Reading the Fascicles of Emily Dickinson

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CHAPTER 6

Asking/Giving Uncommon Alms: From Fascicle 1 to 40

Fascicle 1 c. 1858

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**"The feet of people walking home" is the poem, which is repeated, with subtle variations, in Fascicle 14. Although almost identical in words and form, the poem’s two differing contexts (the two fascicle groupings) offer possibilities for revisions in interpretation; this is consistent with the contextual aesthetics discussed in chapter 2 in which “At last, to be identified” becomes part of a complex of poems related to powerful transformation, whereas in Fascicle 21 the same poem is part of a reflection on aesthetics—the nature of poetry and of the poet. Just so, as chapter 4 argues, two quite different versions of “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” reflect the different contexts of Fascicle 6, full of play, children, and small animals and Fascicle 10, in which the world depicted is more often insidiously suggestive of existential emptiness.**
Of all the fascicles in this study, this is the most problematic because of the inclusion of the separate sheet of paper for “The feet of people walking home.” Obviously, others may differ on this conclusion, but it seems to this reader to fit well where Franklin has surmised that it belongs that it is further evidence of Dickinson’s intentionality. As in each of the pairings, this setting suggests that the poem, more innocent and almost merry in its flower-filled context of Fascicle 1, may be reflective of the frustration of a speaker (or speakers) struggling with frustration and loss. The first and eighth poems of this fascicle may imply that one cause for the frustration is a failure to receive the kind of approbation or at least recognition of the poetic power of the poems such as those the poet sent to Higginson.
Here again, hidden midway in the fascicle is the poem that will appear again in another fascicle, Fascicle 40. In both cases the editor (Emily Dickinson herself, of course as we have every reason to believe) placed the poem on the bottom of a sheet on the "west" side of the opened book. That is almost all that is similar about the two versions. Separated by six years, the two settings provide radically different interpretive possibilities. Here in Fascicle 3 the impression produced by the voice—largely because of the surrounding poems—is that of a speaker fiercely skeptical. In Fascicle 10 the same poem takes on a devotional tone, far from the mood of this earlier setting.

** Fascicle 3 c.1858–1859

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<td>58</td>
<td>67 Delayed till she had ceased to know—</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>68 Some things that fly there be—</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>69 Within my reach!</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>70 So bashful when I spied her!</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>71 My friend must be a Bird—</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>72 Went up a year this evening!</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>73 Angels, in the early morning</td>
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<td>95</td>
<td>74 My nosegays are for Captives—</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>75 Sexton! My Master's sleeping here.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>76 The rainbow never tells me</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>77 One dignity delays for all—</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78 As by the dead we love to sit,</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>79 New feet within my garden go—</td>
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<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td>903</td>
<td>80 I hide myself within my flower</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>38 I never told the buried gold</td>
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<td>39 I never lost as much but twice,</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>118 I hav’nt told my garden yet—</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>41 I often passed the village</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32 The morns are meeker than they were—</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>33 Whether my bark went down at sea—</td>
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<td>34 Taken from men—this morning—</td>
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<td>35 Sleep is supposed to be</td>
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<td>36 If I should die,</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>37 By Chivalries as tiny,</td>
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Hidden also in Fascicle 40, the little poem which had appeared midway in Fascicle 3, takes on a different tone. In this fascicle, the speaker looks with "compound vision," backward and forward on moments of reverse and advance, claiming the power over her material ("I make his Crescent fill or lack"), even as she moves beyond her own "Color—Caste—Denomination," beyond "locality." In this last fascicle there is a stillness, even in what may well be an elegy for the war dead (these poems were compiled in 1864), "Midsummer was it, when / They died—." Whether or not Dickinson intended this to be her final edition, it ends with "a Revolution / In Locality—" and a "Night" that may be better than the "Suns." While the reader wishes for more and while the writer wrote over 100 other powerful poems after those she gathered for this collection, these poems seem to provide a "perfect" ending (a word repeated three times, more frequently than in any other fascicle), almost a benediction.
Having delved rather deeply into four fascicles, two pairs, in that each contains another version of a repeated poem, this chapter glides more quickly through four other fascicles, two other pairs, to show that jolts of astonishment such as those noted are found everywhere. The canny editor (Dickinson) seemed to delight in such surprises from the very first fascicle, collected in 1858 to the very last, some six years later.

Fascicle 1 begins—and ends—with a mock funeral and a benediction in which bee, butterfly, and breeze substitute for the orthodox trinity. Throughout the remaining poems in the twenty-two-poem sequence, other trios act as shadows of that playful threesome. The fascicle bustles, suggests a lark, a romp. Everything is in motion. The earth turns on its axis (“Frequently the woods are pink—” [J6, Fr24]); the stars swing (“There is a morn by men unseen—” [J24, Fr13]); the linnet flies free (“Morns like these—we parted” [J27, Fr18]); and the dead “dance,” “game,” and “gambol” on a mystic green (also “There is a morn”).

All of this happens in a woodsy garden, beginning with the autumn of the gentian and moving to the summer of the rose. There are nooks for daisies, some columbine, orchis, crocus, and anemone sprinkled throughout as the persona poses as gardener, her “little spade” (“All these my banners be—” [J22, Fr29]) in hand. Indeed, in the sixth poem of the series the speaker “sows” (sews) her pageantry. Morning is privileged over night in this garden; at least four poems of the poet, who later claims “the dark” that she “adores,” focus on the coming morning.1 This garden is out of reach of the Burglar and the cheater (“All these” [J22, Fr29]). It is a space to re/collect (“Oh if remembering were forgetting” [J33, Fr9]) what the “teller” doles out. Each image, each word used in this impressionistic introduction to the fascicle project exists in its own relationship, figurative and literal, within its poem. Like the flower image itself, Dickinson’s little force explodes, blossoms, and multiplies, each part seeding new images in its fascicle setting.

As she does three years later in Fascicle 14, in which she repeats the poem in a radically different context, Dickinson centers the fascicle with “The feet of people walking home” (J7, Fr16). Isolated from its setting in these two fascicles, “The feet” has invited a discussion that reveals the value of reading poems in their places. Ted-Larry Pebworth and Jay Claude Summers in a 1969 *Explicator* call the poem “an unusual example of orthodox Christianity” (item 76). Just so, Jane Eberwein notes the “happy mood” even as Dickinson confronted issues of immortality (1985, 232). However, Greg Johnson has a darker view, finding in it an “overt expression of a death wish” (1985, 145), and Cynthia Wolff finds “bitter irony” (1986, 148). By comparing the settings for the poem in the two fascicles (1 and 14), the reader sees the validi-
ty of each reading—but each is more relevant to the context of one or another of the two fascicle settings.

The first fascicle first: These poems gather a jaunty momentum by the repetition of tripartite construction in the two poems that follow the initial benediction. The visual flourish of “Frequently the woods are pink—” (J6, Fr24), the fascicle’s second poem, apparent only to the fascicle reader, underscores that tripartness. Note the way the “f’s” of its first three lines wave like flags down the poem. Below those three flying “f’s” are two sets of threes in the third poem: the “Sepal,” “petal,” and “thorn”; the “flask of Dew—/a Bee or two—/A breeze a caper in the trees.” And across from the waving “f’s” of the second poem, in the fourth, also a flower poem, “Distrustful of the Gentian” (J20, Fr26), is another evidence of Dickinson’s delight in editing. In this case the ear picks up the echo of the visual “f’s”: the “fluttering of her [the gentian’s] fringes,” along with the “perfidy,” and the “phantom meadows.”

Four poems into the fascicle, the gentian of the first poem has evoked doubt, and the tone of the fascicle modulates. These are not simple flower poems; many, among them Margaret Homans (1980), have discussed the seriousness of Dickinson’s play with flowers, her reversals of “ordinary meaning” in the feminine symbolism and the power of the small. Dickinson begins her fascicle productions, grounding her work in beds of flowers and calling attention to them throughout the book through such appeals to eye and ear.

United by such imagery, the first fascicle is far from uniform or univocal, moving from the brisk playfulness of its beginnings to explorations of the economy of loss. Throughout it is full of surprises for the attentive reader. The fourth poem (“Distrustful” [J20, Fr26]) ends with a hand reaching toward a distant heaven, for example, and is followed on the page by a poem that, when it is noticed, is usually wrenched apart from it: “We lose—because we win—” (J21, Fr28), in which the hand becomes that of a gambler who tosses the dice again. Turning the page, one finds a longer meditation on loss and gain in “All these my banners be” (J22, Fr29), and so forth.

If the fascicle’s seventh poem, “I had a guinea golden—” (J23, Fr12), enacts a drama of loss of inspiration, the eighth, “There is a morn by men unseen—” (J24, Fr13), declares that the poet, as Joanne Feit Diehl puts it, is finding “the ground of poetry” in “an alternative territory” (1983, 159). Situated on the leaf before the central poem, which is repeated in another fascicle (“The feet of people walking home” [J7, Fr16]), this eighth poem anticipates it: Alike in structure (each is twenty-four lines with six of those lines spilling into the next page), each is a resurrection poem, the celebratory dancing feet of “There is a morn” yielding to “the feet of people walking home.” Each suggests a Heaven reminiscent of the Swiss Alps (Sue was in Geneva in 1858, don’t forget—albeit the one in New York—at about the time these poems may have been gathered).
Between the two longer and similar poems is the quick thrust of the ambiguously worded “As if I asked a common alms” (J323, Fr14). Syntactically two fragments of sentences, “As if I asked a common alms . . . / As if I asked the Orient,” initially puzzles, even frustrates the reader. On its own this shorter poem seems an enclosure of that mysterious empty space, the gap, which interests those who find in Dickinson an existential soulmate.2 The unnamed something the speaker asks for is not kingdoms, not the Orient, not a Morn, though it is akin to each. One clue to the identity of those alms is another context Dickinson provided: She included “As if I asked” four years after the approximated date of this gathering in a letter to Higginson, where it follows, without a break, this introduction: “The ‘hand
you stretch me in the Dark,’ I put mine in, and turn away—I have no Saxon now” (L265). Significantly, this is the letter in which Dickinson asks Higginson to be her “preceptor,” a linkage that suggests that the wished-for “common Alms” relates to recognition of her poetic gifts and skills.3

Such a reading reifies Dickinson’s placing the “common Alms” in this fascicle,” and the intertextuality between contexts reifies the studies of scholars, such as Martha Nell Smith, who correctly insist on reading between various venues. This is a fascicle, remember, in which flowers and gardens are metonymies for poems and poet. When she wrote the same poem to Higginson, in which it appears in an almost identical form, the “a’s” of its first words drift down the page on the right to remind us subliminally of that “alms” on the right, whether those alms are the grace to write or the grace of a kindly reading.
The context supplied by the letter to Higginson fits the context in this fascicle. This little common meter bridge ("As if I asked") between longer poems follows logically and directly the preceding poem ("There is a morn" [J24, Fr13]), which ends with almost the same words: "And flood me with the Dawn!" The twice-expressed yearning for some kind of rebirth is repeated in the even tinier poem nestled at the bottom of the page: "She slept beneath a tree" (J25, Fr15), the tenth in the series. Rarely discussed, except as "simple," it takes on greater complexity and interest when read in its fascicle setting. The speaker's "foot," recognized by the not-born flower, merges into "The feet of people walking home," the poem that centers this fascicle and that is repeated in Fascicle 14. In more ways than I can detail here, the central, repeated poem picks up or anticipates every other poem in the fascicle. One can almost imagine the poet sifting through patterns as a quilter does for designs that are neither linear nor pictorial but pleasurable and suggestive.

Answering the plea for alms in the fascicle's ninth poem, for example, the speaker of the twelfth offers alms, saying, "It's all I have to bring today—" (J26, Fr17). The alms, the gift, the grace may be in the form of a literal flower (one imagines another context: a note with a gift) but more probably in the form of a poem, maybe even a book of poetry. This gift "could tell," says the speaker, who accompanies it with her "heart, and all the Bees / Which in the Clover dwell," taking us back to the fascicle's opening.

Between this twelfth poem with its three-part gift and the end of the fascicle, in which the flowers and the tripartite construction return, the editor inserts a series of meditations on silence—or death, particularly that on the sea. They seem an interruption—and are—until we consider that the little ship in the sixteenth poem, "Adrift! A little boat adrift!" (J30, Fr6) "shot—exultant on" and that the twentieth, "On this wondrous sea—sailing silently" (J4, Fr3) is the one that precedes Dickinson's instructions to Sue, "Write! Comrade, Write!" in the letter sent to Geneva. The ship sails into eternity, and the poet, as the fascicle ends, offers a rose to the reader rather than "Garlands for Queens" (J34, Fr10). The rose, symbol of "Chivalry, Chastity, and Equity" (that tripartite construction again) is the stuff of which the attar comes, attar that in "This was a Poet" (J448, Fr446 F21) is distilled; in other words it is poetry. Another rose poem shares that last page of the first fascicle. If one opens the fascicle and looks at its cover pages, the last poem (now on the left) leads to the first (now on the right of the opened book), suggesting the cycles, rebirth, a kind of eternal use, adding (the Bird/poet) to the characters of the initial blessing (Bee, Butterfly, Breeze):

Nobody knows this little Rose—
It might a pilgrim be
Did I not take it from the ways
And lift it up to thee.
Only a Bee will miss it—
Only a Butterfly,
Hastening from far journey—
On it's breast to lie—
Only a Bird will wonder—
Only a Breeze will sigh—
Ah little Rose—how easy
For such as thee to die! (J35, Fr1)

It might be easy for the rose to die, except that it is lifted up to us, readers who continue to discover its multifoliate suggestions as we read the fascicles, of which this is the first.

The “Feet of People” and Issues of Power and Print

By the time Dickinson copied that central poem of Fascicle 1, “The feet of people walking home” (J7, Fr16), into a similarly central position in what we now call Fascicle 14, her world had changed. Compiled against the backdrop of the opening of a war, the feet have changed from those strolling through a garden to those gathered in troops or on graveyards. In this period, too, she initiated “the most important correspondence” of her life, that with Higginson (Letters, 388). The poems selected for this book provide a striking contrast to those in Fascicle 1, and the repeated poem demonstrates the value of reading contextually.

If the first fascicle announced an effort to give shape to an already clearly articulated ambition “to be distinguished,” Fascicle 14 interrogates the problematical extension of that ambition. Blessings in bees and breezes and gifts of flowers and poems give Fascicle 1 a kind of gentleness. This almost totally different setting (Fascicle 14) for an almost identical poem (“The feet” [J7, Fr16]) is most of all different in the attitude it reflects toward “Power.” Power desired, thwarted, robbed, and won is an overt concern in four of the sixteen existing poems and seems a hypogrammatic shadow in virtually every one of its poems. By this time Dickinson, who lied to Higginson (“I made no verse—but one or two—until this winter—Sir—” [L261]), had become a poet aware of “authority and potency,” as Gary Stonum points out (1990, 128). By this time Dickinson had, in fact, self-published at least fourteen books (these fascicles), selecting from at least three hundred poems to do so.

How much—if at all—were the poems in this fascicle and the letters to Higginson an appeal for the kind of attention that might lead to publication? Martha Nell Smith argues persuasively—and many scholars agree with her on this—that Dickinson eschewed the marketplace and that the fascicles are
evidence of a strategy to subvert and triumph over the tyranny of “print.” This fascicle suggests that Dickinson was rather inconsistent on the subject. The poems of Fascicle 14 might be as one stage in an ongoing dialogue the poet conducted with herself. On the one hand, she claimed in that letter to Higginson to be a neophyte; on the other hand, she indicated that she was already considered at least a member of the local literati:

Two Editors of Journals came to my Father’s House, this winter—and asked me for my Mind—and when I asked them ‘Why,’ they said I was penurious—and they, would use it for the World—
I could not weigh myself—Myself—. (L261)

This is her second (known) letter to Higginson, written after he apparently responded with faint praise to the poems she enclosed in that first famously timorous letter (“Are you too deeply occupied . . .” [L260]). She responds to his apparently tepid assessment (“Thank you for the surgery”) and answers in playful hyperbole his apparent questions (about her companions, her reading, specifically, Whitman) and ends with praising his work and appealing to his judgment again. This was ten days after her first letter to him. Two months after that first flurry of correspondence she answered both his praise (“Your letter gave no Drunkenness, because I tasted Rum before—”) and his criticism (“You think my gait ‘spasmodic’ . . . You think me ‘uncontrolled’) and makes her most famous statement about publishing:

I smile when you suggest that I delay ‘to publish’—that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin—
If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase—and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me—then—My Barefoot-Rank is better—. (L 265)

Coupled with the evidence of her overture to Higginson and her continuing correspondence with him, Fascicle 14 suggests frustrated ambition. Listen to the echo (or anticipation?) of the letter to Higginson in Fascicle 14’s first poem (J319, Fr304): There’s a chase, a barefoot boy, and something (fame? publication? approbation?) that tantalizes and slips away:

The maddest dream—recedes—
unrealized—
The Heaven we Chase—
Like the June Bee—before
the Schoolboy—
Invites the Race—
Stoops to an Easy Clover—
Dips—Evades—
Teazes—Deploys

and so forth.
The Bee that promises but does not provide “steadfast Honey” is far from the one invoked as blessing in the first fascicle’s first poem. Just so, the second poem, “What if I say I shall / not wait!” (J277, Fr305), reflects impatience, if not frustration. In an *Explicator* article I more fully explore the almost suicidal desperation of this Hamlet-echo. There is none of that in Fascicle 1, just as there is no flower imagery (other than that crocus in the repeated poem and a jessamine/jasmine in another) in Fascicle 14, most of it straining against the conventional belief in “lips of Hallelujah / [which] Long years of practice bore.”

However, into this fascicle (Fascicle 14), so radically different in tone, Dickinson appears to have placed in a similarly central position “The feet of people.” Admittedly, knowing with certainty its position is complicated by the two problems confronting Franklin in its restoration: The first is that the fascicle’s final poems may be missing; the second, that rather than being written—as almost all of the other poems were—on previously folded sheets, sharing the space there with other poems, “The feet of people” seems to have been inserted after it was sent to someone or to have been removed and then replaced (see Franklin’s explanation in the *Manuscript Books* (1981) and in *PBSA* (1979, 353–54). Dickinson’s use of the poem again shows that she could think of it in a new way, privileging it for different reasons each time. This is what other readers do, of course. Thus we read, on the one hand, David Porter’s take on “The feet of people walking home” (aligned more or less with those of Pebworth and Summers and Jane Eberwein) as “a simple affirmation of a private faith in immortality” (1961, 145), and, on the other, Cynthia Griffin Wolff’s as “bitter irony” (1986, 148). Reading the poem in its two settings, as neither Porter nor Wolff did, reifies even polar readings such as the one by Porter, fitting well the way the poem works in Fascicle 1, the one by Wolff, appropriate to the context in Fascicle 14.

Although we may not know for sure why or even whether Dickinson placed this once-used (folded in two places) single sheet between the more customary folded and piled stationery pages, we can see evidence of clever self-publication. As in the poems “They shut me up in Prose” and “This was a poet,” there are poems answering others in Fascicle 14. “What if I say I shall / not wait” (J277, Fr305), for example, faces “Ah Moon—and Star / You are very far” (J240, Fr262), a poem that ends by declaring sadly, “I cannot go!” On the next two pages are two poems that appear to be about women (those who are too limited by feminine contingencies, perhaps, to leap the moon), about friendships,
and again, about disappointment: “A Shady friend—for Torrid days—” (J278, Fr306), on the left, and, facing the “Shady friend” and syntactically reflecting it, “A solemn thing—it was / I said— / A Woman—white—to be—” (J271, Fr307).

“Solemn”: Of the twenty-four times Dickinson uses the word (in nearly eighteen hundred poems), four of them are in this fascicle. Fascicle 1 was not “solemn”: The bees did not cruelly tease, nor did dreams. The moon was almost reachable. The speakers of the first fascicle’s poems pose as coy, flirtatious, and playful, even as they speak seriously of gains earned from loss. In Fascicle 14, however, the speakers strive—often for death itself—in a landscape of pain. War rumbles in the background. A teasing God/universe is up to conjuring trickiness. That is a solemn thing in itself, but the first overt use of the word in this fascicle is the declaration in the fifth poem in the sequence that it is a “solemn” thing to be a “Woman—white,” to be what the “Sages call . . . small”: in other words, perhaps, to be the poet constructing the work, the poet who answers those sages by swelling at her sense of the power of the so-called “small.” Although in the early, faulty, 1896 edition Higginson and Todd, who amputated the strong last two stanzas of the poem, titled the remaining stanzas “Wedded,” white was not necessarily bridal in the nineteenth century, but it was the costume of the woman poet (“The Wayward Nun” in Juhasz [1983a, 32]), in this case one who dared to take on the majority opinion that would label her “small.”

In the same fascicle all of the panoply of war—Parades . . . Pomp . . . A pleading Pageantry . . . Flags . . . Music . . . [and] Drums too near—is “Inconceivably solemn!” (J582, Fr414), the tenth in the series. There is “solemn News,” too, in the eleventh poem, “More Life—went out—when / He went” (J422, Fr415), the story of the death of someone uncommonly fine. Between the two poems that begin with the overt use of “solemn” are four that in import are just that. Below the end of the fascicle’s fifth poem’s assertion that the poet is strong enough to “sneer” at those who do not see the force in the “small,” the fascicle’s editor writes “I breathed enough to take / the trick” (J272, Fr308). How can one live when one is nearly smothered? One “simulate’s” a life. Something has been so nearly lethal to the speaker of this poem (faint praise, perhaps, or—not forgetting the larger world—war drums in the distance) that the only strategy is to “descend / Among the Cunning Cells / and touch the Pantomime / Himself / [and feel] How numb ("cool" is the variant) the Bellows feels!”

The implied gasping violence of this common metered poem continues in the poem that faces it: In one the poet “sneers” back at those who diminish the force of her “small”ness. Then, in the next she “simulates” a life “among the cunning Cells”: “Kill your Balm—and it’s / Odors bless you—” (J238, Fr309, the sixth poem). The aggressive thrust of the phrases that follow:
“Bare your Jessamine to the storm . . . Stab the bird” taunts the reader or God or the system of the universe. Keller is right in speaking of “the wolf in all of Dickinson’s sweetness”: “The poet is assertive. Poetry is daring. Audacity is an aesthetic. . . . There are rewards to the risk” (1979, 292). Keller’s words are more descriptive, however, of the poet or her speaker(s) in Fascicle 14 than the one we met in Fascicle 1.

It is by now a truism that the flower (balm and Jessamine—Dickinson grew jasmine in her hothouse) and the bird are metaphors for the poet. The “maddest perfume” that lingers both echoes the fascicle’s first poem and, because it is so much like that first one, leads to the next poem, the fascicle’s eighth, in which “‘Heaven’—is what I cannot / reach!” (J239, Fr310). Heaven hides “Behind the Hill.” Although the speaker says that “Paradise—is found” there, she follows it with the discouraging news that “Her teazing Purples” are “decoys” for the “credulous.” Certainly the notion of a conniving, frustrating, tricksterish universe or deity is not orthodox Protestantism. Following poems that suggest such heterodoxy, “The feet of people walking home” (J7, Fr16), lineated—but, significantly, not punctuated—exactly as it was in Fascicle 1, seems puzzling. Although its imagery was indeed a focus for much of the first fascicle, “The feet of people” also contains images that echo poems in this fourteenth book so opposite in tone. First, because of the apparent bitterness of the surrounding poems, one guesses that here the feet of people walking home may be battle-weary feet; they may be those dead honored by the “Inconceivably Solemn” parade of the poem that follows, or they may be the Hamlet-like figure of the second poem meditating on “fill[ing] this mortal— / off.” And the needed patience—the “Long years of practice”—will be the point of “There are two Ripenings” (J332, Fr420), the fascicle’s sixteenth poem. There’s more: The pearl imagery, for example, anticipates the fascicle’s thirteenth poem, “Removed from Accident of Loss” (J424, Fr417), in which “the Brown Malay” is “unconscious” that of “Pearls in Easter Waters / Marked His.” The line, one that seems almost spit out by the frustrated speaker, “Larceny [is] legacy,” stings as do those poems that prepare the way for it; if we inherit a kingdom, this fascicle implies, we do so in a system that is not wholly honest, open, or fair.

Contextual pressures also shape a new take on the poem’s final stanza. In Fascicle 1 the village, the angels, the abbey, and the triumphant last line, “Such resurrection pours,” were linked with other poems. Here the serial images of blankness, distance, and darkness suggest reasons for Dickinson’s situating the poem in this new setting. The figures that “fail to tell me” and the classics that “vail their faces,” not to mention the punning verb in “How far the village lies,” convey the skepticism of the very last image of the extant fascicle: the soundless, expressionless stoic vision of “Death— / who only shows his Granite face / Sublimer thing [way] than speech” (J310, Fr422). Just so, the repeated poem’s key line, “My faith that Dark adores,” sets up the
startling opening of one of this fascicle’s oddest poems: “A Toad, can die of Light” (J583, Fr419), the fifteenth in the series. That strange ode to death as “the Common Right / Of toads and Men” fits this fascicle as it would not fit, say, Fascicle 1 or Fascicle 40.

It is as dangerous to ascribe biographical motives to one of the fascicles as to any of the poems; nevertheless, the despair of so many of these poems and the focus on death, certainly more than in Fascicle 1, might reflect several kinds of pain associated with the date Franklin assigns to this fascicle (about 1862). Not only is this the year she began her tentative association with Higginson, whose responses must not have elated the hopeful poet, but it is also the year she wrote the sad letters to her cousins and to Samuel Bowles recounting the death of “brave Frazer—‘killed at Newbern’ . . . by a ‘minnie ball.’” (L255, L256).

Fascicle 14, chosen for this study because its centered poem provides a test case for the way context affects interpretation, it having been centered also in Fascicle 1, ends mysteriously. Franklin explains that it may be missing a leaf, one part of the folded paper having been ripped away. I am tempted to think, however, that the poem that is the last surviving one in the fascicle, is Dickinson’s own way of ending this meditation on disappointment and death. She had followed her toad poem with “There are two Ripenings—” (J332, Fr420), a fairly long poem in which the speaker seems to be exhorting herself to patience, and, facing that, a poem that seems to reflect sheer weariness, “It ceased to hurt me, though / so slow” (J584, Fr421). The ambiguous “it” and the equally ambiguous “something” that “had obscured the track” (one thinks of those “feet of people walking home”) to something like resurrection have taken their toll. “The Grief—that nestled close / As needles—ladies softly press / To Cushions Cheeks— / To keep their place—” has almost been assuaged. And “almost” is the operative word. The speaker cannot explain the learned consolation, the movement from the frantic tone of the fascicle’s first poem, only its effect:

Nor what consoled it, I could
Trace—
Except whereas ’twas Wilderness—
It’s better—almost Peace—

Below these four lines is a Hamlet-like ending (“the rest is silence”):

Give little anguish
Lives will fret—
Give Avalanches,
And they’ll slant.
Straighten—look cautious for
Their breath—
But make no syllable, like
Death—
Who only shows his Granite face
Sublimier thing [way]—than Speech—. (J310, Fr422)

Without noting the fascicle context for this poem (her book appeared the
same year the Manuscript Books were published), Joanne Feit Diehl speaks of
Dickinson’s “stoicism of silence, the relinquishment of her art” that follows
“overwhelming experience”: Diehl also speaks of the “awe” in this the fasci-
cle’s last poem, saying that “the result and reaction to Dickinson’s private loss
becomes a precondition for her fragmentary form of art” (1981, 24). Reading
Dickinson in her fascicles expands that assessment. Emily Dickinson could
not know in 1862 “if fame belonged to [her],” as she told Higginson. That
was not in her power to arrange or to know, but what was in her power was
to shape her growing body of work, the speech hurled in the “Granite face”
of death that was all around her. For some two years, perhaps with some form
of publication in mind, she had chosen these books as one way to shape that
speech. Whether consciously or serendipitously, she provided each little book
with its own design. Each design, in turn, shapes the effect of its components
so that, for example, “The feet of people walking home” has a darker, sharp-
er effect in this wartime fascicle than it had four years earlier in the flowery
first.

That difference is signified by the difference in punctuation, something
that is observable only in the manuscripts. The two versions of “The feet”
appear to be almost identical; they even break at the same line, spilling on to
the next in both cases with “Whose peasants are the angels.” In fact, when
one holds the two side by side, the second seems almost a carbon copy of the
first. The one change, however, shows the power of what Paul Crumbley—
who believes the fascicles to be “finished works” (1996, 11)—calls “inflec-
tions of the pen.” Crumbley takes the title of his intriguing study of the
Dickinson dash from Dickinson’s L470: “[A] Pen has so many inflections and
a Voice but one.” Although Crumbley does not discuss specifically either the
use of the end mark (the period) or this particular poem, the example of the
different versions of the same poem in Fascicles 1 and 14 reifies Crumbley’s
call for “readers to take seriously the uniquely Dickinsonian grammar,
orthography, and punctuation” (ibid., 28). I would add to Crumbley’s advice
that readers need to take seriously as well the different uses to which she puts
those details in two versions of the same passage. When it appears midway in
Fascicle 1, “The Feet of People” is punctuated at the end with an exclamation
point; in Fascicle 14, the exuberance implied by such a mark is not just muted; it seems stamped out by the round, large, final period. By such small marks she “hid herself” in Fascicles 3 and 40, both of which focus on—and reveal—the “Granite face” of Death.

“I Hide Myself” in Fascicles 3 and 40

When Dickinson selected “The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality” (J827, Fr820) as the opening of what appears to be her last fascicle, she alluded to both the timeliness and the timeless quality of her poems and announced the general concern of both fascicles in which she “hid herself.” The news that was not news was that of death. That Dickinson constantly tweaked the meaning and margin of death, of course, is no news, but in Fascicles 3 and 40 she explores the subject in such radically different settings that they form an appropriate conclusion to this study of the way context shapes meaning.

Readers of this book know well the numbers of young and old family members and friends whom Dickinson had lost by 1858, when she compiled Fascicle 3. By 1864, when she compiled Fascicle 40, she also had, of course, as a constant reader of her father’s journals and a member of Amherst’s first family, become familiar with national carnage. Yet Fascicle 3’s vignettes of the grieving watcher at bedsides reveals a Dickinson closer to that described by Cynthia Griffin Wolff: “[P]erhaps this God of absolute cold has concocted a cosmos that functions primarily as an experiment in human anguish” (1986, 321); Fascicle 40, on the other hand, in which Dickinson placed a poem almost identical to one in Fascicle 3, places her closer to the mystical Dickinson of Inder Nath Kher: “In the midsummer of mind,” he says, “death is like ‘The Summer closed upon itself / in Consummated Bloom’” (1974, 209).

Two years before Dorothy Oberhaus published her extensive study of Fascicle 40, I had engaged in a similar study. Frankly, I was amazed at the orthodox devotion reflected in this fascicle, so that I was not surprised at part of the Oberhaus theory. Although it may be a stretch to see all of the forty fascicles as forming “a single œuvre,” in which Fascicle 40 is the climax of a “conversion narrative” (1995, 87), as Oberhaus does, her conclusions that this fascicle is “a meditation” (ibid., 9) is inescapable. So thoroughly and elaborately has Oberhaus analyzed the fascicle we believe to be the final one (the proviso inherent in this sentence might be one challenge to complete acceptance of Oberhaus’s theory) that this discussion focuses primarily on the different voice I hear in Fascicle 3, which contains a duplicate poem.

Both fascicles 3 and 40, separated by six years, almost hide the repeated poem in an identical position on the bottom of a sheet on the west side of the
booklet. Unassuming as it seems in isolation, however, the little “I hide myself” in this context seems a coded assertion of poetic identity, or rather, identities. As with “The feet of people” in Fascicles 1 and 14, this poem becomes a different artifact within its altered setting. In Fascicle 3 the impression produced by the voices is fiercely skeptical, the stance existentialist; in Fascicle 40, as Oberhaus shows so thoroughly, the voice is so meditative that Oberhaus claims the speaker to be Christ. Fascicle 3 conveys impatience; Fascicle 40, a serene anticipation of the end of finite time.

Speaking usually from the point of view of a small observer to death’s puzzling manifestations, poems in Fascicle 3 speak of “Mystery,” “riddle,” and “enigma,” each a synonym for the state that is beyond telling. Built into that structure are at least two of Dickinson’s most idiosyncratic and potentially heterodox statements on death: “Some things there fly that be—” (J89, Fr68), the second in the fascicle, and “Sleep is supposed to be” (J13, Fr35), the third from the end (note the near symmetry). The loose narrative seems to reach a crisis in the sixteenth poem, the angriest poem in the fascicle, in which the bereaved mourner rails at her “Burglar! Banker—Father!” This “loose narrative” should not be confused with the kind of plotted narrative Shurr tells—or even with the kind of religious devotional Oberhaus finds; it is closer to a train of linked vignettes. Each succeeding poem picks up and turns to a new light an angle or image from the previous poem. Poem leads on to poem through associative clusters of words and images.

Fascicle 3 poses a barrage of questions about death. Is it ceasing to know? Is it knowledge that cannot be put down? Is it the view of the eye of the humble tourist? Is it captivity or victory? Flight or rest? The hidden or the revealed? Each poem poses a new question. Equally the fascicle queries the hortatory act: the tension between the telling and the keeping of silence. In seven of the poems this is a specific refrain, and it is implied in the other poems as well. Both concerns emerge in the first poem, “Delayed till she had ceased to know” (J58, Fr67).

Although Higginson later selected this three-verse, common, particular poem as one of the fifteen he chose for his *Christian Century* article and although several have posited interpretations of this poem, most readers are baffled by the characteristic gaps and inconsistencies of “Delayed.” For one thing, the gender of the subject is slippery; three times the one who has “ceased to know” is female, but by the end that subject (masculinized, then neutered) is “a king / Doubtful if it be crowned.” For another, there’s that missing direct object: “[T]o know” what asks the reader. “It would be” what, and what is the “it” in the second stanza? Why the heavy beat of iterated Delayed/Delay/lay in the first stanza and the conditional mode of the “Had not” and “if there may be” of the next two stanzas? So much is missing in this poem that the reader thinks again of the Riffaterrean hypogram, that shadow
inherent in but unstated and hovering just outside the formal elements of
the poem. Cristanne Miller's study of Emily Dickinson's grammar, particularly of
Dickinson's "nonrecoverable deletions" that "allow a freedom of association
and narrative movement" (1987, 30) is helpful, but perhaps the most helpful
way to approach the riddles is to replace this poem in its fascicle context,
where the jarring tone of "Delayed" continues in the second poem's riddle.

In "Delayed," the speaker hovers around the friend who has "ceased to
know," attributing her own doubt to her subject, but she herself delays until
the poem's last line—the overt statement of doubt. She could not "have
guessed" what lies beyond. The unfulfilled yearning "to know," the inability
to "guess," and the assertion that the subject is "Doubtful" yield to a similarly
unorthodox ending of the fascicle's second poem, "Some things that fly
there be—" (J89, Fr68). An elegantly structured poem—its three three-lined
trimeter lines subliminally emphasize the trinities that are offered as "things
that fly" ("Birds—Hours—the Bumblebee") and "things that stay" ("Grief—
Hills—Eternity")—the poem moves along in easy triplets until the last stan-
za. Leaving out the "Some things," the speaker again uses threes but this time
bases the trinity on alliterative sound: "resting," "rise," and, the scariest,
"Riddle."

When the speaker asks the answer to the oxymoronic question of resurrection—
how the "resting" can "rise"—she also asks an epistemological question,
"Can I expound the skies?" Can she, to use her dictionary, "explain, lay open
to meaning, clear of obscurity, interpret" the heaven she has been handed? If
she knew, as she probably did, Emerson's "Brahma's" advice to "Find me, and
turn thy back on heaven," she must have found congenial the exhortation to
resist the handed-down assumptions about an afterlife involving spiritual polar-
izations such as heaven and hell. Just as she knew that "Parting is all we know
of heaven / And all we need of hell" (J1732, Fr1773), she knew that Paradise
is also here on earth; separation from this earth produced a grief she could not
answer away by expounding the skies, at least not in this, the third fascicle.

Not one but two puns punctuate this second poem of Fascicle 3: "How
still the Riddle lies!" That on "lies" has been noted (see, for example, Porter
1961, 80); less discussed—and never in relation to this fascicle, I believe—is
the play on "still." Does she mean "how quiet" or "how long unanswered" the
Riddle "rests in our minds" or "conveys untruths"? That we cannot know
answers to the most central question of human existence and that it is always
just a hand's reach away seem the purport of the third poem, nested just
below the riddle. Similar to those impatient poems of Fascicle 14, "Within
my reach!" (J90, Fr69) conveys a kind of agonized frustration.

The fourth and fifth poems of the fascicle face the second and third; both
echo and anticipate the concerns of other poems in the fascicle. The violet of
the fourth ("So bashful when I spied her!" [J91, Fr70]) is wrenched like
Emerson’s “Rhodora” from its secret place. When, later in the fascicle, the speaker says she “hides herself within her flower,” she repeats the keyword, “hide,” and she iterates the not telling (“I shall never tell”) of the first and second poems. The wrenched violet merges into a mortal bird with a barbed tongue (“My friend must be a Bird—” (J92, Fr71). As with the natural characters of the first four poems, this one, too, concerns not knowing: “Ah, curious friend!” says the speaker, “Thou puzzlest me.” Riddles and puzzles: These are not the concerns of Fascicle 40, in which a poem placed here and changed little appears. Context does affect interpretation.

A thud of disappointment also ends the next (seventh) poem, “Went Up a year this evening!” (J93, Fr72). The speaker of this little story, a spectator at a death, goes through a number of stages, of which “wonder” is one, but the speaker ends the otherwise buoyant poem with this: “A Difference—A Daisy— / Is all the rest I knew!” As with “lies” and “still” in earlier poems, the “rest” resonates here, and the reader recognizes the frustration of the not knowing. Just so, the two poems that face this story, both of which might be read as cheerful nature poems, nevertheless have their own disquieting thuds. “Angels, in the early morning” (J94, Fr73) “parched” flowers, an image E. Miller Budick also finds disturbing (1985, 69–70). And the “nosegay” and “Captive” of the next (eighth) poem have their own unsettling resonances. The reader of the fascicles—and only the reader of the fascicle—will notice one of Dickinson’s tricks on the bottom of the opened page, though what to make of it, I confess, I’m not sure. Could she just be having fun by placing across from each other these lines: from “Went out a year”: “The wondrous nearer drew— / Hands bustled at the moorings— / The crowd respectful grew—” and, on the right, from “My nosegays”: “To such, if they’d whisper / Of mornings and the moors / They bear no other errand. . . .” Mooring the poems together this way cannot have been a complete accident. In all of the 1,775 poems Dickinson uses some form of “moor” or “mooring” only seven times.

Way leads on to way within Fascicle 3. Turning the page from Angels and nosegays, the reader discovers another graveyard scene, one reflecting simple acceptance, perhaps, of the death of a loved one to whom the flower and bird (both, to repeat, metonymies for poems) provide directions—and they are better than the directions of “Cato.” Below that, “Sexton! My Master’s sleeping here” (J96, Fr75) is a reminder of the limits of knowledge, as is “The rainbow never tells me” (J97, Fr76), the ninth and tenth poems of Fascicle 3.

In spite of the limits of knowledge—or because of it—“Angels,” the fascicle’s seventh poem, seems to be a poem of faith. The common meter “Angels” might just as well fit Fascicle 40, but it is followed by a poem that, because of the verb in the first line, reminds us of the fascicle’s opening (“Delayed till she had ceased to know”); it is “One dignity delays for all—” (J98, Fr77). This rather long poem, too, seems devotional but for that problematic verb and its
dark observation that death is inevitable for all. There’s a “meek escutcheon” on the crowned dead, reminding the fascicle reader of the “meek appareled thing,” the dead in the fascicle’s first poem, and looking toward the nineteenth poem, “The morns are meeker than they were—” (J12, Fr32).

Meanwhile, Dickinson has other (it seems to me intentional) surprises in store. Following the relative orthodoxy (if we ignore the Cato reference) of the twelfth poem, she situates the speaker of the thirteenth, “As by the dead we love to sit” (J88, Fr78), by a bedside or graveyard, grappling with the tension between knowing and believing. The grappling has to do with the mathematics of loss, a notion that is followed in the next poem by the mathematics of gain: “New feet within my garden go—” (J99, Fr79) with its itemization of things “new,” which cannot make up for the sadness of the end, “And still [that pun again] the pensive Spring returns— / And still the punctual snow!”

These are the poems that prepare for and all but hide the poem that Dickinson considered important enough to place in two fascicles. The speaker (or speakers) of these graveside poets, having “grappled” with death for thirteen poems, says

I hide myself within my flower
That wearing on your breast—
You—unsuspecting, wear me too—
And Angels know the rest! (J903, Fr80)

As with other repeated poems, this one seems both centrally located and pivotal in terms of language and idea. As are earlier and subsequent poems in the fascicle, it is about knowing; the poem (the fascicle?) contains what the poet knows and conveys to the listener/the reader/the wearer of the verse. What she does not know, what only the angels (there are several in this fascicle) know is “the rest,” that simple word, which has already appeared three times in the fascicle. Both the Johnson and the Franklin variorum editions note that the poem in one of its versions seems to have accompanied a literal flower. Regardless of whether this is true, it does not belie whatever meaning she attached to it when she selected it for placement here.

After declaring that she “hides [her]self,” she includes four poems in a row that begin with the first-person singular. We know that the “I” of her poetry may be a “supposed person,” but the almost hammered-out use of the pronoun and the tone of the poems suggest that maybe she was both hiding and revealing herself in this fascicle. “I never told the buried gold” (J11, Fr38), the fifteenth in the series, begins this string of poems. In it, the speaker declares lightheartedly that she wants to join forces with the plunderer (of the sunset), a kind of Captain Kidd, and will earn the right to share the “booty” she has greedily watched him hide. Comic relief it may be, but it also reminds us of the mathematics of gain
and loss, the tension between knowing and not knowing and between telling and not telling. And there's another surprise in the last verse: It faces the little poem (the fourteenth, which is repeated in Fascicle 40) in which the speaker “hides” herself: There the speaker wonders “Whether to keep the secret— / Whether to reveal— / Whether as I ponder / ‘Kidd’ will sudden sail—”

There's a seriousness to this fun: Fascicle 3 moves to the next poem, potentially one of her fiercest assaults on orthodox belief. To anticipate that, perhaps, Dickinson the editor copied the last verse of “I never told” at the top of the page. The lines form almost an introduction to “I never lost as much but twice” (J49, Fr39): at the end of the fifteenth poem, the one that hints at the larceny of Captain Kidd—and the urge to larceny by the speaker for the “buried gold,” the speaker wonders “Could a shrewd advise me / We might e’en divide— / Should a shrewd betray me— / Atropos decide!” The Atropos reference, a quotation from Shakespeare directly related to the death poems but so different from the reference to Kidd in the same poem, is only a little less puzzling than the object of the verb “decide.” Barton Levi St. Armand explains “the shrewd” as the reader or viewer; the treasure as the transformed beauty of the landscape—the work of the artist, whose work becomes “the spoils of aesthetic adventure” (1984, 267). Yes, that works: this is a fascicle in which the artist hides him- or herself (his or her skill) in the flower (poem about the sunset). The question of what is to be decided can only be guessed by the proximate poems and then only through a suggestion that we might again liken to that hypogrammatic shadow.

Below the unfinished thought in “Could a shrewd decide” is the poem that might indeed be the fiercest in the fascicle—though it has been called funny (Budick 1985, 126) and “far from rebellious” (Rapin 1973). Following a number of crowded pages, this poem, introduced by the “shrewd” verse, is set off with plenty of space above and below it as though its author/editor wants it to be clear:

I never lost as much but twice—
And that was in the sod—
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the throne of God!

Angels—twice descending
Reimbursed my store—
Burglar! Banker—Father!
I am poor once more! (J49, Fr39)

To the reader who began this little collection with the sense that the riddle of resurrection “lies” “still,” if you will; that birds have barbs; and that whatever treasure or “buried gold” may be swept away—whether that be the
power to write of sunsets or simply the disappearance of beauty—the lines seem highly charged. What this says about the philosophy or theology or state of mind that Dickinson had “hidden” in her work is, of course, as open to interpretive possibilities, as the views of Budick and Rapin suggest. Three women, two of whom knew Dickinson, weigh in this way. Sue, Emily’s most intimate friend, told Daniel Chester French that “Emily remained a docile child of God and a rebellious heir of his kingdom” (Bianchi 1932, 57); her daughter Martha Bianchi said something rather different: “Though Emily took liberties with her Puritan vernacular and dogma when venting her baffled patience with the inscrutable, these impish flashes were no more to the underlying God-consciousness than one gargoyle on the roof is to the heart of the cathedral within” (ibid., 55). “Rebellious heir” or “God-conscious” with “impish flashes”: Neither seems quite sufficient to describe the effect of that sharp “Burglar! Banker—Father!”

Speaking of “The Daughter and the Awful Father of Love” in her When a Writer Is a Daughter (1982), Barbara Mossberg lingers on this poem as a reflection of “the earth-bound Emily-Edward relationship”: “At first glance this is a dutiful daughter poem. . . . But instead of regarding God as the rightful owner whose authority and judgment in matters of life and death must be accepted on faith, Dickinson purports to consider God a ‘Burglar.’ . . . Thus she challenges the legitimacy of his power” (114). Replaced in its intended sequence, the line (as the entire poem) merges with the imagery of the taunting deity who keeps conditions for knowledge and certainty just out of reach (as in the third poem). If He is a “robber,” reducing the speaker to “a beggar” (in the fourth poem), she (the poet/persona) is as well, having once “robbed the Dingle” (in the fascicle’s fourth poem). There was a “plunder” of sunset, and the poet wished to be an accomplice to the piracy. If He (God) is a Banker, he is “shrewd,” like the one to whom the speaker appeals in the lines from “I never told the buried gold” and so forth. The poem hurls its accusation at a usurious deity who demands much too much too often and who extorts. What creates such anger and sadness? The next poem offers the suggestion that appears throughout the fascicle: Mortal separations are too painful to voice directly, as the poet says in “I haven’t told my garden yet—” (J50, Fr40), the seventeenth poem in the fascicle and the third in the congruent series of poems that begin with negatives (“I never told”; “I never lost”; “I haven’t told”).

Other secrets hide in the fascicle’s final poems. In the next poem (“I often passed the village” [J51, Fr41]) the speaker wanders through the village of the dead, remembering passing as a schoolgirl before she “knew the year . . . in which my call would come.” Facing this proleptic poem are two others that may be seen as proleptic as well. The fascicle has moved from poems in which the speaker grieves for others to one in which she imagines her own death. “The morns are meeker than they were—” (J12, Fr32), though often read as a light-
hearted evocation of fall, even parodic, in this sequence seems a bit eerie. It rests between the notion of a still, cool, submould existence in “I often passed” and the little poem that might partly be based on a Holmes and Barber emblem (see Monteiro and St. Armand [1981]) and that here holds the word we have already met—twice—in the earlier poems: “Whether my bark went down at sea—” (J52, Fr33), in which the speaker imagines herself out upon whatever sea of eternity it is she has been contemplating all through the fascicle. “By what mystic mooring,” she asks, “She [the little bark / the soul / the dead] is held today—”? As elsewhere in the fascicle, there is no answer to the question, simply a reiteration of the need to know: “This is the errand of the eye / Out upon the Bay.” She returns to the examination in the fascicle’s twenty-second poem, another one that might have originated in humor, “Sleep is supposed to be” (J13, Fr35). Moving toward the implied assertion that morning will occur, the poem recites two views of death. First, it is a rest: “the shutting of the eye”; second, it is some kind of heavenly place: “the station grand,” surrounded by witnesses, resurrection (morn). Dickinson’s lineation, however, belies the orthodoxy, however parodic, of those views. Although she might as easily have lined the poem in five verses of three lines each, she broke one line away from that structure: “Morning has not occurred!” The lines that follow, which imagine that paradisiacal day, have a conditional cast.

The last page is crowded with text. “If I should die” (J54, Fr36) imagines life without herself. Everything in the poem again is conditional except “That Commerce will continue— / And Trades as briskly fly.” There is nothing in the penultimate poem to override the conclusion of the one that preceded it (“Sleep is supposed to be”) that “morn” in the theological sense might not occur. However (possibly) heterodox the end of “If I should die” might be, there’s a lilt in that poem in which the poet moves from bedsides and graveyards to the world of the living, and there’s a lilt in the tiny poem at the end. It may, in fact, be the answer to all of the doubt hidden within the fascicle, in which the poet seeks to discover how to be moored in her own faith. It seems as grand an assertion about the enterprise of the poet as any she ever wrote:

By chivalries as tiny,
A Blossom, or a Book,
The seeds of smiles are planted—
Which blossom in the dark. (J55, Fr37)

Look at the fascicle. This little poem is in an identical position and is identical in length and nearly so in meter to the little poem, “I hide myself,” the one she pulled out to copy, some six years later, into Fascicle 40.

Fascicle 40, as Dorothy Oberhaus has shown us, is devotional. There is a stillness, a certainty, far from a bland placidity, not found in earlier fascicles
in the one we believe to be her last book. Nothing shows that quieter mood better than to contrast it with Fascicle 3. Here I differ from both Shurr and Oberhaus, who, in their very different readings, find a serial story from Fascicle 1 to 40. In Fascicle 3, as we have seen, the Dickinson persona spurns Cato and stamps her foot at the “Burglar!—Banker—Father!” who leaves her “poor once more.” She imbeds the quatrain “I hide myself” between a cemetery poem and a reverie on how much larceny the poet is allowed (compared to Kidd’s). And she ends with a celebration of mortal life and the role of the poet in that life (to live on in the “Chivalries so tiny” and make those who follow, those who inhabit the world of trade and commerce and everydayness, smile).

In Fascicle 40, however, the speaker looks with “compound vision,” backward and forward, on moments of reverse and advance, claiming the power over her material (“I make his Crescent fill or lack”) even as she moves beyond her own “Color—Caste—Denomination,” beyond “locality.” In this last fascicle there is a stillness even in the eerie sadness that hovers over what I take to be an elegy for the war dead (“Midsummer, was it when they died—” [J962, Fr822]).

There is a perfection in these death (and life) poems quite literally. The word “perfect” itself, in fact, is iterated three times, appearing more frequently here than in any other fascicle. Not prominent in the Oberhaus study is the fact that in the very middle (again) of this fascicle—so different from the third in tone and image clusters—on the west side of the opened volume (again) Dickinson inscribed the little poem that otherwise astute readers (citing the earlier version) call “banal” and “precious” (Griffith 1964, 153–56). To fit the new context Dickinson altered “I hide myself” (J903, Fr80) more radically than either of the two variorum editions (Johnson’s and Franklin’s) indicates, though not, certainly, as radically as she had the “Alabaster Chambers” of Fascicles 6 and 10. The changes call us to attention.

In this version the four lines, reworded, appear as seven:

I hide myself—within
My flower,
That fading from your
Vase—
You—unsuspecting—feel for
Me—
Almost a loneliness—

Lineation is no small matter. Martha Nell Smith (whose website makes it visible) has said that Dickinson’s careful holographs with their jokes and significant flourishes reveal her “performance script.” She cites Susan Howe’s response as a poet: “Try to copy Dickinson’s calligraphy; retrace one sweep-
ing s, a, or c, and you will know how sure her touch was / is. . . . Messages are delivered by marks” (Smith 1992, 62–63). Here “My flower,” “Vase,” and “Me” stand out, almost as if in apposition to each other or at least calling the reader to consider the connections among the three: The flower she so often equated with poetry, the vase that her dictionary reminds us has not only domestic but also sacred uses as a vessel for sacrifices (Oberhaus expands this [113]), and herself as source and object of feeling are joined in ways available only to the reader of the poem in its fascicle place.

Along with the lineation, the words present the poem in a new light. The concern with angels and with knowing in the last line of the earlier version (“and angels know the rest”) are transformed into the loneliness of this fascicle, in which the signs of the physical world—flowers, bees, trade, and commerce—are largely replaced by the language of an almost abstract vastness: “immortality” (“The only News I know” [J827, Fr820, the first in the series]; the “ungracious country” [J961, Fr821, the second]; the “nearness to Tremendousness” and “Illocality” [J963, Fr824, the fifth]). This fascicle has none of the exasperation (or the playfulness) of Fascicle 3, in which the speakers variously doubted, raged, or quoted (parodically) from scripture. In Fascicle 40 the universe the poet reflects has room in its paradise for those who seek to “Occupy My [probably Christ’s] House” (“Unto me,” J964, Fr825, the sixth in the series).

Just as there was almost a mate or a second verse, perhaps, to the earlier version of this poem (“By Chivalries so tiny), so there is to the version in Fascicle 40. It, too, occupies physically a place that underscores its connectedness. The eleventh poem of Fascicle 40 is the only one (other than the repeated poem) in this fascicle about flowers:

Between my country
And the Others—
There is a Sea—
But Flowers—negotiate
Between us—
As Ministry. (J905, Fr829)

Chivalries so tiny—flowers, poems, and poems that become new in fascicles, those bundled leaves of grass Dickinson left to intrigue—no, awe—the rest of us: This is the Ministry of Emily Dickinson. Whatever else we do with the poems Dickinson left for sister Vinnie to find, whatever other ways we (as her early editors and as most scholars still do) group her poems, we must also read and teach Dickinson through her own context. She cared about context.

Nothing shows what Robyn Bell calls the “passionate certainty” (1988, 353) of the craftsmanship of the fascicles better than the final pages of the
project. Much as in Frost's "Oven Bird," who "knows in singing not to sing" of the "diminished thing," Dickinson does not so much explain as inscribe in the writing itself what she acknowledges to be "Unfulfilled" and "Incomplete." It is in the way the last poem speaks to the first on the opened book. Dickinson speaks of "a Revolution / In Locality," which itself revolves visually to the "Bulletins of Immortality." She speaks of "Suns [that] Extinguish" in order that a "New Horizon" be "Embellish[ed]." She implies that the other sun of the new horizon is what illuminates "The only Show" worth seeing: Immortality. In the end, the fascicle says (again) with Hamlet, in effect, that "the rest is silence." But the silence is not dreadful, any more than is the darkness.

The last words of Dickinson's fascicles might seem like a drop into nihilism: "Fronting us—with Night," but this is a fascicle (and in many ways a project) that has provided "Compound vision— / Light—Enabling Light" and the night fronts—palpably fronts as one looks at the open book—"Bulletins from Immortality." The Bulletins, then, are the last word. The poet promises, "If other News there be— / Or Admirabler Show— / I'll tell it you—." Telling it was always the burden of her poetry. Inferring is our burden—and joy.