a few months after A 826. In this spring, as the light and temperatures are once again rising, so Dickinson’s internal conditions also seem to have been changing. From the depths of A 829, Dickinson emerged to draft the last two extant documents of the ca. 1858 to ca. 1861 "Master" constellation on sheets of laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a decorative frame containing a queen’s head above the letter L. As the poet and scholar Susan Howe wrote in 1991, for Dickinson, “[t]he physical act of copying is a mysterious sensuous expression. […] She paid attention to the smallest physical details of the page. Embossed seals in the corner of recto and verso leaves are part of the fictitious real.”188

The queen’s head is associated with a brief but significant period—and, perhaps even more significantly, with a series of events, a train of thinking, a moment when prose and verse were closer together than ever before or after. What new constellations of documents would come to light, what possible connections, associations, and resonances would materialize if we were to read all of the works composed on paper embossed with a queen’s head?189 In this spring-turning-into-summer, message, medium, chance, and authorial intention converge in a private, experimental poetics of infinite postponement.

A 828 feels like an apotheosis. In A 828, Dickinson’s speaker returns from the hour of lead. To mark this return, Dickinson writes in a beautiful fair copy hand. A new adeptness is apparent in the negotiation of the epistolary dynamics of presence and absence: in A 828, Dickinson gives an account of the speaker’s experience of the intricate interweaving of gender, sexuality, autonomy, and dissent in a language that freely crosses genre boundaries and that needs no authorization from outside. While there are many material cruxes that lead us to question the precise nature of the “Master” documents’ connections to one another, there are also intimations—textual and philological—that ultimately affirm that the association is not arbitrary. The multiplicity of drives organizing the earlier epistolary, indeterminate, and verse texts converge here, and while nothing in these earlier texts can predict the extraordinary vision conjured in A 828, read in retrospect each may be seen as an auger of this final extant document. The speaker’s probing of the future is thus balanced by an engagement with the past manifest in her oblique retrieval of the language and imagery of all that has come before.

Indeed, although at least three years have elapsed between the first extant document in the constellation, A 827, and this last extant document, A 828, the images organizing the first missive—flowers, the Sabbath, sundown, and the sea—return, changed, in the last. In A 827, love is a sea on which the speaker drifts, “count[ing] / the / Sabbaths, till we / meet on shore –” (46–48); in A 828, she asks the “Master” to remember the disturbing sensation of the sea coming “so close as / to make you dance” (82–83). In A 827, the speaker’s flowers whisper “what the / lips in the West, say, / when the sun goes / down” (36–39); in A 828, she

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189 Although no full-scale study of Dickinson’s use of papers has been published, Dickinson’s use of papers in the fascicles as well as in certain correspondences suggest the need for a further investigation on the linkage of materials to the practice of authorship. Can we surmise that Dickinson kept separate paper stocks that she used “with purpose” until she ran out? Did she collect paper stocks that were similar for uniformity in appearance? See R. W. Franklin’s notes on paper types in the fascicles in The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 1407–12.
fantasizes "play[ing] in the woods –" (131) till the "Master" "take[s] me / where sundown cannot find / us –" (132–34). Similarly, the trappings of sovereignty in the earlier poem traced on A 825—coronation, the robes of ermine—also resurface in A 828 in allusions to the House of "Plantagenet" (47) and the "new coat – that the Tailor / made –" (50–51). More important, perhaps, the "rest in revering" (5) that the speaker of A 825 experiences is unsettled in A 828, when, "the pageant by" (A 825, 6), she forgets "the Redemption / in the Redeemed—" (24–25).

The temporal proximity of A 828 to both A 829 and A 826—separated, perhaps, by the gap of only a few months—puts them in a still more intimately charged relation to one another. In A 828, the "marriage" trope of A 826 falls away, while the destroyed associations expressed in the fractured images of wounding that rend A 829 are mended, re-gathered in a series of tropes that carry us from the opening conceit of the shot bird to its transfiguration into a vehicle for the poet's voice "[riding] in Ether –" (142). Although no single phrase of A 829 returns in A 828, there is much to suggest that the earlier text may be a raw trial of the latter.

A 828 arises out of the dialectics of memory and forgetting. Without ever naming what befell her, the speaker-writer in A 829 conveyed her annihilating experience of a loss that deprived her of the power to describe her condition except as a series of rapidly and disparately changing image flashes. In A 828, the speaker writes as one restored to time's fullness. In this hour—the queen's hour—she enjoys an exact imagination of the translucent beauty of this-worldliness. Most crucially, the speaker's return to time restores her access to memory. Having undergone and survived the trial of falling out of time recorded in A 829, the speaker now recognizes time as her ally and love's witness. In writing to the "Master", she alludes at every opportunity to their place on the plane of human experience and to love's progress in the ebb and flow of human temporality. In retracing the passage of her love for him/It from its origins to the present, she recalls the moment in the now-distant past when her heart "outgrew me –" (16) and became too heavy to hold; she remembers the moment when she first heard of and asked the "Master" for "Redemption" and the next when he/It "gave me something / else" (23–24) that made her forget redemption; she remembers the moment of conversion, the turning in the heart—"I knew you had altered me –" (27)—and how long it was before she was able to tell the "Master" of the change; and she remembers a time when she would have thrown away her life—"my breath" (30)—had that been the price exacted to remain in the presence of the strange thing he/It had given her.

It is not only time but also an awareness of time's passing that spurs the speaker forward with new frankness. Immediately following repeated injunctions to the "Master" to "remember" all the points along the itinerary of their love, she notes "I am older – tonight" (33), and a little later, she remarks that she has been waiting "a long time" (104) for their reunion. And then, suddenly, A 828 projects Dickinson's speaker and her addressee far into the future. After taking inventory of the marks on their corporeal bodies that appear to affirm their subjection to aging and mortality—her hazel hair dappled; "Master" carrying a cane—on the penultimate leaf of text, she imagines consulting her watch to see how far the "Day" has "declined" and if they might "take the chances of / for I Heaven –" (111). In this future that approaches, they stand in the last province of the light to watch the dimming of the world. The sun is already far down in the west; the blue hills of A 827 are darkening into slate gray; the whole Connecticut River Valley is falling into shadow lit only by the bobolink's—that New World's blackbird's—"silver scruple" (95). In all ways, A 828 is a night composition; it calibrates the dark, takes its measure. Although devotion itself is as changeless as "the moon and the / crescent –" (35–36), the writer and addressee living under the sky in the Northern Hemisphere are themselves vulnerable to change.

Dickinson is in her thirty-first year on earth, and although but three years have passed since her composition of the first extant missive and this one, the distance between A 827 and A 828 is the infinite distance between then and now. Through A 828's rhythmic variation of temporal zones—human, deep historical, cosmic—speaker-writer and addressee alternately seem to collide and spin light years...
away from each other. This zooming in and out of time reverberates in the text’s changes of scale: love stakes its claims in Pompeii and the House of Plantagenet, in an hour in a meadow near Amherst, in the bobolink’s vespers.

The dialectics of memory and forgetting that form the temporal axis of A 828 are echoed in the dialectics of nearness and distance that play out on the spatial plane of the document. The speaker wishes to "breathe where you breathed – / and find the place – myself –" (38–39); she grieves that "sorrow and frost" (42) are nearer the "Master" than she is; she desires to "come nearer" to him/lt "than Presbyteries – and nearer than / the new coat – that the Tailor / made –" (48–51); she acknowledges that endless separation is the condition for their exchange: "the prank of the Heart / at play on the Heart – in holy / Holiday – is forbidden me –" (51–53). Whereas in A 827, the voice of the "Master" surprises the speaker after a period of silence, interior allusions in A 828 suggest that more recent messages, now lost, if they ever really existed beyond the speaker’s imagination, were exchanged and that they led her far outside the boundaries of convention asserted in A 827. Now in the speaker’s telling, his/Its voice returns merely as a citation in her text, a mark of his/Its presence-absence, while the many dashes that rend the text may be spaces made by the exit of the "Master" or spaces of memory itself.

Those who cannot speak directly to one another must fashion a new language in which to communicate, a set of signs known only to them or sometimes only to one of them. Some of the allusions in A 828 feel private, opaque. What is the "Corporation" that trespasses "Eternity" (99)? What is "the little chest – to / put the alive – in" (114–15)? Such references ensure that the understanding of outsiders remains partial and imperfect. They may point to the long, now untraceable chain of communications between the supposed structures of writer and addressee or only to the indecipherability at the heart of private histories and the gaps inherent in all messages sent across time and space. The presence of the "Master" solely as a citation in the speaker’s text conversely reminds us of his absence and of the "address gap" between them. It is not only that such references ensure that the understanding of outsiders, our understanding, remains partial, but they also remind us of the correspondents’ estrangement from each other. In A 828, Dickinson shows us that devotion and writing are exorbitant and asymmetrical and that both may be a summons to a releasing violence that is also a hidden plenitude.

The textual situation of A 828 is unique in relation to the other "Master" documents. Editors have generally labeled all three "Master" documents once deemed "letters" as "drafts" because they remained among Dickinson’s papers and in unfinished states. But they are not all drafts in the same sense. The first extant document, A 827, begins as a fair copy and becomes an intermediate copy only after Dickinson decides to revise a line close to the end of the text and is unable to do so without crossing out three words and interlineating variants. Even here, however, the variants appear in virtually the same fair hand as the words they replace, and the evenness of the ink strokes and color indicate that the changes were made in the course of writing or very soon after, possibly when she scanned the page and found a line that did not please.

By contrast, the composition of A 828 almost certainly unfolds in two distinct moments separated by an indefinite interval. In the first moment of textual creation, Dickinson composed in ink, writing across two folded sheets, or four leaves of stationery, leaving only the verso of the final leaf blank. She has written quite fluidly from beginning to end, the hallmark of fair copies transcribed from an exemplar, save for a hesitation of perhaps a few seconds on the verso of the second leaf when she crossed out a single word and, further down on the same leaf, carefully interlineated two others. In the second moment
of composition, Dickinson changes writing implements, working now with pencil rather than pen. Dickinson’s turning from ink to the pencil’s lead marks a fundamental change in the document’s status from a potentially public to a private one: although the salutation remains, her pencil, or the mixture of ink and lead, seems to signal that A 828 will not enter the circuit of exchange. In this second moment of textual composition, A 828 is re-directed inward. And yet it is as sure as—surer than—anything in ink. The shift in the speaker-writer’s psychic equilibrium surfaces in the deliberateness of Dickinson’s cancellations and the power of her additions. Together, they catalyze her escape from the conditions of the earlier version of A 828 as well as those of the still earlier trial of A 829.

In the manuscript witness, the pencil strikes through inked words, allowing the two layers of the text to appear in clear relief. The longest single passage canceled by Dickinson in her second approach to the text follows:

And another passage appearing later in the text:

And a third cancellation of what was once—in another world—the final line of the first version of the text:

Dickinson’s Webster’s defines abject as “A state of being cast away, hence a low state; meanness of spirit; baseness”. In the first version of A 828 and, still more violently, in the trial of A 829, abjection draws Dickinson, in the philosopher Julia Kristeva’s words, “toward the place where meaning collapses”. Yet while in moving from A 829 to A 828, Dickinson first carries over the earlier epistolary work’s abject elements, in her second passage through A 828, she crosses them out. The strikethroughs she makes during her return to the text are extensive and heavy. Intentionality, so often ambiguous in Dickinson’s manuscripts, is in this instance clear. Here the act of cancellation opens up the route to autopoiesis and a new account in which the writer’s experience of abjection and loss is replaced by her sudden apprehension of the overwhelming plenitude of each moment. Sometime in late 1860, Dickinson had read these lines of Emerson’s: “The poet knows that he speaks adequately then only when he speaks somewhat wildly, or with ‘the flower of the mind’; not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life”. Outside—beyond—abjection, the second version of A 828 touches—sounds—a beauty and serenity we will not find again until we reach Dickinson’s late writings of the 1870s and 1880s, when it is at last permitted full voice.

190 And how strangely resonant Kristeva’s description of the “abject” is for our reading of these texts: “A certain ‘ego’ that merged with its master [emphasis added], a superego, has flatly driven [the abject] away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging the master [emphasis added]. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object; to each superego its abject. It is not the white expanse or slack boredom of repression, not the translations and transformations of desire that wrench bodies, nights, and discourse; rather it is a brutish suffering that ‘I’ endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other’; see Kristeva’s Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.


192 Here again we might probe the influence of the “Master” experiment on Dickinson’s later—late—work, where prose and verse often alternate within a single document and where there is a similar fanning out of address.
In the second version of A 828, moreover, ending opens unto ending and at last to unendingness. First, it is possible that in canceling her petition to "Master" to answer—"Will you tell me if you will?" (136)—Dickinson is choosing to close the text with the lines just above, those carrying the vision of "the true [who] keep / coming – till the town is full" (134–35).193

Yet below the new boundary line created by cancels, Dickinson set down two passages, both penciled in a fair copy hand. Each is just three lines long: the first is apparently prose, the last is certainly verse:

*I didn't think to tell you, you didn't come to me “in white” – nor ever told me why – (137–39)*

+ No Rose, yet felt myself a'bloom, No Bird – yet rode in Ether – (140–42; rev ? 28–30)

What are these passages that glide below the body of the text proper, and where do they belong? In a poetics of the text, we might see them principally as additions, unmarked and marked, respectively, for incorporation into the work's body. Indeed, given the semantic echoes of the prose passage with lines almost opposite it on the unfolded sheet—"What would you do with me [emphasis added] / if I came 'in white' –" (112–13)—it seems likely that even though there is no material indication that the penciled lines should appear in proximity to the lines they answer, Dickinson nonetheless intended to stitch them back into the text at that point.

In the case of the second set of lines, the lines in verse, the unusually magnified diaritical "+" to the left of "No Rose" clearly recalls the reader to a passage all the way back on the verso of the document's opening leaf, a passage itself most aggressively re-called—literally struck out—by Dickinson in her second transit through the text.

Yet unlike a poetics of the text, a poetics of writing, while gladly acknowledging that the tercet turns the text on the verso of its opening leaf, also reads the tercet as the epigraph or coda manually inscribed at the document's very close and as performing its re-opening. For even if the text concludes just before the final canceled boundary line, the compositional process did not. In Dickinson's essentially graphetically bound, written poetics, the conventional relation signaled by Dickinson's cross (+) is not canceled but destabilized, and here we have a compelling—and fundamentally Dickinsonian—example of the parting of identity between "text" and "writing". The last words Dickinson wrote, the last thought she had in this scene of writing, not only perform her escape from the net of single address—the correspondence with the "Master", whether actual or imagined, is over—but also signal her flight into the poetics of "choosing not choosing" that marks much of her verse at...
least between 1861 and 1864 and, in different ways, all her post-1864 letters, prose, and verse fragments.

Beginning with a powerful conceit of the shot bird who continues to sing, A 828 climaxes or ends, depending on our placement of a textual addition, with the bird’s (speaker’s) escape from gravity and ascension into ether. Either way, the transit, expressed in the melody of A 828, is that of the stranger progress of negativity: on the way to the “untried country-fold” (103), the speaker is suddenly raptured, but in place of the eschatological instant of salvation she once—perhaps now long ago—desired, comes a poetry interchangeable with grace. And so, the text of A 828 that first records the speaker’s re-entry into time and the re-ordering of her experience of the shattered world described in A 829 also marks her subsequent exit into an atopic paradise of words outside the labor of writing. “No Bird” is not constantive—it neither states nor reports a truth in the world, and it is not subject to error—but performative. In A 828, poetry moves away from language into music. Code words for visible and invisible beauty, respectively, “Rose” and “No Bird” also express the writer’s singular sounding of the re-astonishment of the world.

194 Although I do not wish to impose a biblical reading of A 828 (or any of the “Master” documents) here, Dickinson surely knew the following passage from The Wisdom of Solomon 5.11: “Or as when a bird hath flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found, but the light air being beaten with the stroke of her wings and parted with the violent noise and motion of them, is passed through, and therein afterwards no sign where she went is to be found” (KJV). For her deep familiarity with this source, see Jack L. Capps, “The King James Version”, in Emily Dickinson’s Reading: 1836–1886 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), chap. 2.
Fig. 38. *Daisy* defined in Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1844

*Fam. of Plants.*