Writing in Time

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Writing in Time: Emily Dickinson's Master Hours.

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Master. / If you saw a bullet (A 828)

Date: Composed, or possibly copied from an earlier draft (initial or intermediate, not extant), in ink, and revised both during composition or copying in ink and again on a separate but temporally close occasion in pencil, ca. summer–autumn 1861.

Material: 2 folded sheets (4 leaves; each leaf = 202 × 127 mm) of laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a decorative frame (13 × 11 mm) containing a queen's head above the letter L and later folded horizontally by hand into thirds.

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 may have 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 828.

Current custody: Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

Publication history: MLT 1894, pp. 422–23 (six sentences only); MLT 1931, p. 411 (six sentences only); MTB 1955, pp. 422–30, entire, in facsimile; THJ 1958, L 233; YH 1960, II. 22–23; RWF 1986, pp. 31–46, in facsimile with transcript; RWF 1998, Fr 190 (three verse lines only); CM 2016, p. 528 (three verse lines only).

Summary of authorial interventions in the text:
The nature of the revisions ED made to this document strongly suggest that she worked on the text on two separate occasions, creating two significantly different versions. The notes below are keyed to the second (later) version of the text; unless otherwise noted, the revisions were carried out in the later scene of writing and revision.

Through the notes I hope to represent the integrity of the texts in time and to mark the non-identity of the first and second versions of the text.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, line 12: ED used eight diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "Sir –" and then proposed the variant "Master –" above the line.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, recto, line 13: ED wrote "I dont" over "He" in ink; the "H" is carefully reworked into the "I". [First scene of composition and revision.]

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, lines 4–7: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel each word of the following passage, leaving only four words uncanceled: "in the Redeemed – I didn't / tell you / for a long time – but / I knew you had altered me – / I was tired – no more –".

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, line 7: ED added "and" in pencil above "was": "and was tired – no more";

her penciled "+" mark added above "more" points the reader to three verse lines at the end of the text possibly meant for insertion here: "+ No Rose, yet felt myself / a'bloom, / No Bird – yet rode in Ether –".

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, lines 7–11: ED used pencil crosshatching to cancel the following passage:

"so dear / did this stranger become, that / were it, / or my breath – the / alternative – I had tossed / the fellow away with a smile."

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, line 19: ED penciled "can" above "never"; she may be proposing it as a variant for "never" ("...if I can forget...") or an addition ("...if I can never forget...").

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 15: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "but".

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 15: ED carefully reworked the "e" in "breast". [First scene of composition and revision.]

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 21: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "reverent" and then proposed the variant reading "hallow" (also in pencil) above it.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 22: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "reverently" and then proposed the variant "hallowed" (also in pencil) above it.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 2: ED used multiple diagonal ink slashes to cancel "our". [First scene of composition and revision.]

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 6: ED revised the line in pencil, first canceling "They" with multiple diagonal pencil slashes, then adding the underscored numerals "1" and "2" above the line to indicate a change in word order. The original line in ink,"They said a syllable – one of them –", subsequently reads "one of them – said a syllable –".

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 14: ED first added "remember that" in ink above the line [first scene of composition and revision]; then later [second scene of revision] she used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel both words and the space between them.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 17: ED added the letter "n" in pencil, changing "ever" to "never".
Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 2: ED added the words "like you –" in pencil above the line: " – but if I had the Beard on / my cheek – like you – and you – had Daisy's / petals".

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 5: ED added the word "me" in pencil above the line: "Could you forget me in fight, or / flight –".

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 14: ED used six diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "Eternity" and then proposed the variant "Heaven", also in pencil, above the line. At the same time, she penciled in the word "too", squeezing it into the line to achieve the reading "... but the / 'Corporation' are going too – so Heaven / wont be sequestered...".

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 15: ED continued revising the line in pencil, using multiple diagonal slash marks to cancel "at all –" and then proposing the variant "now" above the line: "...but the / 'Corporation' are going too – so Heaven / wont be sequestered – at all now –".

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 18: ED used six diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "country" and then proposed the variant "fold" (also in pencil) above the line.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso, line 5: ED used five diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "of" then proposed the variant "for" (also in pencil) above the line.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso, line 16: ED used twelve diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "this summer"; she then used six diagonal pencil slashes to cancel "could" proposing the variant "would" (also in pencil) above the line.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso, lines 19–20: ED used twenty diagonal pencil slashes to strike out each word of the lines: "Would it do harm – yet we both / fear God –".

Sheet 2, leaf 2, recto, line 8: ED used twenty-three diagonal pencil slashes to strike through each word of the question with which the initial version of the text ends: "Will you tell me if you will?"

Sheet 2, leaf 2, recto, lines 10–12: ED skipped a line and then added three lines in pencil: "I didn't think to tell you, you / didn't come to me 'in white' – / nor ever told me why –"; when the sheet is open, the lines almost mirror the echoing lines on the verso of sheet 2, leaf 1, verso: "What would you do with me / if I came 'in white'?

Sheet 2, leaf 2, recto, lines 14–16: ED skipped another line and then added three more lines in pencil: "+ No Rose, yet felt myself / a'bloom, / No Bird – yet rode in Ether –".

These lines, keyed for insertion on sheet 1, leaf 1 (verso), at line 7, also appear to be the last words she wrote when she returned to revise the text.
Master.

If you saw a bullet hit a Bird - and he told you he wasn’t shot - you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word - One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy’s bosom - then would you believe? Thomas’ faith in Anatomy - was stronger than his faith in faith. God made me - Sir - I didn’t be - myself - I don’t know how it was done - He built the heart in me - Bye and bye it outgrew me - and like the little mother - with the big child - I got tired holding him - I heard of a thing called “Redemption” - which rested men and women -
Dear reader, I asked you for it. You gave me something else. I forgot the letters on the table. I think it was the last day of the month. It was a few days before Christmas.

With a bright I cannot agree. That bright red coat.

The love of the country is my only apology to come nearer than my parents. And nearer than the new coat. That the older made: the sound of the heart at play on the heart in her memory is garden in.

The make me say it over.

I fear you laugh. When I was with the Colonel

When you laugh in your heart - sir, is it me

The man - a little is the other

Can it be the beginning - if it

In the night - because

Is it - is it a turn?

True things can happen. Sir,

I touch them
You remember I asked you for it - you gave me something else - I forgot the Redemption in the Redeemed - I did not tell you for a long time - but I knew you had altered me - I was tired - no more - so dear did this stranger become, that were it, or my breath - the alternative - I had tossed the fellow away with a smile.

I am older - tonight, Master - but the love is the same - so are the moon and the crescent - If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed - and find the place - myself - at night - if I never forget that I am not with you - and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I - if I wish with a might I can not repress - that mine were the Queen's place - the love of the - Plantagenet is my only apology - To come nearer than Presbyteries - and nearer than the new Coat - that the Tailor made - the prank of the Heart at play on the Heart - in holy Holiday - is forbidden me - You make me say it over - I fear you laugh - when I do not see - "Chillon" is not funny. Have you the Heart in your breast - Sir - is it set like mine - a little to the left - has it the misgiving - if it wake in the night - perchance - itself to it - a timbrel is it - itself to it a tune?

These things are reverent. Sir, I touch them reverently, but
persons who pray - dare remark

Father! You say I do
not tell you all - Daisy "confessed -
and denied not."

Vesuvius don’t talk - Etna - don’t -
They said a syllable - one of them -
a thousand years ago, and
Pompeii heard it, and hid
forever - She couldn’t look the
world in the face, afterward -
I suppose - Bashful Pompeii!
"Tell you of the want" - you
know what a leech is, don’t
you - and Daisy’s arm is small -
and you have felt the Horizon -
hav’n’t you - and did the
sea - never come so close as
to make you dance?
I don’t know what you can
do for it - thank you - Master -
– but if I had the Beard on like you my cheek - and you - had Daisy’s petals - and you cared so for me - what would become of you? Could you forget in fight, or flight - or the foreign land? Could’nt Carlo, and you and I walk in the meadows an hour - and nobody care but the Bobolink - and his - a silver scruple? I used to think when I died - I could see you - so I died as fast as I could - but the “Corporation” are going too - so Eternity wont be sequestered - at all Say I may wait for you - Say I need go with no stranger to the to me - untried Country - I waited a long time - Master - but I can wait more - wait till my hazel hair is dappled -
And you can. You can come then. I can't cook at my match. And if the clay is
it, you declared, we can take the Chinese here. What would you do with me
when I came in orbit? Wasn't the then: pretty
but then Alice in?
I want to see you more. Then all. I said for in
the mark. And the elite, arrives a cattle. Will he say
my one for the skin.
Could you come to Egypt England.

I wonder. Could you also
I come. Where?
Could I do this? Not yet.
Could Clay disappoint you. In she would see. She
in the comfort. forever just.
and you carry the cane -
then I can look at my
watch - and if the Day is
too far declined - we can take
the chances of Heaven -
What would you do with me
if I came "in white"?
Have you the little chest - to
put the alive - in?
I want to see you more - Sir -
than all I wish for in
this world - and the wish -
altered a little - will be my
only one - for the skies -
Could you come to New England -
this Summer - could you come
to Amherst - Would you like
to come - Master?
Would it do harm - yet we both
fear God - Would Daisy disappoint
you - no - she wouldn't - Sir -
it were comfort forever - just
to look in your face, while
you looked in mine - then I
could play in the woods - till
Dark - till you take me
where Sundown can not find
us - and the true keep
coming - till the town is full.
Will you tell me if you will?
I didn't think to tell you, you
didn't come to me "in white",
nor ever told me why,
+ No Rose, yet felt myself
a 'bloom,
No Bird - yet rode in Ether,