remote from the discourse addressed to him and sometimes to the more distant forms of “Thy” or “It”. The brevity of A 825, its status as a minor work, has led us to overlook it as the first site in which Dickinson crucially re-figures the “Master” as stranger, where the uncanny linking of intimacy and distance is quietly forged.

Coronation, pageant, courtier, ermine: these words are rare in Dickinson’s lexicon. From the net of the words that compose Mute – thy Coronation – another small constellation of poems from across Dickinson’s oeuvre emerges. Most are markedly hermetic, difficult to interpret. In them, pageant is almost invariably associated with departure and coronation with eternity; the courtiers appear as seekers, closer to those who wait at the gates of Paradise than those who attend at court; and ermine is as sumptuous as love or death. In one, Wert Thou but ill – that / I might show thee, composed for or at least copied in Fascicle 40 just before Dickinson exited the fascicle experiment forever, a clustering of images—of illness, trial, and sentencing, of the Stranger—seems to recall at least one, possibly more fragmentary lines of narrative from the “Master” project, also long since ended.

The material condition of A 825, its existence as a small square of paper possibly folded to cover the text inscribed upon it, feels like part of its meaning. The most private and enigmatic of writings, the “Master” documents may structurally resemble prayers—vows or devotions—which, as the historian Michel de Certeau writes, “count on the expectation of the other. But [are] not sure of it.” And while the reference point for this experiment—the “Master”—appears only rarely as an unnamed yet singular address after 1861, the importance of the experiment continues to be felt in Dickinson’s conception of both poetry and letters as forms of communication depending not on reciprocity and symmetry but on the radical uncertainty of connection. In the “Master” documents, as in the work that follows, writing’s voice conveys both faith in the otherness that awaits it and a necessary accession to all that may, or may not, come.

**THIRD HOUR**

*The Hour of Lead: A 829*

tell her
her offence
fault – Master –
if it is not so small
enough to cancel with
her life

**EMILY DICKINSON, from A 829**

Where—and by what forces—is Dickinson carried from the solicitude of A 827 and the humility of A 825, the first two extant documents in the “Master” constellation, to the trial of the third, A 829? How do we measure the distance between these documents?

In A 829, the restrained longing and the quiet reclamation of the beauty and strangeness that once approached her in spring and poetry, love and pain, are gone, deposed by a paroxysmal rage. Bearing neither salutation nor signature, A 829 does not unfold as part of a sequence but survives instead as the record of a rupture. Whatever has

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174 For poems including the word *pageant*, see “All these my banners be” (Fr 29); “Inconceivably solemn!” (Fr 414); “Some such Butterfly be seen” (Fr 661); “The harm of Years is on him” – (Fr 1215); “Death is the supple Suitor” (Fr 1470); “One of the ones that Midas touched” (Fr 1488); and “Pompless no Life can pass away” – (Fr 1594). For poems including the word *courtiers*, see “Taken from men – this morning” (Fr 34); “She bore it till the simple veins” (Fr 81); “In rags mysterious as these” (Fr 102); and “Wait till the Majesty of Death” (Fr 169). For poems including the word *coronation*, see “The Day that I was crowned” (Fr 613); “Smiling back from Coronation” (Fr 651); and “One crown that no one seeks” (Fr 1759). And for poems containing the word *ermine*, see “The Guest is gold and crimson” (Fr 44); “One dignity delays for all” – (Fr 77); “In rags mysterious as these” (Fr 102); “I met a King this Afternoon!” (Fr 183); “No matter – now – Sweet –” (Fr 734); and “Wert Thou but ill – that I might show thee” (Fr 821).

175 Although perhaps philologically perilous, it is interesting to read this later poem, composed (or copied) around early 1864, next to the earlier possible “Master” poem “Again – his voice is at / the door –” (A 89-8/9), composed about early 1862 and never bound. If these poems—so full of doors, thresholds, openings—do remember the “Master” experiment, they do so in a more oblique way, encrypting the very address they seek.

occurred, the speaker is not who she was before. By revealing the non-identity of the writing self across time, the third extant “Master” document sounds the problem of the discontinuous nature of identity that ultimately troubles Dickinson’s entire poetic project.178

Although we have no exact knowledge of where the “Master” documents rested among Dickinson’s papers, I am sometimes swayed by the argument that they must have lain together, otherwise the association between them would have been too fragile to hold. What really links them beyond the single lexical usage of Master, a word used in the first and third epistolary documents as a salutation—”Dear Master”—but then found only deep in the interior of the second epistolary document (A 829), which remains notably without address? The temporal distance of the three years between these two extant epistolary “Master” documents (A 827 and A 829) is only briefly interrupted by the short “Master” lyric of 1860 (A 825). But those three years hint at other forms of distance—spatial, psychic—that operate at the core of the “Master” experiment and that are more resistant to measure. For just as A 827 and A 829 belong to two separate, even severed, moments in time, so they also belong to two different worlds and two opposed mentalities. While the first describes and summons a prelapsarian, Edenic space through the language of flowers, the second laments the speaker-writer’s fall into an unconsecrated void.

Whether Dickinson addressed one or more human or inhuman interlocutors in the “Master” documents, whether there was a hiatus in the epistolary communications between the spring of 1858 and the spring of 1861, or, conversely, whether everything she wrote between these dates is an oblique message to the “Master(s)“ are not questions that can be definitively answered. What we can say is that, first, in or around spring 1861, the withdrawal of a powerful, real or imagined, interlocutor appears to open a space in which Dickinson violently re-directs her energies into writing; second, her language in this draft draws constantly and with a profound hunger upon the disorienting landscape of the New World; and third, no one, including ourselves, was ever meant to read this document. Even on a material level, the barriers to reading A 829 are considerable. A rough pencil draft, the stress of the occasion is widely legible across the handwritten leaves, where, in place of the elegant script of A 827, over-writing, blurred variants, and cancellations mar the surface of the fine paper. A 829 cannot be considered part of a “correspondence” not only because of these material impediments or because no evidence exists that it (or a variant version of it) was ever sent or because no reply to it has been recovered but also because no return message is possible.

While the “Master” documents are all private documents, only A 829 is also in some profound sense an unreceiveable, even unreadable text. It becomes virtually a private repository.

In the first epistolary work in the constellation, A 827, Dickinson’s speaker honors at least some of the conventions of epistolary writing: she opens with a greeting; she takes care to compose in a language that, while it scans as verse, also mimics the flow of rhythmic, cadenced prose. Most important of all, in this first extant epistolary document, we discover the speaker’s attentiveness to another being, the addressee. The message solicits an exchange of thoughts, beliefs, feelings; it awaits a response. Although no other documents seem to accompany this one—no earlier messages by Dickinson to the “Master”, no replies from that addressee—still it is conceivable that such exchanges may once have existed and that a dialogue now lost to time unfolded between them. So singular is this intuition that the belated reader of A 827, especially when unfolding and then turning the leaves of the manuscript, may feel as though she has intercepted a message intended for someone else.

A 829, by contrast, is no longer a transactional but rather a purely expressive text. The brokenness hinted at in A 825 now structures A 829, which appears to begin in medias res. Are leaves missing from the document? Although no one has yet suggested this possibility, we cannot rule it out since Dickinson’s habit—in fascicles and correspondence—was to stack separate bifolia one over

178 Approaching the question of identity from the opposite direction, Theodora Ward, who was among the first, after Bingham and Leyda, to see the “Master” documents, wrote, “The possibility of the existence of more than one correspondent must be considered in connection with the rough drafts of three highly emotional letters to an unnamed ‘Master’.” See Ward, The Capsule of the Mind: Chapters in the Life of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 151.
the other rather than interleaving them to create gatherings. Given this practice, it is conceivable that one or more sheets could have become separated from the extant sheet before being lost or destroyed. If no leaves are missing, the singular absence of a salutation may reflect the suddenness of the shock experienced by the speaker, perhaps her recognition that while she and the "Master" have shared a past, his/its present and future now depart from hers. In place of a letter, which often carries with it the hope for a reply, A 829 is a fantasy that operates as a replacement for an encounter.

From the outset, exclamation usurps the place of salutation, recurrently rending the text nearly until its close at the hundredth line:

Oh ' did I offend it – (1)
Oh how the sailor strains, / when his boat is / filling – (81–83)
Oh how the / dying tug, till the angel / comes . (83–85)

Of the interjection "Oh", the English poet Jeremy Prynne has written, "it seems chiefly to conjure a possible world internal to the feeling self. [...] Both in emotional reference and in grammatical function [Oh] seems locked unconstruably into the interiority of the uttering subject." In Dickinson's case, "Oh" seems to oscillate between inner speech and apostrophe; recognizably not narrative, "Oh" disrupts connectedness and representational reference. In the experience of love—albeit its loss—documented in A 829, language performs the speaker's openness to wounding by the other. The speaker presents herself as touched, broken into in her subjectivity, unable to return to herself. An allusion to a disturbance that occurred in the past—"that awful parting — (19)—is followed by paratactic references pointing to other, more present experiences of wounding. What is conveyed in A 829 is not the precise coordinates of the space she has entered but rather the incredible psychic acceleration the speaker experiences in the moment of entering it.

Fig. 27. A 829, ca. late winter–spring 1861, repeated exclamations, lines 1, 81, 83 (details)

Following her initial "outcrie", the speaker is carried on the jagged backs of verbs ever further into a universe of annihilating abjection: want, bend, flinched, blundered, grieved, grazed, kneel, cancel, punish, banish, shut, sting, waste, cough, hurt, seek, wander, strain, tug, come, open, take, will, want.

One pervasive source of unease in A 829 issues from Dickinson's intermittent use of the pronoun it where we would expect "he" or "Master" and, though far less frequently, "she" or "Daisy". "It" may simply represent the noun in a neuter gender, but as Cristanne Miller long ago observed, in Dickinson's poetry "it" also functions somewhere between being "directly referential, as grammatical subject, and as an unnamed blank in meaning." Dickinson's deployment of the pronoun here, moreover, associates both "Master" and "Daisy" with the inhuman world, albeit with different attributes and in vastly different scales. The "Master-It" embodies the inhuman in vastness of influence and absence of mercy; "It" is the "Guest" too big for the human heart to


180 I am grateful to Sharon Cameron for this insight; see the "O" repeatedly shifting between inner speech and apostrophe as Whitman deploys it in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd": "O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies" (7, 5); "O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call" (9, 2); "O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?" (10, 1); "O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?" (11, 1); "O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night" (16, 13).

“awake in his (5–6), a culprit willing to “cancel” (46) her life in order to
concepts first appear.

182 In the lines "awake in his / likeness", the cancellation of "his" is achieved
through overwriting "your".

183 And so, A 829 may after all carry some memory of A 827, where these words/
concepts first appear.

Pierre-Marc de Biasi defines the literary draft as the
"negligible domain of all that precedes the final version of
the text: a sort of opaque space in which the structures of
signification and style are not yet in place and that remains
resistant to interpretive designs upon it".184 In A 829, the
resistance to interpretative design may be especially
strong because no later fair copy of the text exists that
might help us to decode it. Its code, which belongs
indelibly to its draft condition, frustratingly and tantaliz-
ingly resists us and seems to urge us towards unfounded
conjecture. Yet Dickinson, who neither handed this trial
of love and writing over to oblivion nor finished it for
prosperity for readers she would never know, saved it.

At roughly the same time that Dickinson is drafting A 829,
she is also striking out in a new direction in the fascicles.
In 1861, variant readings begin to appear with some frequency, undermining the idea of the single, finished poem and engaging the aesthetics of "choosing not choosing" that will be central to her poetics for the remainder of her writing life.185 It does not feel coincidental that Dickinson's long farewell to the "Master" and her leave-taking of the textual authorities she once imagined might place their imprimatur on her poems occur simultaneously. Not fully legible, and never exhausted by our readings of it, A 829 foretells the end of the teleological phase of the fascicle project even as it conveys a warning about the breakdown of the world. In its audible intensity, A 829 is more voice than text, a series of displaced enunciations that re-define the territories of poetic language and the registers of the written voice at once. Instead of interpreters, Dickinson's draft turns us into witnesses.

FOURTH HOUR

The Midnight Hour: A 826

Then – Midnight – I have passed from thee –

EMILY DICKINSON, from A 826

In the "Master" constellation, verse may still operate as closure, a check against the roaming, centrifugal casting out of thought found in the longer trials of genre at the constellation's core. Less anarchic in appearance than the draft that precedes it, A 826, A wife – at Daybreak / I shall be may be an initial attempt to resolve the psychic disorder sounded in the fractured voices of the earlier document by bringing the speaker back within the bounds of the social order. In A 826, the series of thresholds that structure the poem are linked to an itinerary designed to effect her translation from "maid" to "wife", and the speaker's step-by-step movement seems at first so locked into the poem's metrical unfolding as to make deviation from the course seem impossible.

Yet at "Midnight", the speaker reports crossing over a boundary and also "pass[ing] from thee" (8–9), a referent so ambiguous that we may imagine she has passed not only through the apex of the darkness but also through the wide arms of the "Master". The marriage day alluded to in the poem's opening lines does not break at its end, where, in place of the time-bound condition of "wife", a "face" she has seen before, the speaker summons a vision of eternity.

The mechanical, culturally inscribed fantasy collapses.

Associated with the "Master" constellation, A wife – at Daybreak permits us a new and potentially recontextualized reading of A 829, hinting that the origins of the speaker's wound may be traceable not to the "Master" rejecting her but to her choosing a life outside the conventions that structure his/Its own. The anguished, bitter outcry with which A 829 opens—"Oh ' did I offend it / Didn't it want me / to tell it the truth," (1–3)—convicts her, not him, of a first and violent infraction against love's social order.

A poem's meaning does not derive only from the reproduction of its words but also from its meshwork of relationships with history, time, and place. In the spring of 1861, when Dickinson drafts A 826, she is drafting a private poem, and the 1861 A wife – at Daybreak (A 826) remains in its draft (un)dress: it does not enter the fascicles; it does not circulate beyond Dickinson's work space. Indeed, a full year must pass before Dickinson returns to the poem and makes a fair copy, and then yet another year passes before she makes a third copy and binds it into Fascicle 32. Each of the two subsequent copies (1862, 1863) is a variant version of the first draft of 1861; each marks its distance from A 826 and the "Master" experiment. The 1862 manuscript (A 116) is composed in ink on two leaves of stationery.186 Neither folded nor addressed, it does not seem to have been prepared for sending. Nor was it prepared for binding, since in copying the poem Dickinson wrote only on the