Writing in Time

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**Oh ' did I offend it — (A 829)**

**Date:** Drafted and likely revised on the same occasion, in pencil, ca. late winter–spring 1861.

**Material:** One sheet, folded vertically into two leaves (each leaf = 187 × 123 mm) of wove, cream, gilt-edged, lightly ruled stationery embossed FINE | NOTE | PAPER in a decorated vertical oval (13 × 11 mm); the MS was later hand-folded horizontally in half.

**Provenance:** Discovered among Dickinson's papers after her death.

**Initial custody:** Unsent in Dickinson's lifetime; no evidence of circulation of a copy of or similar to this document has been found.

**Secondary custody:** MS likely passed from Lavinia Norcross Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd, ca. 1891; from Todd to Millicent Todd Bingham, ca. 1932; and from Bingham to Amherst College, 1956, where it was catalogued by Jay Leyda and assigned the number A 829.

**Current custody:** Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.


**Summary of authorial interventions in the text:**

Note: This document offers evidence of Dickinson's trial of composition. In this document we witness her experimenting, often moment by moment, proposing alternate constructions and trajectories for lines in the heated process of drafting. While Dickinson seems to have worked initially with a worn pencil—the lead marks left on the paper are soft, sometimes almost smudged—in another pass through the text she used a sharper pencil when altering pronouns via overwriting and, on occasion, when adding variants or canceling text. The amount of time that elapses between these two compositional moments is unknown, but the impression given by the MS is that the second moment almost immediately succeeded the first.

Leaf 1, recto, lines 2–3: ED struck out these lines with three heavy, diagonal cancel marks.

Leaf 1, recto, line 6: ED proposed the variant "lower" as a variant for "meeker"—a combination of adjectives ('meek' and "low") also used in "Mute — thy Coronation —".

While it seems to have been ED's habit to place alternate or additional readings to the right or left and slightly above the line after the initial term, her private system of notation often allows for ambiguity in reading. Spatially, "lower" also stands just below and to the left of "smaller" in the line above, creating a constellation of related terms—"lower" "meeker" "smaller"—that seem to collectively underscore the speaker's condition. The variant reading was left unresolved.

Leaf 1, recto, line 6: ED proposed "ways teased" above "ways teased" above the cancellation.

Leaf 1, verso, line 6: ED canceled "life troubled" and proposed the variant "ways teased" above the cancellation.

Leaf 1, verso, line 6: ED proposed the variant "nature" for "sense" but left the reading unresolved. Here again, Dickinson's private system of notation allows for some ambiguity. Another possible reading of the line interprets "nature" as a possible variant for "life" and "ways": "her odd – Back woods man life /ways / nature teased his finer sense".

Leaf 1, verso, line 7: ED canceled three letters ("bea") of an incomplete word when another thought overtook her.

Leaf 1, verso, line 9: ED added the word "preceptor" above "grace", possibly as a variant; "teach her preceptor"; or as an addition, "teach her grace – preceptor"; the reading remains unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 11: ED proposed the variant "Dull" above "Slow" but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 13: ED proposed the variant "knows" above "learns" but left the reading unresolved.
Leaf 1, verso, line 16: ED proposed the variant "wordless" above "royal", underscoring "wordless" and partially striking through "royal" with the same stroke.

Leaf 1, verso, lines 17–18: ED first wrote "now – she stoops – a" then left a space and repeated the indefinite article on the next line when she wrote "a culprit –"; she then struck through "stoops – a", inserted "kneels" on the same line, and traced in heavier pencil "a" on the following line. She then subsequently struck through "now –" and partially underscored the beginning of "she"—which then she overwrote as "Daisy" to produce "Daisy kneels, a culprit –".

Leaf 1, verso, line 19: ED canceled "offence" with a single strikethrough. The "f" of the variant "fault" is composed over the dash originally following "offence".

Leaf 1, verso, line 20: ED canceled "not so" with a single strikethrough.

Leaf 1, verso, line 22: ED wrote "she" over "Daisy" possibly to adjust for the syntactic change in line 17. The overwriting in lines 17 and 22 may have occurred at the same time.

Leaf 1, verso, line 23: ED wrote over "do not" to form the word "don't" using the cross-stroke of the "t" to cross out the final "ot" of "not"; this overwriting may have occurred at the same time as the overwriting in lines 17 and 22.

Leaf 2, recto, line 3: ED wrote "your" over "his" possibly at the same time she altered other pronouns in the draft.

Leaf 2, recto, line 8: ED wrote "with" over another illegible word or part-word.

Leaf 2, recto, line 10: ED canceled "may" and "should" one after the other with separate single strikethroughs.

Leaf 2, recto, line 14: ED wrote "You" over "He" possibly at the same time she altered other pronouns in the draft.

Leaf 2, recto, line 22: ED wrote "much" over another illegible word or part-word possibly beginning with "h" or "ha".

Leaf 2, recto, line 23: ED crossed out "If you" with a single strikethrough.

Leaf 2, recto, line 26: ED formed the "s" of "seek" over another illegible letter, possibly "f".

Leaf 2, verso, line 1: ED canceled "whatever" with a single stroke.

Leaf 2, verso, line 2: ED introduced the variant "if" before or after canceling "out".

Leaf 2, verso, line 10: ED formed the word "me" over an illegible word, likely "in".

Leaf 2, verso, lines 14–15: ED canceled "glad / as the" in two separate strokes.

Leaf 2, verso, lines 21–23: The final lines of the text are difficult to parse. ED first wrote "Heaven will prove" but immediately abandoned the verb "prove" by crossing it out. She then experimented with the verb "disappoint" and adverb "only" placing "only" slightly above the line so that the text now reads, "Heaven will disappoint only me –".

At this point she appears to be working in separate cells. In the left cell, under "disappoint me" she writes, "because its’ not so dear" while in the right cell, she seems to be testing various formulations for "prove" including "because" and "will be".

She abandons the draft before indicating a final reading.

Editorial marks on the document:

Leaf 1, verso, line 12: Another hand, probably Millicent Todd Bingham’s, has written "wren" above the same word in Dickinson’s text; the editorial note clarifies the reading.

Leaf 1, verso, line 14: Another hand, probably Millicent Todd Bingham’s, has written "dares" above the same word in Dickinson’s text, while also re-tracing the final "s"; the editorial notes clarify the reading.
Oh 'did I offend it -
Did'nt it want me
to tell it the truth.
Daisy - Daisy - offend it - who
bends her smaller life to
tis' lower his, meeker every day -
who only asks - a task -
who something to do for
love of it - some little way
she can not guess to make
that master glad -
A love so big it scares
her, rushing among her small
heart - pushing aside the
blood - and leaving her
faint and white in the
gusts' arm -
Daisy - who never flinched
thro' that awful parting -
but held her life so tight
he should not see the
wound - who would have
sheltered him in her
childish bosom - only it was'nt
big eno for a Guest so large -
I was once her love, her
and she was mine. Perhaps
perhaps she guessed my taste—perhaps
her odd books were for
my reading. Her music
she knew all that—
but now she go un
harm’d—teach her your
words. Her memory—
soon shall pass away. Where—
e’en the rain after her
mind—gave her home.

For all the love I had
her—more with
her love—her beauty
her essence. Make
it so small
Is it not with
her joy, she is satisfied
our punish—do not punish
her—she’s in pain.
So—my pledge, come
will forgive—sometimes—
This Daisy – grieve her Lord – and yet it often blundered – perhaps she grazed his taste – perhaps her odd – Back woods man life troubled his finer sense, Daisy bea knows all that – but must she go unpardoned – teach her grace – teach her majesty – teach her preceptor –

Dull Slow at patrician things –
> Even the wren opon her nest learns more than Dull Dares –

Low at the knee that bore her once unto royal rest, now – Daisy stoops – a kneels, a culprit – tell her her offence fault – Master –

if it is not so small eno to cancel with her life, (She) is satisfied – but punish – do not banish her – Shut her in prison –

Sir – only pledge that you will forgive – some time –

before the grave, and Daisy will not mind – she will awake in your likeness – Wonder stings me more than the Bee – who did never sting me – but made gay music with his might wherever I may should did go – Wonder wastes my pound, you said I had no size to spare – You send the water over the Dam in my brown Eyes – I’ve got a cough as big as a thimble – but I dont care for that – I’ve got a Tomahawk in my side but that dont hurt me much, If you Her master stabs her more – Wont he Come to her – or will he let her seek him –
never minding whatever
So long wandering out to him at last-
Oh how the sailor strains,
when his boat is filling - Oh how the
dying tug, till the angel comes. Master, open
your life wide, and take me in forever,
I will never be tired - I will never be noisy
when you want to be still - I will be glad
as the your best little girl - nobody else will see me but you - but
that is enough - I shall not want any more - and all that
Heaven will prove only because
disappoint me - will be
its' not so dear