonymity. On the other hand, the phenomenon of the "newspaper waif" becomes most visible when the waifs are reunited with their authors in the anthology. Like the groups of orphaned children after the war who needed orphanages, aid societies, foster care, and social security, waif poems in their disempowered status rally public concern in the form of anthology collection and attempts at reunification with their author/parents. The implied analogy between parent and author suggests the affective relationships treated in many poems are re-enacted through periodical circulation. Poems become waifs through their very popularity. The process of republication renders them fully anonymous yet also evidences their relevance to the reading public. In both the cases of the "newspaper waif" and the invented fallen poet soldier emphasize the viability of textual circulation apart from authors, but with a lingering sense of attachment to the lost author.

Both the image of the dead soldier-poet, identified only by the poem found on his corpse, and the image of the vulnerable, free-floating but nonetheless cherished newspaper waif bring to mind a popular image from the periodical literature of the war, that of the unknown soldier of Gettysburg. A fallen soldier at Gettysburg was unidentifiable but for one document on his person: a photographic image of three

children. The image and its attendant story found its way to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on Oct. 19, 1863; a story titled "Whose Father Was He?" ran in an effort to identify the unknown man by the claims of those who recognized his orphaned children. The photograph itself could not be reproduced in the newspaper—instead, the image was described verbally. The story was picked up and run by other papers around the country. Merely a month later, the effort succeeded. Amos Humiston's body was identified, his wife confirmed a widow, and his children became the faces of efforts to help war orphans. Cartes-de-visite of the children were sold to raise money for an orphanage that took them and others like them in, a further testament to the press' ability to both proliferate a message and harness the strength of the public imagination into an intervention.

The war produced actual waifs, who share with the "newspaper waifs" and fallen soldier-poems the associations with artifacts of the fallen soldier, anonymous recirculation in newspapers, and sympathetic possibilities. The act of claiming the dead by identifying the living provides the bittersweet finish to the Humiston story; the influential circulation of poems apart from their actual producers complicates the rightness of authorial claim with the idea that the cultural work of a text extends far beyond a writer's intention. Poets, editors, and readers claimed as the cultural work of mourning the uncountable yet particular losses of the war. In claiming the classes of dead soldier poet and newspaper waifs as categories for the study of Civil War poetry, present day scholars of nineteenth-century American culture add significantly to their understanding of the connected problems of editorial procedure, national and individual mourning, and the role of poetry in a newspaper society.

Chapter 3

Emily Dickinson's Posthumous Poetry

"Just how much shock, of form or of content, could the reader absorb?"

--Millicent Todd Bingham, *Ancestors' Brocades*

The defining outrage of Dickinson criticism in the past century has been the work of her first editors, Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. From the competing publishing projects of the Todd and Dickinson descendants, to feminist revisions of "the Dickinson myth," to the growing tendency to fault any attempt at translating Dickinson's manuscript poetry into print, scholars have vigorously reacted against what many perceive as the textual, biographical, and critical distortions perpetuated on Dickinson's works by the first editions of her poems in 1890, 1891, and 1896; and of two volumes of her letters in 1894. While many acknowledge the difficulties of the task Todd and Higginson faced in bringing Dickinson's idiosyncratic writing to a public audience, few have paid serious attention to the way these editions form the foundation for Dickinson's initial and enduring reputation.[40]

In this chapter, I read Dickinson's single-author volume print debut, the 1890 *Poems of Emily Dickinson,* as much as possible in terms of its own historical moment, in an attempt to appreciate the meaning of the work for Dickinson's first (print) audiences, and to understand some of the cultural work of Dickinson's poetry when it first appeared.[41] I argue that an underappreciated factor in Dickinson's initial print reception is the fact of her posthumeity. *Poems* participates in, and would have been received within, some of the conventions of posthumous poetry I've explored in prior chapters:

the tendency toward biographical context to frame poems for readers; a tradition of editing which foregrounds personal relationships and editing-as-interpretation; thematic interest in the scene of death and the speaking dead, inflected by the author's death; and concern over the terms of valuation in considering the substance or "spirit" of poetry versus formal sophistication of versification and expression. By reading Dickinson's art within the traditions of amateur "poetry of the portfolio," the gift book, the culture of reprinting, and the memorial poetry volume, I argue for the positive influence of Todd and Higginson on Dickinson's initial and enduring reputation. By emphasizing her continuities with prior analogues in the nineteenth century, I foreground some of the less-understood ways that Dickinson was a nineteenth-century poet, and not only a pre-cursor of modernism, as she is more typically read. Both Dickinson's long-studied manuscript practice and thematics of death are profitably complicated and clarified by placing her texts within a tradition of posthumous poetry.

I. Poetry of the Portfolio

Since the 1981 publication of R.W. Franklin's facsimile edition *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, scholars have increasingly consulted Dickinson's manuscripts, finding there not only the most authentic expression of Dickinson's poetry, but also a whole system of manuscript circulation and self-publication which has become the preferred context in which to understand Dickinson in terms of her own presumed intentions. Although editions of Dickinson from 1890 through the 1998 Franklin variorum have translated Dickinson's poetry into print, there has always been an

awareness of the poetic qualities of her manuscripts. This critical awareness can in part be traced back to Higginson's opening comment in the preface the 1890 *Poems*:

> The verses of Emily Dickinson belong emphatically to what Emerson long since called "the Poetry of the Portfolio,"—something produced absolutely without the thought of publication, and solely by way of expression of the writer's own mind ([iii]).

When Higginson so labels Dickinson's art, he dispels potential confusion by giving this unusual poetry a name; validating it with a tradition; suggesting a mode or disposition in reading; and, by alluding to the book's nature as a stand-in for something else, excusing shortcomings both poetic and editorial.

In order to introduce Emily Dickinson's unusual poetry to new readers, Thomas Wentworth Higginson classifies it as part of an established American verse tradition. Dickinson was not the first to be considered a special manuscript poet.[42] As Higginson notes, it was Emerson who called for the valorization of manuscript poetry. In 1840 the essay "New Poetry" appeared in *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist magazine. The piece opens with a statement that sits uneasily between descriptive speculation and prophetic propaganda, to the effect that a perceived progressive democratization in civic life will (or ought to) be accompanied by similar democratization in the arts:

> The tendencies of the times are so democratical, that we shall soon have not so much as a pulpit or raised platform in any church or townhouse, but each person, who is moved to address any public assembly, will speak from the floor. The like revolution in literature is now giving importance to the portfolio over the book. Only one man in the thousand may print a

> book, but one in ten or one in five may inscribe his thoughts, or at least with short commentary his favorite readings in a private journal.

This claimed democratization of literature means for Emerson that more people may write, and write more, and to better effect. To further this purpose, the valorization of manuscript joins with a relaxation of rules and standards on writing, allowing each to "speak from the floor," leading to greater individual pleasure in expression. Emerson goes on to ask, by way of proposal:

> Is there not room then for a new department in poetry, namely, *Verses of the Portfolio?* We have fancied that we drew greater pleasure from some manuscript verses than from printed ones of equal talent.

Emerson asserts that the portfolio as medium re-sets the aesthetic horizons for poetry. Forgiven, even treasured for, its imperfections and idiosyncrasies, this "private…household poetry" appeals to the mature sensibility with its "ruder strain." Verse of the portfolio, kept (at least metaphorically) in a case or covering as a workspace and/or display for one's best artistic creations, not only allows each man to "speak from the floor," but also engages the "fancy" of the reader. This "democratic" aesthetic prizes the relevance of subject matter: "every day witnesses new attempts to throw into verse the experiences of private life." This kind of verse is set apart for its unique qualities, which are highlighted by their evocation of a narrative of poetic production:

> For there was herein the charm of character; they were confessions; and the faults, the imperfect parts, the fragmentary verses, the halting rhymes, had a worth beyond that of a high finish; for they testified that the writer was more man than artist, more earnest than vain; that the thought was too

> sweet and sacred to him, than that he should suffer his ears to hear or his eyes to see a superficial defect in the expression.

This kind of verse is the appropriate medium for "men of genius" who are "incapable of any perfect exhibition, because however agreeable it may be to them to act on the public, it is always a secondary aim." This is perfectly in line with Emerson's Transcendentalist program. Utter candor is the chief value offered by "verses of the portfolio."

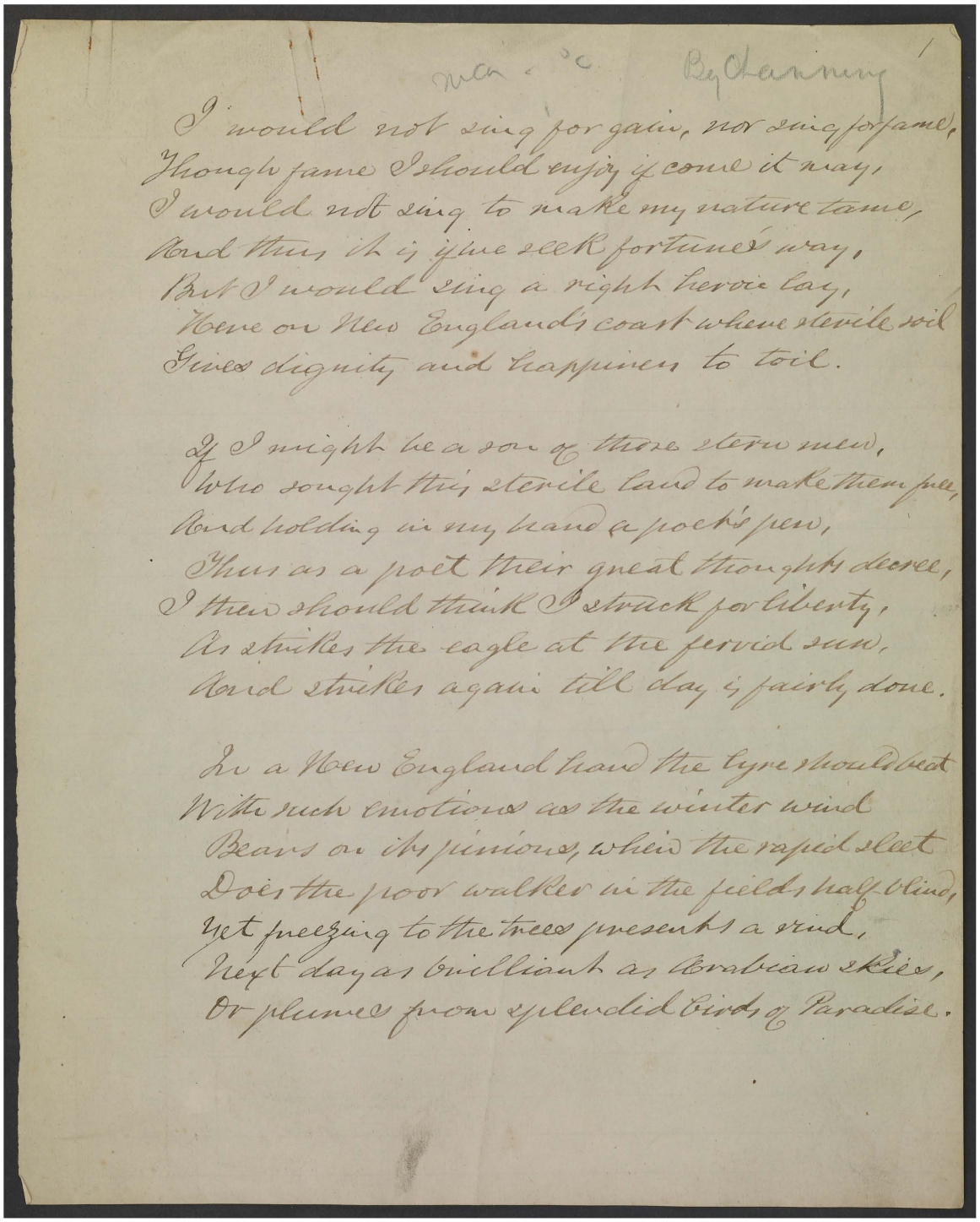
Emerson's essay holds up as unnamed key example the author's friend, Ellery Channing. While this friend's cast-off verses seemed "dead" to their author, Emerson as reader found in them a "lively joy." There are other things Emerson finds in Channing's manuscript verses: "self-repose" "self-respect" "love…which adores the gentle nature and not the costume." "Religion" of no organized church, "good wise heart" promoting "strength and cheerfulness." Among other American writing, this is the "most purely intellectual, distinguished" by "the fineness of perception" and "absence of all conventional imagery." Emerson closes this encomium by, without a trace of irony, translating Channing's manuscript verse into a series of printed periodical poems. He interrupts often (if not regularly) to insert commentary: "These are proper Manuscript inspirations, honest, great, but crude […] This is the poetry of hope." He refers to the further gems to be mined from "this rare file of blotted paper," "this rich pile of manuscript." He closes the selection with this comment:

> We have more pages from the same hand lying before us, marked by the same purity and tenderness and early wisdom as these we have quoted, but we shall close our extracts here. May the right hand that has so written never lose its cunning!

Emerson insists on the intertwining of this poetry's content and its materiality, the process of writing verse naturally following from access to ink, paper, and the proper frame of mind. Nevermind, he says, if the execution of ideas into verse is less than perfect.

Literary history has been far kinder to the essayist than to his chief example. Ellery Channing's poetry has not been noticed even in the extensive recent efforts to recover the variety and significance of nineteenth-century American poetry beyond the hyper-canonical Dickinson and Whitman. Channing the younger was nephew and namesake of the great Dr. William Ellery Channing, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and intellectual giant of the era. Poe, writing for *Graham's* magazine, notes the disparity between the two Channings in his 1843 review of Ellery's poems, just before he concludes that the writings themselves "are full of all kinds of mistakes, the greatest of which being their ever having been published at all." Channing is today remembered as an interlocutory character in the works of his transcendentalist friends and as the first biographer of his friend Thoreau. Despite the appreciation, promotion, and encouragement of Emerson and his circle, Channing never succeeded as a poet in any other measure than leaving an enormous "rich pile" of unpublished manuscripts. Here is

one from the University of Virginia Special Collections library.



I would not sing for gain, nor sing for fame,

Though fame I would enjoy if come it may

I would not sing to make my nature tame
And thus it is if we seek fortune's way
But I would sing a right heroic lay
Here on New England's coast where sterile soil
Gives dignity and happiness to toil.

These are conventionally unconventional sentiments expressed later (and others might say more compellingly) by Dickinson. The subject matter of the poem—eschewing the ideas of poet-for-profit or decorous conformity, in favor of a homegrown muse—neatly mirrors the author's resolution to avoid publishing. These sentiments are common in an era of increasing commercialization of literary production, a perceived homogenization of poetic expression, and the well-documented avalanche of print media from the 1830s on. Despite the thematic resemblance, Channing's manuscript leaf possesses (at least to my eye) none of the distinctive visual elements that characterize Dickinson's, but Channing's poems do make their own case for their purposefully standing outside of print. By implicitly comparing Dickinson to Channing, Higginson does not necessarily declare her greatness (that is better accomplished by his comparison of her to William Blake, which comparison also contains a veiled reference to the visual characteristics of her manuscript poetry). Still, perhaps Channing's poetry would have fared better if the right editor had discovered his posthumous manuscript pile.

When Higginson applies Emerson's term, he invokes particular guidelines for reading Dickinson. First, Higginson begs a generosity of spirit in tolerating or overlooking flaws or eccentricities, which are the result of the author's not anticipating publication. This bid for readerly generosity echoes attitudes discussed in prior chapters:

the matter of Southey's "Uneducated Poets," and the prevalence of and appreciation for amateur poetry in periodicals during the war. Second, by labeling the poems as "of the portfolio," readers of Dickinson's book are given access to something formerly exclusive, since the portfolio denotes limited circulation among personal acquaintances. Analogously, readers are flattered by being the discerning and appreciative Emerson to Dickinson's Channing.[43] The label's function is not uncomplicated, however. Because the poems are "of" the portfolio, readers could be reminded that in a sense the book they hold in their hands is at a remove from the true poetic object.

The physicality of the portfolio (and of the book as its surrogate) correlates somewhat with the idea of the keepsake, as discussed by St. Armand. In his inventory of significant tropes in sentimental culture, St. Armand calls attention to "the keepsake, the memorial token that, owned, touched or bequeathed by the loved dead, took on the connotations of a sacred relic" (60). The sentimental operation of the physical reminder of the departed is perhaps most effectively expressed in this passage from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which St. Armand uses as a chapter epigraph:

> Have not ribbons, cast-off flowers, soiled bits of gauze, trivial, trashy fragments of millinery, sometimes had an awful meaning, a deadly power, when they belonged to one who should wear them no more, and whose beautiful form, frail and crushed as they, is a hidden and a vanished thing for all time? (qtd. in St. Armand 39)

These items belong to Little Eva, who dies the archetypal sentimental death in the preceding scene, cutting off her curls as gifts for her beloved witnesses. Like the

manuscript books and memorial volume of Lucretia Davidson, and the imagined textual relics of the dying soldier, Dickinson's posthumeity renders her discovered manuscripts (and the book that excerpts them) keepsakes. When the poet dies and leaves behind her manuscripts, these may assume the status of keepsake, signaled by the stamped floral design on the cover, for those who knew and loved her (like Dickinson's sister Lavinia, or her sister-in-law Sue). The poems "of the portfolio," even when published, retain the reference to this possible status as keepsake, or stand-in for the deceased.

II. Editing the Portfolio

In applying the label "poetry of the portfolio" to Emily Dickinson's idiosyncratic verse, Higginson named, classified, validated, and suggested reading approaches. The attitudes of readers are strongly considered in the general editorial guidelines adopted by Todd and Higginson. Millicent Todd Bingham in *Ancestors' Brocades* describes her mother's chief concerns in editing Emily Dickinson's poems: "just how much shock, of form or of content, could the reader absorb?" (46). Though Todd and Higginson applied care and thought to their labors, and though the first edition was a commercial success, Dickinson scholars of the past century have tended to find fault with the 1890s editions, if not blame them outright for distorting Dickinson's texts in the way they presented them.[44]

Most scholars are balanced in their assessments, but many nonetheless perpetuate some of these popular, simplified views of the work of Todd and Higginson. Indeed, the work of Dickinson's early editors frequently stands in for that of all editors prior to the

development of the modern era of Anglo-American eclectic editorial theory, departing from the work of W.W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and G. Thomas Tanselle. That school of editorial theory formed in reaction to what preceded it. The perception of nineteenth-century editing as amateurish, subjective, and lacking rigor is largely shared even outside the academic specialties of bibliography and textual studies. The result of this reaction and its reach has been that scholars view nineteenth-century editing as distortions that contemporary editing and criticism must remove and amend. In a response to the valuation of readers and historical context implicit in a social theory of texts, my project aims to restore a renewed appreciation of the work of nineteenth-century editors, even finding within their work useful indices of the values and cultural work of the poetry of the past. Despite my interest in popular and non-academic readings of Dickinson, it seems important to clarify what Todd and Higginson's contribution actually was, and how their work participates in earlier editorial traditions I have been examining.

The well-known story of the posthumous "discovery" of Dickinson's writing is beautifully dramatized by Virginia Jackson in the opening of her book *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading:*

> Suppose you are sorting through the effects of a woman who has just died and you find in her bedroom a locked wooden box. You open the box and discover hundreds of folded sheets of stationery stitched together with string. […] Suppose that you recognize the twined pages as sets of *poems;* you decide that the other pages may contain poems as well. Now you

> wish you had kept the bundles of letters you burned upon the poet's (for it *was* a poet's) death. What remains, you decide, must be published.

The person who first encountered the scene Jackson here imagines anew was of course the poet's sister, Lavinia. It was she who, in consultation with Sue and others, determined that the poetry must be published. Sue initially assumed the editorial duties, but Lavinia grew impatient with Sue's progress, and re-assigned the editorial task to "Colonel Higginson" and "Mrs. Todd." Todd describes in her diary the "task" as she inherited it:

> I told [Lavinia] that no one would attempt to read the poems in Emily's own peculiar handwriting, much less judge them; that they would all have to be copied, and then be passed upon like any other production, from the commercial standpoint of the publishing business […] I asked her how many there were, but that she could not tell. She showed me the manuscripts and there were over sixty little 'volumes,' each composed of four or five sheets of note paper tied together with twine. In this box she discovered eight or nine hundred poems tied up in this way (qtd. in Bingham 17).

Having established that re-copying (after learning to read the handwriting) was necessary, Todd lists further challenges posed by the manuscripts:

> They looked almost hopeless from a printer's point of view. The handwriting consisted of styles of three periods, absolutely different one from another. All were written in a hand which to most persons is

> exceedingly difficult to read, and many words were liable to be widely misconstrued. The poems were written on both sides of the paper, interlined, altered and the number of suggested changes was baffling. Almost every page had a number of crosses [before] many of the words. Each cross referred to a choice of several words at the bottom of the page which the author had thought equally good, and quite as expressive of her meaning as the word actually employed in the text. There was nothing whatever to indicate which word was supposed to fit into which place. The crosses were all alike (qtd. in Bingham 17).

In summing up the situation with Dickinson's manuscript variants, Todd proposes what seems to her the best (and perhaps only) course of action:

> As there were frequently several sets of such changes on a page, no guide to assist in choosing could be relied upon except a sense of the working of the author's peculiar mind, by which the most characteristic word should be retained from the choice of several which she had indicated (qtd in Bingham 17).

Familiarity with the author's "peculiar mind" provides the editorial guide for choosing among the author's variants. Todd and Higginson each had become familiar readers of Dickinson's unusual poetry, and would become only more so. They came to realize that repeated encounters with Dickinson's writing had trained them to read her poems better. It occurred to them that her writing might be baffling to an uninitiated public, and they took every pain to introduce her as favorably as possible, sure that the poems' rewards of

insight and originality would eventually make their own case.

The textual choices of Todd and Higginson are carefully documented in Franklin's scholarly edition. Writing several generations prior to Franklin, Klaus Lubbers usefully generalizes the types of "changes" Todd introduced (16-18):

> 22 changes correcting usage; seventeen cases of word or phrase replacement; and numerous changes, many entire lines, for the sake of rhyme; 8 substitutions of synonyms; 6 poems with omitted stanzas, "among them the metrically irregular fourth stanza of the well-known poem "Because I could not stop for death"; the mistaking of two versions for two stanzas of a poem in two cases; two changes in tense which destroyed the time structure of the respective poems; finally, one rhythmic regulation and the merging of two poems into one.

While some make Higginson a scapegoat for any perceived obstacle to Dickinson's publishing career, most acknowledge the significance of his attention to the cause of her posthumous publication. Higginson's actual involvement in the editing was at a remove from that of Todd, who managed the hard and detailed work of gathering, sorting, transcribing, and organizing the manuscripts.[45] Todd would send material to him for review, and they would collaborate on selection and interpretation. Selections were made with consideration for clarity and comprehension, as well as quality. Higginson is known to have supplied several of the titles, especially the French and Latin ones. The addition of titles to sixty-two of the poems represents one of the significant editorial supplements.[46] Higginson provided the publishing contacts and knowledge of the process

of publication. Most crucially, Higginson wrote the four-page preface, which set the tone for Dickinson's volume, was widely referred to in early reviews, and has remained a keystone of Dickinson criticism.[47]

"[The poems] are here published as they were written, with very few and superficial changes" (Higginson v).[48] The 1890 *Poems* regularizes punctuation, including ambiguous marks and dashes[49]; decides between alternative wordings that Dickinson left undecided in manuscript[50]; and, in some cases opts for word choices, word order, or new words which result in more conventionally felicitous rhymes.[51] As my footnotes indicate, each of these subjects has inspired book-length studies in its own right, and each has assumed an important place in current understanding of Dickinson's art. The 1890 editors selected poems with consideration for reader expectations, but also with appreciation for and a desire to share Dickinson's unique insights. By organizing the poems under general headings ("Life," "Love," "Nature," "Time and Eternity"), the editors imposed order on the volume and guided interpretation of the poems in each section. The addition of titles to many of the poems also guides interpretation of particularly confusing or obscure poems.[52] Each of these choices reflects consideration of how best to make Dickinson's art comprehensible to an uninitiated audience. Furthermore, although Todd and Higginson were unquestionably motivated to showcase Dickinson's artistic accomplishments, the book itself was a commercial venture, and had to sell enough copies to pay for its production costs.[53] The book was packaged gift-ready in a pasteboard box and timed to appear for the Christmas trade.[54] Sales were brisk.

The commercial success of the 1890 *Poems* was by no means foregone. Other publishers rejected the proposal before it landed with Thomas Niles at Roberts Brothers,

and one editor, the poet's sister-in-law, Susan Dickinson, had already refused the task.[55] The editors and publisher gambled on the book's production, which represents a high point in publishing technology and book design when compared with the plain cloth-covered boards of the early and mid nineteenth century. The refined appearance of the 1890s *Poems,* in ivory calfskin stamped with Todd's own image of Dickinson's beloved Indian pipe, has suggested to not a few scholars a resemblance to a gift book, an ornate volume to be purchased, given, and displayed as much for the elegance of its appearance as for the quality of its contents. [56] The Indian pipe on the cover extends this flower symbol Dickinson assigned to herself, denoting modesty and mystery.[57] Many reviewers commented on the association between author and cover image, including the author of "The Literary World" in the *Boston Daily Advertiser,* September 29, 1896:

> [The] cover was stamped in gilt with the drawing of an Indian Pipe, a strangely delicate plant that grows from rotted tree roots and sends forth stems, blossoms, and leaves—all pale as death. This flower of stillness, shadows, and secrecy was the poet's favorite.

The cover image was taken from a painting made by Todd for Dickinson, at the latter's request. Pale, strange, hidden, and thriving among death, the Indian pipe provides a fitting emblem for Dickinson as posthumous poet.

Many assumptions, generalizations, and errors about Todd and Higginson's editing have been perpetuated. New Critical and early feminist readings of Dickinson fault the editions for presenting the poems as a product of a sensational biography of

worldly renunciation, disappointment in love, and invalidism or neurosis, rendering her a sentimental poetess like Emmeline Grangerford, and thereby, arguably, marginalizing her art. When Todd and Higginson are lumped with others into the category of Dickinson's early editors, they are sometimes erroneously blamed for creating the doctored image of her with frizzled front hair and enormous lace collar, which was in fact created at the request of Martha Dickinson Bianchi to match her childhood memory of her Aunt Emily.[58] In the shorthand version of Dickinson's publication history related in most undergraduate survey courses, the complex matter of Dickinson's attitude toward publishing can easily become symbolized by her early correspondence with Higginson, where he seems to have discouraged her from publishing. His association with her posthumous publication, rather than showing his development as a reader and friend of Dickinson, can be easily interpreted as his barring her from publication (which he certainly did not) until he eventually profits from "discovering" her (which he also certainly did not). Higginson in these simplistic formulations stands for the male literary establishment. This view fails to encompass the fact of female authorship's enormous presence and viability in the period, even if it still operated under constraints imposed by gendered social codes about fame, genius, and art.

The editor-as-oppressor interpretation also might express itself by supposing that Todd and Higginson flattened any socially challenging content in Dickinson's poems. Perhaps the most widespread perception, though, exaggerates the extent of the actual textual interventions made in terms of grammar, idiom, word choice, punctuation, rhyme, and meter. Modern Dickinson editors such as Thomas Johnson and R.W. Franklin have made such a convincing case for the insufficiency of Dickinson without her famous

dashes, that one could too easily assume the prior editorial regularization of her punctuation rendered the poetry inert. The most severe charge levied against Todd and Higginson's editorial procedure, acknowledged but not exactly challenged by many Dickinson scholars, is that their editing was not careful and thoughtful, but "interpreted" Dickinson subjectively. While on the one hand I'd like to draw attention to the systematic care and attention that Mabel Loomis Todd gave to the task of editing Dickinson, my work assumes the view of more contemporary developments in textual studies and editorial theory, which argue that all editing, rather than aspiring to some condition of objectivity, is interpretation.[59] Certainly Todd and Higginson made choices about how best to present the poems to their audience, just as any editor would.

By appreciating the editions by Todd and Higginson I do not mean to imply that later scholarly editions of Dickinson were superfluous. On the contrary, editing is a fundamental critical activity, which always reflects the ideologies of current scholarship. The 1890 *Poems* included 116 poems; the 1955 Johnson included almost two thousand. The later 1890s and early 20th century saw the appearance of numerous volumes attempting to complete the publication of Dickinson's existing oeuvre, which had been complicated because of the division of manuscripts that occurred when Lavinia took the editing task away from Sue and reassigned it to Mabel Loomis Todd. Johnson's edition was the first comprehensive collection, and the first to apply the tools of scholarly editorial theory. Johnson aimed at fidelity to the text as Dickinson wrote it, regardless of metrics, rhymes, or other concessions to public taste. Still, Johnson's edition adhered to an idea of authorial final intention, which governed his decision to choose among variants, for example, as well as to lineate according to meter and rhyme rather than

according to how the manuscript lineated. Johnson also proposed a timeline of development based on intense study of Dickinson's handwriting and manuscript practices. "If the Todd and Higginson edition seems a pure product of nineteenth-century America, Johnson's is an excellent example of a scholar's New Critical edition" (McGann, *Black Riders,* 40).

In the 1980s, with the availability of R. W. Franklin's *Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson,* scholars increasingly turned to Dickinson's manuscripts as the most authoritative source for her texts. The manuscript turn led to the current standard edition by Franklin in 1998, which follows many of the principles of the Johnson but more radically so, preserving even so-called authorial mistakes (such as "it's" for the possessive), non-verse lineation, and, most crucially, restoring the fascicle groupings Dickinson left her manuscripts in when she died. While the Franklin and even the Johnson continue to be used freely, increasingly scholars turn to manuscripts as the ultimate source. Ambitiously, the current wave of Dickinson editing is represented by the Dickinson Editorial Collective (DEC), which plans to make available all of Dickinson's manuscripts in digital facsimile. Organizing the edition by correspondent, the DEC foregrounds the ways Dickinson challenges genre by circulating her poems through letter writing.

Despite the existence of these modern, more faithful editions, the 1890 *Poems of Emily Dickinson* remains in regular circulation, having a continuing impact on popular reading of Dickinson. Because the Johnson and Franklin editions are protected by copyright, even their reader editions and selections are still much more expensive than

the public domain 1890s and early 20th century editions, which are available inexpensively everywhere. I have seen many Dickinson poetry collections based on the 1890s editions on bookstore sales tables. The 1890s editions are available for free on Amazon Kindle (the reviews by users suggest that they are not aware of these editions' academically discredited status), and are freely searchable on the Internet thanks to Google Books, Bartelby, and innumerable amateur fan sites. Most non-scholars are unlikely to know that these are academically disparaged versions, and we must accept that popular understanding of Dickinson depends in large part on these early editions. Popular audiences today share these texts with Dickinson's print audiences from 1890 to 1955, who relied on these early editions as well.

Todd and Higginson's "creative editing" (Todd's term) provides a perfect example of editing as interpretation. While their work appears invasive when compared with Johnson or Franklin, it looks downright minimalistic next to Samuel Morse's heavily mediated approach to Lucretia Davidson's poetry, or the outright authorial fabrications of newspaper editors republishing "All Quiet Along the Potomac." At first glance, Todd's interventions are practically invisible on the pages of the 1890 *Poems.* However, her work has much in common with these other editors. When these editors find something incomplete, such as a Davidson fragment, a war poem without an author line, or a riddle poem without an answer ("It sifts through leaden sieves" was titled "The Snow" in the 1891 *Poems*), they must excuse (Morse noting the "The Fear of Madness" as "[*Unfinished*]" and adding the row of asterisks) or invent (in the case of "The Picket-Guard," the dead-soldier provenance). Each of these editors also, in the absence of an author to consult through the process of translating from one medium to another, relied

on a personal construction of the author to guide the translation.

There is some evidence of an evolution in editorial practices across these examples, although my sampling is admittedly too narrow to support such conclusions. However, we can see that Higginson and Todd rely on relatively little biographical framing as compared to Morse and Buell. The titles and subject headings organize the volume asynchronously, like some of the period's anthologies that grouped poems under subjects like "Love" or "Grief," ostensibly so a reader could isolate the right reading to suit an occasion or mood. Dickinson's artistic maturity relative to Davidson and Gibbons accounts for some of this difference, but the aesthetic treatment both of poetry and of posthumous authorship also changed during the nineteenth century (see St. Armand 42).

III. Biographical Reading and Editorial Intimacy

"Little regard was paid to the person behind the poetry" according to Klaus Lubbers, generalizing about the 1890 *Poems* reviews in his reception study *Emily Dickinson: The Critical Revolution* (33). Indeed, compared to the strict narrative framework of posthumous poets like Davidson and Gibbons, Dickinson's book offers little in the way of biography. However, the editing and reception of the 1890 *Poems* nonetheless assume the significance of biographical details in poetic reading. The biographical framing in the preface, though minimal, directs readers to appreciate Dickinson's idiosyncratic muse; identify her as a posthumous poet; recognize a barrier of

privacy between reader and poet; and become curious about the apparent mysteries of the poet's life and mind.

While appeals are made to readerly generosity, Higginson does not portray Dickinson as an amateur or emphasize her lack of education as did previous editors of posthumous poets. Higginson's portrayal of Dickinson's idiosyncratic muse provides part of the preface's instruction to readers in how to read Dickinson properly, although he of course didn't necessarily succeed in every respect. One negative reviewer writes "[t]he poems […] read like the first random notes of a poem rather than of the poem itself, and appear to be fleeting ideas jotted down in a hurry with the intention of elaborating them later on."[60] This reviewer imagines Dickinson's drafting process as incomplete, perhaps interrupted by her death. Higginson also suggests the incompleteness of Dickinson's poetry by noting that

> Such verse must inevitably forfeit whatever advantage lies in the discipline of public criticism and the enforced conformity to accepted ways.

Rather than construing a lack of polish or even incompletion as problematic, Higginson suggests that readers valorize it. His comment that the poems appear much as written stands alongside this one as an argument for the special qualities of "unpolished" verse.

> On the other hand, it may often gain something through the habit of freedom and the unconventional utterance of daring thoughts. In the case of the present author, there was absolutely no choice in the matter; she must write thus, or not at all.

Higginson hints at Dickinson's fierce individuality as he validates the rigor and internal logic of Dickinson's poetic practice.

> She wrote verses in great abundance; and though curiously indifferent to all conventional rules, had yet a rigorous literary standard of her own, and often altered a word many times to suit an ear which had its own tenacious fastidiousness.

Instead, Dickinson's homegrown authority achieves its own validation through the poet's experience (she wrote "in great abundance") and her dedication to her own conceptions. Higginson offers an expressive metaphor for Dickinson's undecorous but original art:

> In many cases these verses will seem to the reader like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew and earth still clinging to them, giving a freshness and a fragrance not otherwise to be conveyed.

The botanical image echoes the Indian pipe on the cover, with the same associations of dirt and death, naturalness and "freshness," and with the suggestion of the mild violence of the poems having been "torn up" out of the place, or from the author's pages, that nourished them.

The fact that Dickinson became publically recognized as a poet after her death leads me to label her a posthumous poet. Her first mass print audiences discover her and her poetry after she is already gone. If literary meaning can be imagined as being formed dialectically between author and readers, posthumous authorship draws attention to the constructed nature of the author in that dialectic. In cases where authorial agency is most weakened, the mediatory role of the editor becomes more important than ever. With the biographical information Higginson gives in the preface, readers could both identify

Dickinson as part of an earlier tradition of posthumous poetry, and also be guided to perceive her poems in the appropriate way. Higginson offers basic facts and a telling anecdote:

> Miss Dickinson was born in Amherst, Mass., Dec. 10, 1830, and died there May 15, 1886. Her father, Hon. Edward Dickinson, was the leading lawyer of Amherst, and was treasurer of the well-known college there situated. It was his custom once a year to hold a large reception at his house, attended by all the families connected with the institution and by the leading people of the town. On these occasions his daughter Emily emerged from her wonted retirement and did her part as gracious hostess; nor would any one have known from her manner, I have been told, that this was not a daily occurrence. The annual occasion once past, she withdrew again into her seclusion, and except for a very few friends was as invisible to the world as if she had dwelt in a nunnery.

The picture of Dickinson as "gracious hostess" reminds one of Channing, the brilliant conversationalist, but chiefly serves to emphasize the level of seclusion Dickinson adopted for much of her life. Dickinson's hostess provides a moral example, the dutiful daughter of the important man, but also suggests an analogy with her poetry book. While Dickinson remained private in her lifetime, the book publication represents her moment to come before the crowd. The anecdote implicitly sanctions the publication of Dickinson's private writings, and offers an authorial image dutifully welcoming readers into her world.

Privacy, especially a woman's privacy, was highly valued within the separate-spheres ideology of Victorian America. The idea that Dickinson did not oversee her own publication could lead people to label the *Poems* an intrusion on her privacy, even after her demise. The lack of authorial sanction for publication caused conflict for some readers of her poetry, if they dared to read it at all:

> Two critics found themselves unable to judge the poems objectively on account of their posthumous publication and their private character. "The fact that the author herself does not present them to the public disarms the criticism that otherwise would object to them as obscure." "We should resent them hotly, no doubt, were any liberty of caviling ours. But none is possible; it is much as if, without her will or knowledge, we were reading, over the recluse woman's shoulder, the most intimate thoughts of her strong, ardent, melancholy soul as they flashed nakedly into life at the point of her pen in all the freedom of solitude save for her own parental eyes" (Lubbers 23).

The fact of Dickinson's reclusiveness in her lifetime also erects a perceived barrier between poet and reader, which the 1890 *Poems* selectively breaches:

> A recluse by temperament and habit, literally spending years without setting her foot beyond the doorstep, and many more years during which her walks were strictly limited to her father's grounds, she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a few friends; and it was with great difficulty that she was persuaded to print, during her lifetime, three or four poems (Higginson [iii]-iv).

Again, Higginson draws attention to the exclusive access the volume brings to the formerly excluded public.

Dickinson's death, idiosyncratic muse, and life of seclusion are the chief biographical facts in the 1890 "Preface." Further biographical details emerged in promotional essays written by Todd and Higginson, by others who knew Dickinson, and, indeed, as inventions of the popular imagination. While Higginson passingly compares Dickinson's seclusion to that of "the nunnery," the enduring, mocking identification of Dickinson with the eccentric spinster living in quasi-religious renunciation originates in the periodical press.

> After the appearance of Mary E. Wilkins' short story collection, "New England nun" became one of Emily Dickinson's standing epithets […] *A New England Nun and Other Stories* was published at the end of March 1891 and the label was first applied [to Dickinson] in *The Providence Journal* of June 14 (Lubbers 32-33).

Wilkins' story "A New England Nun" elaborated on a type Dickinson fit: the celibate woman who lives alone according to her own uncompromising personal law. Wilkins' protagonist, Louisa, keeps an inordinately neat house, indulges herself in continually fresh clothing and the dishes normally reserved for company, and generally exemplifies a woman too comfortable with her station in life to need to marry. The drama in the story results from the return of Louisa's fiancé after they've spent fourteen years engaged and mostly on separate continents. Eventually the two agree to break their engagement. The story ends with this line: "Louisa sat, prayerfully numbering her days, like an uncloistered nun." The "New England nun" label represents a popular fantasy of

Dickinson's seclusion, but recasts it in harmony with her devotion to her own uncompromising personal rules. Higginson never suggests the connection between Dickinson's isolation and her craft, but the stubborn will implied in his treatment of each lead readers to assume their connection. Dickinson's seclusion came to be seen as a purposeful renunciation, and her never marrying eventually became a dominant interpretive lens.

Along with an emergent narrative of renunciation as defining Dickinson's biography, reception writings characterized Dickinson's art insistently in the negative. "Untutored," "unpolished," "unsought," "inevitable": each appear in Higginson's preface. His final word is a negation-filled quote from Ruskin: "No weight nor mass nor beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought." Reviews add to Higginson's list "irregular," "inadequate," "incomprehensible," and feature formulations like "she was the articulate inarticulate" (qtd. Lubbers 33). Describing by negation, rather than assertion, suggests the challenge Dickinson posed to conventional poetics. This challenge includes the fact of the author's inaccessibility, evident in her lifetime seclusion, her absence through death at the time of her poetry's publication, and the elliptical nature of the writing she left behind. Later critics would identify negation as a characteristic strategy in Dickinson's poetry, an interpretive strain present even in the early reception of her poetry.

Because of Dickinson's posthumeity, lifetime reclusion, and the negation which attended any efforts to characterize her poetry, and perhaps because of the relatively limited biographical coverage in her poetry book, Dickinson came to be conceived of as something of a mystery. Lubbers notes that early gaps in her biographical record

encouraged readers to speculate on her life events, drawing inferences and making conjectures. How could such a distinctive and formidable poet go heretofore undetected? Some reviewers speculated on Dickinson's record of publication (which they knew included "three or four poems," among them "Success" in *A Masque of Poets*), that perhaps she had authored the anonymous "Saxe Holm" stories (Lubbers 33). Just as wartime readers constructed a dying soldier poet to author "The Picket-Guard," Dickinson's early readers attempted to construct an author who explained her writing. These speculations found provocation in Higginson's description of meeting Dickinson:

> For myself, although I had corresponded with her for many years, I saw her but twice face to face, and brought away the impression of something as unique and remote as Undine or Mignon or Thekla (v).

Just as Davidson's readers sought to explain her poetic production in terms of her illness, Higginson wonders at the socially reclusive Dickinson's ability to inhabit a fictional persona:

> [I]n the few poems of shipwreck or of mental conflict, we can only wonder at the gift of vivid imagination by which this recluse woman can delineate, by a few touches, the very crises of physical or mental struggle (vi).

Reviewers were to echo this sentiment in a variety of ways: how could the recluse have firsthand knowledge of the wide-ranging content of her poems? In addition to the biographical aporia, Dickinson's elliptical and innovative art was the primary source of mystery:

> And sometimes again we catch glimpses of a lyric strain, sustained perhaps but for a line or two at a time, and making the reader regret its sudden cessation (Higginson vi).

The sense of mystery, loss, renunciation, and negation all contribute to Dickinson's early readers' various and complex reactions to her writing.

As with prior posthumous publication I've examined, Dickinson's 1890 *Poems* draws attention to the relationship between author and editor. The title page announces in Gothic typeface that the poems of Emily Dickinson are "Edited by two of her Friends," who are named below it. The label "friend," as I have elsewhere noted, in this period connoted anyone who cared for a person's best interests, and included both family members and relationships between people who may never have met. Higginson intimates the different levels of friendship in his comment:

> This selection from her poems is published to meet the desire of her personal friends, and especially of her surviving sister (v).

Higginson in this comment discloses the motivations for publication, as well as authorizing it, just as Morse did more than sixty years prior in similar acknowledgements to Davidson's mother.[61] Because the editors, as friends, exist on a continuum of intimacy with the poet's family and loved ones, they can be trusted both with acting on behalf of those people and the poet herself. Although Higginson admits that his face-to-face meetings with Dickinson did little to invest him with interpretive authority about her poetry, the fact that he did know and correspond with her, and was an established reader of her poetry, makes him a fitting intermediary between the poet and her public. Add to this the fact of Higginson's own celebrity as a literary tastemaker and the crucial nature

of his association with her poetry becomes clear.[62] While the public would not have known the dimensions of each editor's actual relationship to the author, the claim to emotional proximity to the living author validates as knowing and correct Todd and Higginson's presentation of the poetry.

Dickinson's poems are stripped of biographical details, and resist reference to her personal history. Nonetheless, both her early audiences and generations of scholars have sought to connect the two. Many poems comment, or seem to, on her attitude toward her poetry's eventual publication. None do more so than the poem Todd and Higginson choose to include as the first poem in 1890 *Poems,* not as a selection, but as "prelude," untitled, italicized, and providing its own introduction:

This is my letter to the world,
That never wrote to me,--
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty.

Her message is committed
To hands I cannot see;
For love of her, sweet countrymen,
Judge tenderly of me!

Dickinson indeed committed the message to hands she could not see by leaving at her death no exact instructions about the disposition of her poetry manuscripts (her sister burned the letters as requested, but balked at the poetry, which surprised her with its volume and that Emily had not made any provision for it). The poem is frequently

remarked for its appearance of modesty. "Talk About Books" in the *Chautauquan* of February 1891 notes: "The reader is disarmed of hostile criticism at the outset. Who could withstand the gentle appeal of the opening lines?"

It seems at first the persona of the poem does not presume the world has required her poetry. However, this reading starts to fall apart when one realizes this persona's actual egotism. She need not be written to, to write, and has on her side "Nature" and "majesty." In its address to a "world," the poem is "the only evidence of an idea of publication, and probably the utterance of a passing mood only" (Higginson, "An Open Portfolio"). Another reviewer plagiarizes Higginson and adds to the comment: "The only evidence of an idea of publication that is found in her verses is in the following, which opens the volume. [poem quoted in full] But these may have been, and probably were, the result of a passing mood, and not written with any thought of the place which they here occupy" (C. M. Smith).

Other reviewers hint at the pleasures of posthumous reading I've explored elsewhere. When readers read Dickinson's poems, they may wonder at Dickinson's own thoughts about the fate of her compositions. Dickinson is imagined to have, while living, entertained fantasies of her fame after death**.** Howells is but the first of a number who imagine the living Dickinson's posthumous fantasy:

> [I]t was evident that she wished her poetry finally to meet the eyes of the world which she had herself always shrunk from ([Howells], B64).[63]
>
> It seems as if she looked forward to the possibility of their publication after her death; although during her life she shrank from allowing her

> inner thoughts thus to come before the public, as she shrank from appearing there herself (Spear, B355).
>
> So morbidly afraid of revealing herself that at last she would not address her own letters she still intended her poems to be published the dedication shows (Harris, B489; bio detail from Todd, B418).
>
> To her unknown public, present and to come, she has made her own touching appeal (Koopman, B560).

Todd writes in an editorial comment in the 1894 *Letters* that this poem "seems to indicate the thought of a possible future public, when she herself should be beyond the reach of the praise or criticism which her writing might call forth" (267-268).

While scholars have sometimes exaggerated the biographical constructions put forth by Todd and Higginson, the 1890 *Poems* certainly provides guidance for readers expecting to read Dickinson's poems with reference to her life and death. Accomplished chiefly through the preface, this attention is reflected in reviews, and ties Dickinson's early reception to accepted nineteenth-century forms of biographical reading of poetry, especially in the case of the posthumous discovery. Reviewers express curiosity about the mysterious poet and her mind, while recognizing both the voluntary privacy barrier of seclusion and involuntary distancing of death, each mediated by the editors and the book they produced. Identifying Dickinson as a posthumous poet allowed readers an opportunity to appreciate Dickinson's idiosyncratic muse. Such appreciation can be seen in reviewers' comments on the most-quoted and most-mentioned poems of the 1890 edition.

V. Reading *Poems* (1890)

It is impossible for a current-day academic Dickinson specialist to read the 1890 *Poems* just as they were first read, although that doesn't mean the effort is not worth making. Indeed, it's impossible to generalize much about what readers of any period actually think and feel when they read something, especially without any personal record from those readers. Professional readers and reviewers do leave records, which themselves have some influence upon their reading publics. We are fortunate to have excellent records of Dickinson's early reviews, collected in Willis J. Buckingham's *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s: A Documentary History* (1989). Much of this material was also studied and written about by Klaus Lubbers in his *Emily Dickinson: The Critical Revolution.* I draw heavily from these two works in my discussion of the reception of Dickinson's 1890 *Poems.*

Following the convention of their time and place, early reviews of Dickinson's poetry tend to be short and, to a modern academic's taste, typically lack analytical depth. Lubbers sums up the prevailing concerns in the reviews:

> The great number and variety of the book notices, their prevailing brevity and general lack of coherent argumentation invite a systematic investigation comprising difficulties of understanding, aesthetic evaluation, comparisons, attempts at classification, biographical speculations, and British reactions (22).

Poetic influences and resemblances are frequent topics, with the most frequent being Dickinson's affinities with William Blake and Emerson. Reviews rarely go to any length about any one poem, but do quote freely, often entire and often multiple poems. Though

evaluation occurs, it's far more common to simply notice the book, and to largely repeat information from the preface or other reviews (including essays published by Higginson and Todd). The practice of whole poem quotation with little or no comment may at first seem unimportant, but in fact deserves attention. Reviewers sometimes note that a poem is a "sample" or somehow represents the rest. Dickinson's art tends to be evaluated in general rather than particular terms, but the quoting of particular poems provides an index to what was catching reviewers' (and readers') attention. If a poem drew attention, that was significant, since

> [t]he distinguishing note of Emily Dickinson's literary debut lay in the predominance of extreme opinions and in the feeling that her poetry compelled the reader to assume an either-or attitude (Lubbers 44).

Reviews of 1890 *Poems* tended to be favorable, and many enthusiastically so, matching the brisk sales of the first volume and paving the way for new print runs and further volumes. Of course, there were numerous negative reviews, and many of mixed opinion.

One of the chief topics of reviewer commentary is the matter of form (versification or grammatical) versus content. Higginson noted toward the end of the preface that "when a thought takes one's breath away, a lesson on grammar seems an impertinence," and many reviewers echoed, elaborated, or challenged that sentiment. When a reviewer decides to evaluate Dickinson's versification, he or she typically can only find fault:

> Common to all of them is a narrow and perfectionist standard of valuation: narrow, because it is limited to a few means of poetic expression (rhyme, rhythm, meter, melody); perfectionist, because it demands a smoothness of

> presentation peculiar to the fin de siècle, a glossy finish petrified in a cluster of metaphors in the reviewers' ABC. Anything deviating from such a poetics could not but fall short of the idea (Lubbers 26-27).

The positive reviews excuse or overlook Dickinson's perceived failings in this area.[64] A few bold readers, and more as time went on, came to see Dickinson's flaws as virtues. Negative reviews were staunch:

> A sensitive reader of her poetry cannot but vacillate between alternatives. While contemporaries are inclined to give preference to substance, the verdict of posterity is governed by formal criteria (qtd in Lubbers 29).

When reviewers responded positively, though, they grappled with a breakdown in critical terminology in efforts to define Dickinson's style.

Todd and Higginson each wrote essays, sometimes signed and sometimes not, in support of their editorial project. They also promoted the book to important potential reviewers, including William Dean Howells, who wrote an influential response in his "Editor's Study" column in *Harper's Monthly* in January 1891:

> If nothing else had come out of our life but this strange poetry we should feel that in the work of Emily Dickinson, America, or New England rather, had made a distinctive addition to the literature of the world, and could not be left out of any record of it [.]

Howells' support undoubtedly helped the book's sales, and his perceptions about the nature of Dickinson's appeal hold up even today. However, his generous praise also attracted a rival critic, the Scotsman Andrew Lang, to the cause, who wrote a series of sneering excoriations of Dickinson's poetry:

> Though few people care for poetry, and though a new poet has to wait long for his laurels in England, in America both singers and the love of song seem much more popular. America has lately lost two great lyrists—lost them before their very names were heard of in our country. One was Miss Emily Dickinson, whose remains Mr. Howells has applauded, and has found to be in themselves a justification of America's literary existence (B102).

Lang, who is also the standards-loving critic quoted above, ties Dickinson's unorthodox versifying to democracy, which he's heard "is remarkable for the licence it permits to women and to children." Although it's easy to cast him as the Commonwealth-accented villain in the story of Dickinson's eventual critical triumph, Lang represents not just British reaction to *arriviste* American literary culture, but also a serious position held by many within the Victorian cultural establishment: "Poetry has its laws, and if they are absolutely neglected, poetry will die." Lang would find good company among those today who lament that poetry has, indeed, passed on.

Reviewers invariably respond in some way to the work of the editors. Todd and Higginson are mentioned by name and Higginson's reputation and the words of his preface are invoked. Their exercise of tact and good judgment come in for comment: Howells writes that "[t]he editors have discharged their delicate duty toward [Dickinson's poetry] with unimpeachable discretion." No one seems to challenge the supposition that the poems "appear much as they were written," and a few reviews laud the courage of the editors in so allowing the poems to stand on their own, as the author left them.

> Occasionally, the outside of the poem, so to speak, is left so rough, so rude, that the art seems to have faltered. But there is apparent to reflection the fact that the artist meant just this harsh exterior to remain, and that no grace of smoothness could have imparted her intention as it does.

Howells notes that the poems, though short, are not fragments, but

> are each a compassed whole, a sharply finished point, and there is evidence, circumstantial and direct, that the author spared no pains in the perfect expression of her ideas.

The perception of wholeness and intention, while pronounced in Howells and not as common in the other reviews, contrasts with the apparent flux of the texts in manuscript, with their variants, difficult handwriting, and evident stages of draft. Although Higginson mentions that the titles are editorial supplements, they are treated as native to each poem. Howells remarks that "I died for beauty" could not take a title, and so title-lessness comes to signify something in the company of poems with titles. The titleless poem, instead of being the norm as they are among Dickinson's manuscripts, becomes marked as a poem that could not, or need not, be summarized or introduced with a title. The section headings, too, while no doubt perceived as products of an editorial device, become significant points of commentary. One reviewer writes that the headings show "at a glance how wide was the range of that Amherst girl's thought and how very serious the tendency of her mind" ("Out and About," B481). In these examples we see reviewers responding, consciously or not, to Dickinson's texts as editorially constructed in the 1890 *Poems.*

The most frequently mentioned or quoted poem in the reviews is the first in the volume, "Success."

POEMS.

I.

SUCCESS.

[Published in "A Masque of Poets" at the request of "H. H.," the author's fellow-townswoman and friend.]

SUCCESS is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host
Who took the flag to-day
Can tell the definition,
So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Break, agonized and clear.

The title "Success" might lead us to expect a definition of the term, and the poem does offer one. Read alongside the immediately preceding epigraph ("This is my letter to the world") it is also a declaration of the triumph of appearing in print. The headnote reminds us of the author's reluctance to publish, and introduces another "friend," H.H., the recognized signature of Helen Hunt Jackson, who succeeded in bridging the distance between the reclusive author and the public. Although we identify the battlefield setting and the dying soldier as conventional features of Civil War poetry, this poem's place in the volume invites us to take this statement also as a position of the author toward her own fame. The head note for "Success" does not refer to the author's death, nor does it tie its composition to her biography, as we've seen in prior examples. Instead, the note establishes her currency in the print world and as having already been seen by her readers, although they couldn't before identify the poem as hers.

The publication of "Success," and its pride of place at the front, capitalizes on the unclaimed renown Dickinson enjoyed as the anonymous author of this poem. *A Masque of Poets* (1877) was the last of a fourteen-volume "No Name" series published by Roberts Brothers.[65] A publishing gimmick that was mildly successful, the series featured the anonymous works of known authors. Guessing the identities of the authors became a major draw of the series. Indeed, in the two copies I've seen, and in two others mentioned by Stern, readers have penciled in the supposed authors of each poem. Helen Hunt Jackson published two novels in the series, and persuaded Dickinson to join her in contributing to the poetry volume.[66] Dickinson's poem was widely considered the best of the volume, according to "No Name" series bibliographer Madeleine Stern, and the poem was largely attributed in reviews to Emerson, although he'd given up publishing his

poetry nearly a decade before. By heading the volume with "Success," the editors answer the riddle of its authorship, and guarantee reader interest in the rest of the heretofore-unknown author's oeuvre.

The first two lines are like a maxim, like something to be learned by heart. This is a form Dickinson loves to play with, the declarative, authoritative sentence that belies its own complexity (like "Hope is a thing with feathers"), which requires the poem to explicate it. The complexity here is the neat paradox between knowing success and valuing it. Words with repeated "s" sounds ("success" "sweetest") invite us to notice their surface similarities and their finer differences. "To comprehend a nectar" is called nonsense in at least one review, yet it seems perfectly clear that she is repeating, with some difference, the sense of the first two lines in the second part of the stanza. "To comprehend a nectar" is a rewording of "counting something sweetest." The sweetness itself becomes the object of the verb. This line is the subject of the sentence whose verb is "requires." We've gone from imagining the platitude about success and sweetness to confronting the underbelly of what it means to "ne'er succeed"—to be the one with "sorest need." Stanza two, with the taking of the flag, places the first's abstractions in a familiar setting: the battlefield. The "purple host," in retrospect, must be the distant massed armies, although "host" suggest angels, and "purple" is the hue of bloodied corpses. The central paradox asserts that the vanquished, and not the victors, define "victory." Definition, then, proceeds from a lack or loss of the thing defined. Similarly, the poem sinuously switches agents and objects: it is the "distant strains of triumph," defining success, which fall on his "forbidden ear." Though the dying soldier "can tell the definition" better than the victors, he does not actively define. The "distant strains"

are heard "agonized and clear." The soldier's anguish becomes translated into the sound he hears.

Reviews mentioning this poem do not analyze it in the way I have just done, but comment on the poem's subject, its quality, and, especially, on its prior appearance in *A Masque of Poets.* Higginson wrote a summary of the poem in an essay on Rumanian folk poetry, which he briefly compared to Dickinson's poetry: "The dead soldier lies absorbed in the one yearning hope that they will not put him actually in the grave till he has learned how the fight ended" (B315). Another reviewer summarizes the message: "Success is understood best by those who lose it" ([Roche], B41). The poem's quality lies in the essential truth of its message ("[W]hat profound truth lies in lines like these" [L. Whiting, B213]), and the fact of its original utterance, an example of "true wit" in a borrowing from Alexander Pope:

> There are lines and stanzas of Miss Dickinson that are destined to be among the best known and most highly valued quotations of our language; they express so forcibly what many have thought but few have said ("Books and Authors," B69).

Indeed, the poem's 1890 publication repeats itself in both thought and speech, echoing its own prior appearance. The majority of reviewer comment alludes to the poem's prior publication. The poem "is well known and is one of the best in the volume" ("New Books," B26). According to one negative reviewer, "Success" is one of the few of Dickinson's poems which "bears any sign of artistic revision; and that we note, on comparison, was judiciously trained a bit into form before its publication in the 'Masque'" ([Hurd], B48). The formulation "comprehend a nectar" is mocked, first in

"The Literary World" in the *St. James Gazette* ("We wonder if H.H. understands how you 'comprehend a nectar,' or whether she things that 'day' and 'victory' are good rhymes?" [B189]) and later, in a jokey bit called "Helps to High Living" in the Chicago *Unity* which quotes an inscrutable Dickinson line or couplet for each day of the week (B370).

The status of "Success" as a formerly anonymous poem connects it, and Dickinson, with the "newspaper waifs" and their authors of the preceding chapter. Indeed, the author of "Poetry" appearing in the *Golden Rule* expressed relief that the formerly anonymous poem had achieved "authored" status:

> One is glad to find in its appropriate place the poem 'Success.' […] The book is bound most tastefully. It will be highly prized by persons of elegant taste (B67).

Like Ethel Lynn Beers, Dickinson only became identified with her popular anonymous poem through the twinned events of death and book publication. Despite the strong public memory for the poem in the "No Name" book, no reviewers remarked that "Success" had an even earlier publication, and with Dickinson's name attached. The poem appeared in a wartime periodical being produced to raise money for a Union charity. The poem was signed, and may have been used with Dickinson's tacit approval (Dandurand). As Ingrid Satelmajer points out in her article on Dickinson's 1890s periodical publications, there is likely still much to be discovered about the relationship between Dickinson's periodical and book publications. "Success," as the best-reviewed poem of the 1890 edition, offers a window onto the complex interplay between anonymity and posthumous authorship.

Concern over Dickinson's attitude toward her fellow man creeps into commentary on another of her most reviewed poems, "A Service of Song":

Some keep the Sabbath going to church;
I keep it staying at home,
With a bobolink for a chorister,
And an orchard for a dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;
I just wear my wings,
And instead of tolling the bell for church,
Our little sexton sings.

God preaches,--a noted clergyman,--
And the sermon is never long;
So instead of getting to heaven at last,
I'm going all along!

This poem has become a classic of "schoolroom" Dickinson, and if it's cited at all by scholars, it's usually to emphasize her lack of religious orthodoxy. There's a critical narrative that Dickinson's 1890s poems were met with censure for their religious attitudes, something not borne out by the record, according to Buckingham, who notes the predominance of positive reviews of her in religious newspapers. This poem appeared (unsigned) as "My Sabbath" in *Round Table* for March 12, 1864, and John

Chadwick recalls the poem upon its republication in *Poems* some twenty-five years later (B95). James Price Warwick calls it "perhaps the loveliest bit in the portfolio" (B380).

The title in this case arises organically from the poem's content, and draws attention to the poem itself as ritual music. Here the rhymes are perfect, and the rhyme scheme predictable. The irregular meter approximates the hymn stanza pattern of eights and sixes. The metrical pattern is strong enough to make felt the deviations into triple-beat feet ("bobolink" and "chorister" help establish this counter-pattern). The tuneful rhyme and syncopated rhythm, as well as the cast of natural characters, obviates any sense of lack in the author's solitude. The poem shows "there was no loneliness in her seclusion" ("G.," B395), and "A. von E.," writing in *Der Westen*, finds correlation between subject and form:

> Nothing in nature is so unimportant that it cannot be used to express the truths of life. Neither didactic nor artificial, these lyrics are like nature herself. Is the rock less beautiful for being uneven or the lightning for being jagged (B581)?

Reviewers did recognize Dickinson's religious unorthodoxy. Several reviews call the poem "pagan" (usually the same which fault it formally), although the charge seems mostly harmless. Her thoughts "on death and the hereafter are scarcely the thing one would expect to hear at a prayer meeting" ("Out and About," B481), and John Chadwick called it one of her "pretty blasphemies, which Thoreau would have gladly owned" (B95). The most concerned review of the poem, by Samuel J. Barrows for the *Christian Register,* answers back to her declaration of solitary religious observance:

> Would she have liked to commune with God in the presence of other human hearts, or did she write this because she seemed nearer to him when alone? Such privacy with God the soul must seek as Jesus sought it in the mountain. Yet nature is not the only cathedral; and the aspirations, struggles, strivings, defeats, and victories of man himself are what we need to contemplate in sympathetic and fraternal companionship if we would find God in man as we find him in nature. The recluse needs, too, to come sometimes into the busy world, and into "the *assembly* of the saints," as the man of the busy world needs to seek the recluse (B145).

The poem offers, if cheekily, a secularized view of heaven: if one lives right on Earth, Earth itself is a paradise. One wonders if, when the above reviewer parses the lesson of Dickinson's poem for his readers, he fears for the location of her eternal soul.

Dickinson's view of the afterlife was of a "purely conjugal heaven built not for the restoration of old family ties but for the fulfillment of new personal relationships that had been thwarted on earth" (St. Armand 48). The posthumous possibilities of the soul juxtaposed with the complex materiality of the body provide the subject matter of many of her poems, including one which was the second most mentioned poem and the most

substantially discussed in reviews of the 1890 *Poems*.

X.

I DIED for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth, — the two are one;
We brethren are," he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

"I died for beauty" appeared in the section "Time and Eternity," which many thought contained the new poet's finest pieces, and her most characteristic. One reviewer calls "I died for beauty" "one of her loveliest poems," and suggests that the poem's shortcomings pale next to its accomplishments, which are harder to explain:

> No power on earth can make "replied" and "said" rhyme, or "rooms" and "names"; but what of that? Neither is the thought new. Yet, as Emily Dickinson handles it, it has all the thrill and fascination of a new discovery ("Out and About," B481).

Others remarked on this poem's otherworldliness, including Howells, who cites this quality as a reason for its lack of title:

> Then in this, which has no name—how could any phrase nominate its weird witchery aright?—there is the flight of an eerie fancy that leaves all experience behind […] these mortuary pieces have a fascination above any others in the book[.]

The lack of title, among peer poems with titles, calls attention to this poem's inscrutability. Howells' question, though rhetorical, finds a ready answer with his rival Andrew Lang, who "nominates its weird witchery" "nonsense" or "fudge" (B102), and then turns to interrogate the poem (or its defenders):

> What did the corpse mean by "failing for beauty"? Did it die because it was not pretty? Or did it die for love of the beauty of some other person? And, if the dead bodies could go on conversing for a considerable time, why did they relapse into silence when the moss "had reached their lips,

> and covered up their names"? Moss does not, in fact, grow inside graves, and how could any development of moss on the tombstone affect these conversational corpses?

These questions to this day remain unanswered.

For many, Dickinson's poetry, and this poem in particular, strained available critical vocabulary and methods. Dickinson's poetry fueled an existing debate over the supremacy of formal conventions in evaluating poetry. In some cases, Dickinson's poetry also contributed to the development of new critical methods. In response to another critic's charge that Dickinson's poems were formless, Francis H. Stoddard, a professor of English at the University of the City of New York (now NYU), wrote in 1892 what appears to be the first close reading of a Dickinson poem. I can only excerpt, here, but the whole is remarkably astute:

> Two pairs of lines, each with two accents, the similar words being matched in pairs—*justed': joining', died': died', tomb' room'*. *Beauty'* and *truth'* do not perfectly match, of course, because not yet proved to be one in nature. These exact correspondences would produce mechanical regularity and overprove the proposition by overemphasizing the innate notion of harmony, if care were not taken. […] I submit that such art as this may be subtle and medieval, but it is not formlessness (B334).

Dickinson would become a favorite poet of the later New Critics, whose interpretive methods were perfectly suited to Dickinson's compressed and ambiguous lyric poems.

This poem evokes questions, like Howells' and Lang's, and so is characteristic of Dickinson's poetry in general. Reviews describe the poem, and Dickinson's allure, in terms of "mystery," of giving access to the inaccessible:

> Her most characteristic themes were mystery, the 'quiet nonchalance,' the grim interest, the impartial dignity which death bestows ("Grim Slumber Songs," B78).
>
> […] a sound as of Blake singing in the grave […] ("The Week," B54)
>
> This is but a scanty sample of the work of a nearly forgotten life of deep thought and deep emotion that is very well not to let wholly die from our memories. There are a hundred exquisitely said things in this tardy little volume ("Books to Read," B196).

Dickinson, associated with the speaker of the poem, is invoked as a posthumous poet in her "tardy" volume. Her poems preserve the record of her private life; seem to channel voices of the recent (herself) and distant (Blake) past; and proceed from the authority of their subject matter, "the impartial dignity which death bestows." "Grim interest" as a subject of Dickinson's poetry mirrors the "grim interest" taken by audiences in the posthumous poetry of Lucretia Davidson and the dying soldier figure. Where the reader of Lucretia Davidson could revel in the minor puzzles suggested by the nexus of her life, writing, and death, the reader of Dickinson confronts (and perhaps also fantasizes) mystery. The mysteries of "I died for beauty" reach far beyond those identified by Lang: how can the dead (metaphorically) speak? What is the point of union, if any, for truth and beauty? Are ideals as temporally bound as their human inventors? How can an image as terrible as "the moss had reached our lips" be so stunningly beautiful? When a

reader witnesses this conversation, proxy mourning of the sort enacted through the prior posthumous examples is forestalled by the abstract and allegorical nature of the poem's opening. When the final blanket of anonymous decay descends, the loss is for all, including the identity of the speaker, authors, and anything else with a name.

Dickinson's poetry repeatedly dramatizes the deathbed scene or the speaking dead. Her early reviewers and later scholars have considered this theme among her chief and characteristic subject matter.

> Such things could have come only from a woman's heart to which the experiences in a New England town have brought more knowledge of death than of life. Terribly unsparing many of these strange poems are, but true as the grave and certain as mortality (Howells).

Dickinson's thematics of death correlate with the desire of her readers to perceive her mysteriousness. To conceive of the content of her poetry, readers like Howells want to imagine the life Dickinson must have lived. Upon such examination, the poems take on the qualities they speak of ("true as the grave and certain as mortality"), and their frustrations become their achievements. By dramatizing the poet's inaccessibility through a staged intimacy, Dickinson's "strange" poems haunt her readers with their simultaneous actions of confiding and distancing.

The idea of mystery brings me to another characteristic Dickinson poem-type, the riddle. Later scholars have expanded this category from straight riddles (like "A narrow fellow in the grass" or "It sifts through leaden sieves") to include poems with what Jay Leyda influentially labeled "omitted centers":

> The riddle, the circumstance too well known to be repeated to the initiate, the deliberate skirting of the obvious—this was the means she used to increase the privacy of her communication; it has also increased our problems in piercing that privacy (xxi).

The last of Dickinson's popular 1890 poems I want to discuss, untitled and from the first section, "Life," can be labeled retrospectively as a poem with an omitted center:

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

> And saints to windows run,
>
> To see the little tippler
>
> Leaning against the sun!

The poem proceeds through a baffling array of figures evoking the speaker's elation, but at what? What feeling is so elevated, and why? The poem was noticed for its impossible rhyme of "pearl"/"alcohol," as well as for its baffling first image. Dickinson, according to Lang,

> writes utter nonsense. It is clearly impossible to scoop a tankard from pearl. The material is inadequate (B72).

Other reviewers gave deeper consideration to the poem's main subject:

> The best example of Miss Dickinson's characteristic qualities as a poet, her audacity, the illusiveness of her thought, the essential melody of her verse […] To aid our readers in catching the clue to this piece of lyric delirium we suggest that the 'tankard scooped in pearl' are the vault of heaven; that the emphasis in the next verse falls on *summer;* the third verse applies to the fresh autumnal air; and that in the following verse the 'snowy hats' are the sign of winter, and that the 'windows' to which the saints run are those of the 'inns of molten blue' of the second verse ("The Week," B54).
>
> With nature, all the intensity of her love of being gets its fill (Nichols, B47).

> [Her] childlike quaintnesses recall Blake, but also many a rhymer of even greater simplicity […] What Emily Dickinson says of love has a peculiar interest, and it can hardly be forbidden that the reader should wonder what experience of her own she might have had to produce so exceptionally personal utterances as some of these voices of imagination seem to be ([C. Whiting], B13).

These generous reviewers offer explanations to help fellow readers. The last comment comes close to prurient interest in Dickinson's love life, seeing a contradiction between her "New England nun" image and the suggestion of physical ecstasy in the poem. Such wondering about Dickinson's biography, as about the subject of her "omitted center" poems, is provoked by Dickinson's development as a non-public poet. When her art, which developed in private and in her correspondences with key figures such as Susan Dickinson, came before the public, it changed in more ways than losing a few dashes or smoothing a few rhymes. Because the context for her personal writing was not shared with her new public audiences, Dickinson's poetry appeared more elliptical than ever. Simultaneously Dickinson's published poems allude to a more personal, offstage context, while offering the tantalizing fantasy that the reader might through reading join the more intimate circle. A major factor in Dickinson's initial and enduring appeal, tied to her "omitted center" style, biography of seclusion, and posthumous fame, is the fact of her personal inaccessibility.

Another poem in the first section, "Life," was among the most, and most favorably, reviewed in the volume, and by no means enjoys such a high reputation among Dickinson scholars today as it did among its first audiences.

> If I can stop one heart from breaking,
>
> I shall not live in vain;
>
> If I can ease one life the aching,
>
> Or cool one pain,
>
> Or help one fainting robin
>
> Unto his nest again,
>
> I shall not live in vain.

One reviewer found this poem a stylistic relief, as compared to its relatively less straightforward peers in the volume:

> One has just pished and pshawed at
>
> Imps in eager caucus
>
> Raffle for my soul
>
> when this really charming little piece at once of meaning and music reconciles us ("Books of the Week," B192).

The predominant spirit of the commentary on this poem is that it shows the author's human side, in contrast to the implied misanthropy of her secluded life:

> [H]ere is the one which shows the tender, *human* side of her nature, and which makes one wish she might know how great an inspiration and help to others are the poems she wrought in secret, not knowing they would ever meet other eyes ("W.M.," B359).

> [B]ehind that [shut] door is a kindliness which finds expression as follows ("New Books," B26).
>
> And yet it is clear that she did not wish her life to be lived wholly apart from the life of her kind. How human and how noble the aspiration in these lines! ([Barrows], B145)
>
> How little did this gentle hermit dream that her musings might some day fulfill her desire ("Editorial," B97).

"If I can stop" provides readers with an anchor for their desires that Dickinson might wish to communicate with them, might care to share feelings with them. Later Dickinson criticism has tended to play down Dickinson's more sentimental poems such as this one, but arguably early audiences enthusiastically, perhaps necessarily, embraced them. Indeed, some go so far as to say that this poem's spirit of sympathy and devotion to others exemplify Dickinson's entire poetic project: the poem "sums the mission of her volume" ("From the Book Store," B19) and

> Her life work was to be a friend—counseling, consoling, and helping others. Her poetry became the unusual means for fulfilling this purpose (A. von E., B581).

This characterization of Dickinson seems somewhat foreign now, unless one considers the content of and her devotion to her vast correspondence, which frequently takes on the character of extreme emotional identification and other sympathetic activity.

This side of Dickinson can, however, be seen in her obituary, written by Susan Dickinson:

> Very few in the village, except among the older inhabitants, knew Miss Emily personally, although the facts of her seclusion and her intellectual brilliancy were familiar Amherst traditions. There are many houses among all classes into which her treasures of fruit and flowers and ambrosial dishes for the sick and well were constantly sent, that will forever miss those evidences of her unselfish consideration, and mourn afresh that she screened herself from close acquaintance…. Not disappointed with the world, not an invalid until within the past two years, not from any lack of sympathy, not because she was insufficient for any mental work or social career – her endowments being so exceptional – but the "mesh of her soul," as Browning calls the body, was too rare, and the sacred quiet of her own house proved the fit atmosphere for her worth and work. All that must be inviolate….

Susan's obituary, with its emphasis on the living Dickinson's role in her community, provides a companion piece to Higginson's preface, with his image of her as the once-a-year gracious hostess at her father's parties. While I've argued for the significance of the way Dickinson's first editors presented her to the public, Susan is a reminder that it might have been otherwise. Susan's efforts to publish Emily's poetry proceeded very differently, as Martha Nell Smith's work reminds us. Whatever Susan had done, though, would have been deemed inadequate by later scholars, if they had known the name of Emily Dickinson at all. The works that continue to matter to us will need to be reshaped to contemporary standards, even as our engagement with those works heavily reflects what came before. Susan's obituary, like Higginson's preface, and like the 1890 *Poems,*

places Dickinson firmly within a late-nineteenth-century context, which was, after all, her own.

Notes

[1] Although the prior tradition of posthumous poetry in England seems to be mostly, famously masculine, and generally mixed with the idea of the poet without access to publication for reasons of education, geography, or privilege, the tradition of posthumous poetry in America gravitates toward memorializing the amateur poet, or offering delayed recognition of the shy or reclusive poet sure of his or her vocation. This perception is gleaned from the examples of posthumous poetry in the Wegelin Collection of Later Nineteenth-century Minor American Poetry in the Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia library.

[2] The modernist reaction against sentimentalism is well documented in Richards' introduction. McGann in *The Poetics of Sensibility* isolates T.S. Eliot as the key figure in this modernist reaction. Although I focus on nineteenth-century American poetry, the fortunes of popular sentimental poetry in England are similar. Scholarship like McGann's and that of Yopie Prins on the popular poetesses of the British nineteenth century has been influential for work in the American period, and vice versa.

[3] Recent anthologies and editions of recovered poetry include Bain (1996), Bennett (both *Palace-Burner* [2001] and *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets* [1998]), Gray (1997), Hollander (1996), and Spengemann (1996). Digital editions include Mandell as well as the numerous American periodicals databases and Google Books.

[4] See Walker (1982), Kete (2000), Bennett (2003), Richards (2004), Loeffelholz (2004), Sorby (2005) and Cavitch (2007). The rejuvenated field has also been significantly defined by a volume in the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (2004), a special issue of *ESQ* (2008), and McGill's edited collection (2008).

[5] Bennett's edition of Piatt was sparked by Bennett's discovery of Piatt in her wide reading across nineteenth-century periodical poetry in preparation for her anthology. Piatt has emerged from this wave of recovery as a "good" if previously overlooked poet. Richards notes that received critical approaches do little to help us understand period reception (25). In *The Poetics of Sensibility,* McGann asserts the critical centrality, framed but not dominated by theory and method, of "less mediated perceptual encounters (affect at all levels)" (5), a concept reinforced by him with specific reference to Landon in his fall 2001 graduate seminar.

[6] On the culture of recitation, see Sorby and Rubin. On scrapbooks, see Garvey. For "the antebellum culture of reprinting," see McGill.

[7] "Omitted center" is a term coined by Jay Leyda to describe the way certain Dickinson poems dance around their crucial subject matter without ever explicitly naming it. "Impacted poems" comes from David Porter's meditation on Dickinson's aesthetics of compression and extremity.

[8] See, for example, Cody, Garbowsky, Guthrie, Mamunes, Hirschorn, Wand and Sewall, McDermott.

[9] Authorial absence twinned with the author's biography as an aesthetic focus foreshadows the famed "omitted center" of Dickinson's riddle-like poems, which will be taken up in Chapter 3.

[10] The rest of her introduction by Huck Finn highlights these elements: "Buck said she could rattle off poetry like nothing. She didn't ever have to stop to think. He said she would slap down a line, and if she couldn't find anything to rhyme with it would just scratch it out and slap down another one, and go ahead. She warn't particular; she could write about anything you choose to give her to write about just so it was sadful. Every time a man died, or a woman died, or a child died, she would be on hand with her "tribute" before he was cold. She called them tributes. The neighbors said it was the doctor first, then Emmeline, then the undertaker -- the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once, and then she hung fire on a rhyme for the dead person's name, which was Whistler. She warn't ever the same after that; she never complained, but she kinder pined away and did not live long." (Chapter 17)

[11] Morse, S.F.B, "Biographical Sketch," *Amir Khan and Other Poems*, 1829.

[12] Manuscript destruction by the poet herself is a recurring event in Davidson's biographies, so likely what remains is much less than her entire output.

[13] Two ornate, bound manuscript books of an apparent 3-book set, *The Miscellaneous Works of Lucretia Maria Davidson*, survive in the Barrett Collection of American Literature at the University of Virginia Library Special Collections. These seem unlikely to be in Davidson's hand, since they are prefaced as memorial volumes ("Compiled from Original Manuscripts / For her Parents"). Archives at the State University of New

York—Plattsburg identify as Davidson's hand a leaf with the poem "The Genius of America," and a signed letter to "Mrs. Bailey." Mills College's Emma Clark Collection holds in one signed letter and a manuscript story "Maritorne."

[14] Southey's review exposed Davidson to the English literary establishment. Wordsworth writes in an 1832 letter to Felicia Hemans: "Let me thank you in Dora's name for your present of *The Remains of Lucretia Davidson*, a very extraordinary young creature, of whom I had before read some account in Mr. Southey's review of this volume. Surely many things, not often bestowed, must concur to make genius an enviable gift. This truth is painfully forced upon one's attention in reading the effusions and story of this enthusiast, hurried to her grave so early."

[15] Dickinson's 1890s editions were "edited by her friends," as were many other such posthumous volumes. Google Ngrams shows the phrase "edited by friends" to be common throughout the nineteenth-century anglophone Google Books corpus.

[16] Described in Morse's "Preface." See letter from Moss Kent to Samuel F. B. Morse, May 2nd, 1829 at the Library of Congress online. The two likely met when Kent commissioned Morse to paint his portrait a few years prior.

[17] Letters from Morse to Irving, Scott, and Southey are available through the Library of Congress's online collection of Morse's papers.

[18] The "friend" label contrasts somewhat with Cheryl Walker's characterization of Morse and Irving as "male midwives" to the birth of the Davidsons' oeuvre; one emphasizes the affective orientation and paternalism of editors, while the other suggests a forced intimacy and complicated authorial agency.

[19] Davidson and her family likely borrowed books from the Kent-Delord house next door; the historic site preserves this family's library, including their copies of Davidson's poetry, but has not yet been made available to scholars for study.

[20] The phenomenon of English posthumous and/or naïve poets, especially between 1770 and 1825, deserves much greater attention than I can give it here. For more, see criticism on individual authors.

[21] I'm grateful to Justin Tonra for this insight, from his unpublished work on Moore.

[22] I use this term with the idea in mind that Dickinson scholars frequently talk about "translation" from manuscript to print.

[23] All images from *Amir Khan and Other Poems* used with permission from the Clifton Waller Barrett Collection of American Literature at the University of Virginia Small Special Collections Library.

[24] "The Philosophy of Composition," *Graham's Magazine,* April 1846.

[25] See, for example, John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo,* 32: Summer 1987.

[26] Loeffelholz analogizes the Davidson female triad of the biographies with the female dyad in "Ligeia."

[27] Davidson supplies footnotes for some of her exotic vocabulary; according to Loeffelholz, they are largely drawn from Middleton's geography textbook. Incidentally, Middleton's book was a marketplace rival to another geography textbook, one authored by Samuel Morse's father.

[28] Though Davidson predictably disapproved of Byron ("His faults were great, his virtues less, / His mind a burning lamp of Heaven; / His talents were bestowed to bless, / But were as vainly lost as given."), her borrowings from Moore originate with Byron's oriental writings.

[29] St. Clair, William. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period.* Page 198, Table 11.2

[30] Thanks to Justin Tonra for sharing from his in-progress bibliographic work on Moore.

[31] See Clark Lawlor "Transatlantic Consumptions" and Patrick Vincent "Lucretia Davidson in Europe." Also, 1830 *Revue de Paris* article and a circa 1864 play in Italian by Paolo Giacometti.

[32] I refer to the speaker as female although her gender is unclear.

[33] Faith Barrett's book manuscript, *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave: American Poets and the Civil War*, currently under review at a university press, explores the work of popular wartime poets alongside the actual poetic productions of enlisted men, with special attention to the unpublished manuscripts of Iowan Obadiah Ethelbert Baker (1838-1923). Barrett's focus on the poetry of actual soldiers reinstates the historical imaginary importance of the soldier figure in Civil War literature.

[34] More on watchwords in the "Picket-Guard" section of this chapter.

[35] All references to wartime appearances of this poem are cited in a chronological list in the Appendix.

[36] See Appendix for a complete list.

[37] Not unlike the Currier and Ives print of a soldier's grave which can be filled in with name and place of death, which Fahs reproduces in her book (97)

[38] "The earlier of the two anonymously published poems central to my story of writing in borrowed uniforms, 'A Rainy Day in Camp,' gives us information about the circulation of this cluster of Civil War poetry, but the second one, 'Mortally Wounded,' took on a life of its own, as it came to be attributed to a dying soldier and circulated though broadsides, newspapers, and scrapbooks and was embedded in Civil War mourning and consolation practices" (Garvey 161). Both by Mary Woolsey Howland, of Astoria New York.

[39] This passage itself is reproduced frequently and without good citation. The earliest source I can find for it is in *The Southern Workman,* January 1892.

[40] My work builds on important prior study of the 1890s editing and reception, especially that of Bingham, Lubbers, Buckingham, and Maun.

[41] Dickinson's manuscripts actually had a significant audience in her lifetime through her wide network of correspondents, although of course the audience she reached in print was of an entirely different magnitude.

[42] Despite Emerson's claims, the circulation of poetry in manuscript has a long history. Scholars of the early modern era have posited a "stigma of print" to explain the flourishing of manuscript poetry circulation even in the age of increasing access to print. Coterie circulation ensured the lifetime fame of poets like Sir Philip Sidney and John Donne even as their works were only formally published posthumously. See Marotti.

[43] Readers are also flattered somewhat by Higginson's note in the preface that Dickinson will be appreciated by "thoughtful" readers (v).

[44] Todd did much of the work for the later volumes as well, and based on the positive reception of the first volume, increasingly allowed Dickinson's irregularities and unorthodoxies to stand on their own. See Maun on the evolution of Todd's editorial policies.

[45] See Bingham, *Ancestors' Brocades.*

[46] "Still, he struck exactly the right note, for reviewers were later to invent titles even for some poems that had gone without them because, according to prevailing taste, a poem without a title was considered somehow defective" (Lubbers 18).

[47] "Both essay and preface, conciliatory in attitude yet positive in tone, were frequently quoted and criticized by reviewers and remained influential well into the next century. Some of Higginson's formulations became household words of Dickinson criticism" (Lubbers 18).

[48] Later editorial theory would strive to systematize the approach to emendations, calling some matters like punctuation, or correcting perceived errors, "accidentals," as opposed to "substantives," which were integral to textual meaning. The works of McGann and others have largely challenged this distinction.

[49] For more on Dickinson's distinctive punctuation, see Crumbley and Miller.

[50] For more on the word variants, see Howe and Cameron.

[51] For more on Dickinson's rhyme, see Small.

[52] Higginson in the preface discloses that the poems' titles are editorial supplements (v).

[53] "She [Vinnie] knew Mabel had had some experience with publishing.... And while Sue had envisioned private printing, Mabel at once looked on the venture as a commercial one, which squared with Vinnie's desire for a wide audience" (Longsworth 295).

[54] "[…] layout designed for holiday market […]" (Lubbers 22).

[55] Or Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, had rushed and then pre-empted Sue's efforts. Sue's intentions to edit Dickinson's poems are thoroughly examined in Smith and Hart's edition, and elsewhere in Smith's writings. On the relationships among the parties, including the Todds, Susan and Austin Dickinson, and Lavinia Dickinson, see Longsworth.

[56] There were a number of colored cloth versions as well. The bindings are well documented in Myerson.

[57] For more on Dickinson's use of botanical imagery, see Farr's excellent study.

[58] Described in Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*. I'm grateful to Martha Nell Smith for the reference. The only known authenticated portrait of Dickinson past childhood is the famous daguerreotype, held by the Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College. The most recent claimed photographic image of Dickinson is convincingly disputed by Gleason.

[59] Todd "spent more than two years on the difficult task of deciphering and copying the nearly thousand poems entrusted to her and of choosing between suggested authorial changes. Her decisions regarding variants were, as a rule, made intelligently. She recognized that many variants had merely been a strategy typical of the poet to encircle

her meaning synonymously. In transcribing the difficult handwriting into lines and stanzas she proceeded competently" (Lubbers 15).

[60] Qtd in Lubbers 36. "Miss Dickinson's Poems," *San Jose Mercury*, 19 Apr 1891.

[61] Perhaps the concept of friendly editors has by this time come to seem dated or trite. The reviewer for *The Literary World* places it in quotation marks, perhaps sarcastically (B189).

[62] For more on the relationship between Higginson and Dickinson, see Wineapple.

[63] In quoting from reviews collected in Buckingham, I give parenthetical citation of author name, if available, with "B" and entry number. Full citations are in the Works Cited.

[64] "It is necessary to lay aside all fondness for technical perfection, and to give one's self up to the spirit, but this being done, the lover of the poetical will find the book a rare delight" (qtd in Lubbers 25).

[65] For more on the "No Name" Series, see Stern and Shealy, and Starke.

[66] Although Hunt promised Dickinson "double anonymousness" (see letter of 20 August 1876), Roberts Brothers publisher Thomas Niles eventually discovered the identity of Dickinson, and corresponded with her about her poetry. This correspondence left Niles interested in publishing Dickinson's poetry, and made him a receptive audience when Todd and Higginson approached him with their project.

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Appendix 1:

Chronological Listing of Wartime Occurrences of "The Picket-Guard"

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Appendix 2:

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