



Dickinson in Context

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Dickinson in Context

Margaret Dickie

The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History
By Susan Howe
Wesleyan University Press, 1993

Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism
By Jerome McGann
Princeton University Press, 1993

Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson
By Martha Nell Smith
University of Texas Press, 1992

Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles
By Sharon Cameron
University of Chicago Press, 1992

New Poems of Emily Dickinson
Edited by William H. Shurr with Anna Dunlap and Emily Grey Shurr
University of North Carolina Press, 1993

Manuscript study is, at best, a rough terrain over which textual editors, like caterpillars, pick their careful way. It is not a task for the butterflies of the profession. But Emily Dickinson's manuscripts have attracted not only a variety of caterpillars; they have inspired the butterflies too. Among those presently interested in the editorial task of a new edition—Ralph Franklin, who has prepared the Harvard University Press edition of her manuscripts and is now doing the poems, the poet Susan Howe, and the textual scholar Jerome McGann—there is not entire agreement. Nor have the butterflies waited, as is customary, for the caterpillars to finish before they have taken off on new interpretive ventures. While it is not the first time that editors have disagreed or critics have worked from manuscripts or with inadequate texts, Dickinson studies have been cast into more than usual chaos by the present situation of the manuscripts. The crux of the scholarly and critical problems raised by the unique conditions of Dickinson's manuscripts is what to make of the packets or fascicles into which she copied many of her largely unpublished poems—in short, what to make of handcrafted texts. Until Franklin published facsimiles of the fascicles in *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* in 1981, the fascicles were not a main focus of Dickinson criticism. Now, however, they must be, and critics and editors alike circle around them uneasily.

With Franklin's edition suddenly the poetry, which had been edited definitively—we imagined—in 1955 by Thomas Johnson (also for Harvard University Press), was taken out of the neat chronological order and numbering system Johnson devised and offered in the unfamiliar context of the poet's own apparent ordering, in handwriting that scrawls across rather than shrinks on the page as the printed text does. Johnson's chronology has been called into question by this edition; but, more important, this new Dickinson presents entirely different questions from those of the standard Dickinson—questions of her intention in the poems' groupings, of contexts in work that seemed to have no context, of the various cryptic marks on the texts along with variant words at the end of each poem.

Nonetheless, Franklin's edition is not without its own prob-

lems. Typically, textual editing is itself a product of its time and place, as the history of even Dickinson's printed texts would indicate. For example, when Johnson edited Dickinson's poems and letters, his work confirmed the critical practices of his day, and, as McGann argues, "Johnson's is an excellent example of a scholar's New Critical edition" (*Black Riders* 40). By contrast, although feminist critics have dominated Dickinson studies for two decades, it is fair to say that Franklin's is not a feminist edition. His attempted reconstruction of Dickinson's fascicles recreates the poet in her workshop at a point when feminist critics have been working to bring her out into the world, to place her in the context of other women poets or of her male contemporaries, to examine her craft, her experiments with language, her finish. Feminists, indeed all critics of Dickinson, now have the problem of reinterpreting their work in light of the manuscripts.

For Susan Howe, the editing itself is a problem. "This is a feminist issue," she writes about a project so completely "controlled by gentlemen of the old school and by Harvard University Press since the 1950s" that "it takes a woman to see clearly the condescending tone of these male editors when they talk about their work on the texts" (170). Even more crucial feminist issues are Howe's claims that no one is questioning the basic problem of transcription of the manuscripts, nor is anyone using the printed facsimiles to provide radically changed readings of her work.

It may be, as Howe suggests, that feminist critics have been denied access to the manuscripts, but, until fairly recently, it is not clear that feminist scholars have sought such access. Rather, basing their work on the Johnson edition that Franklin's editions have questioned, feminist critics have devoted their attention to quite different issues—the place of the woman writer in literary history, the role of gender in Dickinson's work, the linguistic peculiarities of the printed text, for example.¹ But, while feminists have been working on these issues, the texts on which their work depends have been edited by two men, first Johnson and now Franklin, both scrupulous scholars but neither one actually a feminist. It is this division in work on the poet that may qualify as the central issue in Dickinson studies today, feminist or otherwise. It explains partially why Franklin's editions have neither been questioned nor inspired new readings of the work. The editor and the critics are at a standoff. Neither knows what to do with the other's work.

In McGann's view, Franklin's edition is "much closer to the linguistic interests of a period that has seen the emergence in the past twenty years of 'genetic' texts and editing procedures," and,

although Franklin is not such an editor, “his work acquires its significance by seizing the privilege of its historical backwardness” (*Black Riders* 40). A “genetic” text attempts to produce a continuous compositional text in order to show the author’s process of creation. It bypasses the printed text entirely, and it might seem an appropriate choice for a poet such as Dickinson who left most of her poems in manuscript. Such a workshop text is problematic for feminists because it returns the writer to her workshop where, McGann has pointed out:

the full significance of Dickinson’s writing will begin to appear when we explicate in detail the importance of the different papers she used, her famous “fascicles,” her scripts and their conventions of punctuation and page layout. Many of these fundamental matters remain largely mysterious to this day. Because she is, along with Whitman, one of the two foundational poets of North America, this obscurity at the very heart of her work reflects a grave cultural ignorance—an ignorance all the more dismal for having gone so unnoticed for so long. (*Textual Condition* 87).

Concentrating on the paper, the script, the punctuation of Dickinson’s manuscripts will take her work back to the point at which her sister, Lavinia, discovered the fascicles and from which every editor since Mabel Loomis Todd has tried to rescue her. The critical problem for feminists here will be how to negotiate between the desire to see the greatest woman poet of all time published and publicly available and the desire to preserve the private publishing mode she seemed to desire. It cannot be done. For Howe, even when she acknowledges that Dickinson’s poems must be transcribed into type, the problem has no solution (153). She writes: “During her lifetime this writer refused to collaborate with the institution of publishing. When she created herself author, editor, and publisher, she situated her production in a field of free transgressive predisccovery” (147). In such a field Dickinson often remains hidden even from such a sensitive reader as Howe, who, admitting her own frequent failure to discover the poet, suggests its cause: “It’s something to do with her way of not publishing, of copying her work into packets she sewed together herself, with what she left out (numbers, titles), with what she left in (variant word listings, various marks). I think she may have chosen to enter the space of silence, a space where power is no longer an issue, gender is no longer an issue, voice is no longer an issue, where the idea of a printed book appears as a trap” (170). But in Howe’s “space of silence,” this new Dickinson,

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made possible by Howe's own feminist response to Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, will be very much like the old Dickinson, the reclusive poet who refused to accede to the social conventions of her day. Where then is the revolutionary or enraged Dickinson created by the first wave of feminist criticism or the complex and sophisticated poet negotiating with strategies of reticence and limitation from the second wave of feminist criticism or even the aristocratic poet scorning populism of one recent cultural critic? Studying the manuscripts, restoring them to their contexts, will not confirm any of these views of the poet. Yet, as McGann argues, the full significance of Dickinson's writing cannot begin to be known until the manuscripts are studied. The issue is, then, how to allow Dickinson her proper space and voice without trapping her in someone else's idea of her space and voice, a problem without solution because if she is to be printed, she will have to be trapped. In the process, how far shall we have advanced on the cultural ignorance that McGann deplores?

While these issues remain suspended, poets, editors, and critics have combined to launch a response to the published fascicles that has disrupted all certainties about the poet. First there are those interested in the manuscripts, Howe and McGann, who have pointed out some of the textual questions that the manuscripts present, suggesting new and complicated areas of investigation for future scholars. Then there are the critics—the feminist Martha Nell Smith, who has read the manuscripts of Dickinson's letters for their content, discovering there new evidence of her lesbian eroticism. And, quite distinct from this work is that of Sharon Cameron, whose earlier study *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (1979) broke new ground in Dickinson studies, and who now has provided a new reading of the fascicles where she finds, as she repeatedly states, Dickinson's habit of choosing not choosing. Not to be mentioned on the same level with these scholars and critics—but, alas, to be mentioned for the stir he has caused—is William Shurr, a kind of gadfly editor who has taken it upon himself to relineate Dickinson's published letters into poems and offer a collection entitled *New Poems of Emily Dickinson* from material which is neither new nor poems nor, strictly speaking, poems by Emily Dickinson.

From these works, we can conclude that the scholarly battles of the 1990s will not be fought over such time-honored problems as Dickinson's romantic interests—her relationship with Samuel Bowles or Otis Lord, for example—or even over the feminist suggestion that she anticipated *l'écriture féminine*, or, in fact,

whether the ways she slanted her dashes or crossed her *t*'s have any meaning at all. Rather—everyone temporarily in agreement that such revelations of the manuscripts are important—the debate now will be over what that meaning is and what the manuscripts can be made to reveal.

The study of the manuscripts, which continues as Franklin prepares a new edition of the poems, is going to be more divisive than earlier arguments over Dickinson because, unlike many questions about her life and work where the evidence simply does not exist for a conclusive answer, the question of the manuscripts can be answered by the manuscripts. The material basis for definitive decision is available—one would think, but even here one would be wrong. The material evidence of the manuscripts seems now beyond the reach of everyone but the few scholars whom Harvard University will allow to view them. According to Howe, Franklin is the one scholar, apart from the curator of manuscripts at Harvard's Houghton Library, who has unlimited access to Harvard's collection of the Dickinson manuscripts (143), although when I checked I was told that I would have to look at the photocopies and microfilms first and then I *might* be given permission to look at the originals. Certainly there are others who have access to the manuscripts—Smith, for one. But such access must be arbitrarily assigned since Howe has apparently been denied it. The manuscripts are fragile, and they need to be protected from multiple handlings; but, even if they were widely available, they would not provide easy and transparent answers to textual questions. For example, there are inexplicable gaps and rearrangements in the manuscripts. Dickinson's earliest editors broke up the fascicles; sets of the poems are not bound at all. The question of how they will be or have been put together again remains open. Also, not all of Dickinson's poems are included in the fascicles. In the end, little can be definitively decided even when the manuscripts are consulted.

What is at issue? The identity of the poems themselves. In this debate, it would appear that Howe takes the most extreme and purest line. Her view is that the identity of the poems is in their manuscript versions. She writes with the authority of a poet who brings to her study of the manuscripts a special sensitivity to Dickinson the poet. She is also aware that every aspect of Dickinson's manuscripts is significant, and, in this, she differs widely from Franklin. She reports that she wrote to him about the consistency with which Dickinson broke her lines after 1860. He replied, she writes, that "[m]y suggestion about line breaks depended on an 'assumption' that one reads in lines; he asked, 'what happens if the form lurking in the mind is the *stanza*?'"

(134, emphasis added). To this notion, she replies: "As a poet, I cannot assert that Dickinson composed in stanzas and was careless about line breaks. In the precinct of Poetry, a word, the space around a word, each letter, every mark, silence, or sound volatilizes an inner law of form—moves on a rigorous line" (145). Clearly Howe has been instrumental in turning attention to what she calls "the Illogic of Sumptuary Values" (131) in Dickinson's manuscripts. She has paid attention to the paper marks, the handwriting, the crosses and checks that Dickinson put on the fascicles when she copied them, the variants at the ends of the poems. She argues:

Words are only frames. No comfortable conclusion. Letters are scrawls,
turnabouts, astonishments, strokes, cuts, masks.
These poems are representations. These manuscripts
should be understood as visual productions.
The physical act of copying is a mysterious sensuous expression.
Wrapped in the mirror of the word. (141)

Having had access only to the originals of two manuscript books, Howe is still without doubt the most searching questioner and most persistent doubter about the published versions of the manuscripts; but, as she herself admits, "I am a poet, not a textual scholar" (153), and the full work that needs to be done on the manuscripts must await such a scholar.

By contrast, McGann is a textual scholar even if he is not, strictly speaking, an editor of Dickinson, and as a textual editor he has an interest in her manuscripts for what they will reveal about the late nineteenth century's "Renaissance of Printing." As such an editor, he is a kind of hybrid caterpillar-butterfly. He inches over the texts only to make soaring generalizations before moving on to other textual problems. Like Howe, he is interested in the visual reality of the manuscripts, where he finds a new self-conscious creator: "Whatever explanations we favor for Dickinson's refusal of print, we must not let them obscure the deep interest she took in the visual aspects of her writing" (*Black Riders* 26). He concludes, "Dickinson's scripts cannot be read as if they were 'printer's copy' manuscripts, or as if they were composed with an eye toward some state beyond their handcrafted textual condition" (38). Of course, everyone has read the manuscripts in exactly this way, and McGann's warning calls for an entirely different approach to the poet; he would like to see her texts "so-

cialized,” that is, placed in the social and political history of their production. He concludes, “Emily Dickinson’s poetry was not written *for* a print medium” (38). McGann thus aligns himself with Howe’s feminist concern for all the aspects of Dickinson’s work that Harvard University Press editions tend to suppress or to edit arbitrarily, but he, like Howe, has failed to explain how to produce the poetry in type.

There remains much to be studied in McGann’s view of Dickinson although, in returning her work to its handcrafted texts, McGann is placing her dangerously close to Howe’s “space of silence” where she might disappear from sight altogether. Again, his Dickinson looks like the old eccentric and reclusive Dickinson. The poet McGann evokes is the textual scholar’s poet: a writer who poses interesting questions of textual editing but who remains trapped in her manuscripts, inaccessible to the general public. McGann might consider rescuing her by an aggressive ideological reading that would find her at odds with the hierarchical power structures of her day; but he would have to confront Betsy Erkkila’s recent political reading of Dickinson as a poet perfectly at home in those structures, *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History, and Discord* (1992). Where would all this lead in an estimate of the poetry?

So much for the caterpillars—now for the butterflies. Working with the unpublished manuscripts of Dickinson’s letters, Smith has taken seriously McGann’s advice to look at the script, and she has discovered in the mutilation of the manuscripts as well as in the many marks on them a Dickinson whose erotic life was censored probably because she was a lesbian. Adding to the textual inquiry a scrutiny of what Smith sees as the poet’s unconventional regard for her sister-in-law, she also wants to pay particular attention to all that has been elided, “devalued by and excluded from” (1) most Dickinson studies, in short, to the poet’s erotic relationship with women. Not herself a textual editor by training, Smith has nonetheless looked at the manuscripts carefully and considered seriously what they can reveal.

Arguing that Dickinson “published” herself in her letters, Smith looks at letters to various correspondents not as biographical notes but as records of literary process, concentrating finally on the lengthy correspondence with Susan Gilbert Dickinson, who, she claims, acted as Dickinson’s mentor and editor in a kind of private poetry workshop. In examining this correspondence in Frost Library at Amherst College, Smith admits that she was “aghast” at the extent of the mutilation of Dickinson’s letters and poems. Someone—perhaps more than one person—has attempted to censor Dickinson’s expression of erotic desire, Smith

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claims. (Critics have generally assumed it was Austin Dickinson who wanted to suppress all expressions of intense affection for his wife, but Smith is not so sure.) Then, in the "Master letters," Smith discovered two penciled words—"like you"—over the line "But if I had the Beard on my cheek." With these added words, the line has Dickinson addressing the Master as a man; without the addition, the mysterious Master could be a woman. Since so much has been made of the "Master letters" in discussions of Dickinson's presumed heterosexual romantic interests, Smith's discovery destabilizes even this mysterious text and suggests that this old battleground in study of the poet must be reconfigured.

With these possibilities in mind, Smith suggests that Dickinson's relationship not just with the unidentified Master but also with her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson was a "lesbian desire" that, she argues, "can clarify and enhance our reading so that her cross-dressing characters and speakers, her impassioned rhetoric to Sue, 'Austin's' responses to those inflamed expressions, and the rhetoric of similarity in many of her love poems make a new sense" (33–34). Recognizing Dickinson's "love as lesbian desire" will suggest "different stories of her life," Smith concludes (33).

The work of Smith—who is never dogmatic, always generous to other scholars, and extremely knowledgeable about the manuscripts as well as the scholarship and criticism of Dickinson—draws on the development of feminist criticism and the insights of gay and lesbian studies to read the manuscripts as a palimpsest of desire expressed and censored, revealed and hidden. Although Smith is not the first critic to suggest that Dickinson was a lesbian—it is an idea that Rebecca Patterson floated in her early study *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson* (1951)—she is the first critic to bring the poet out of the closet of her manuscripts.² For Smith, the manuscripts are there to be decoded, and she is not afraid to probe carefully and range widely in the task. But, as Patterson generated debate, so will Smith.

Rowing in Eden appears at a moment when the very definition of lesbian desire and the question of what is the outside or the inside in homosexual and heterosexual desire are matters open for debate not only within gay and lesbian studies but in the context of feminist cultural studies and recovery projects. Smith's book will contribute its rich insights to that debate, as it will be judged by issues central to that debate. In the context of the manuscript study, this book is valuable for its suggestion that, like Gertrude Stein and H. D. in a later generation, Dickinson might have chosen alternate modes of publishing because she wanted to conceal as well as express her erotic desire. Beyond that, Smith's book also makes a discovery of inestimable impor-

tance in reconstructing the poetry workshop in which Dickinson participated with her sister-in-law and in pointing to the letter-poems as an important genre for the poet. Here, it seems to me, she has created an entirely new Dickinson, an experimental poet quite different from the isolated woman writing for herself. Moreover, this poet seems to be a public figure, a woman whose work had to be censored because it might be published. The handcrafted texts of Smith's poet are the products of many hands. In this respect, she was not, as Howe would have her, her own author, editor, and publisher.

Unlike Smith, Cameron reads the manuscripts as if they were a printed text. Her view seems to be that whatever is there is to be accounted for. Where Smith sees a mutilated and much defaced manuscript with pencil marks distinct from pen, pin holes distinct from other markings, Cameron sees a complete manuscript. She looks chiefly at the words and the variants at the ends of the poems printed in Franklin's edition, shifting attention from what the manuscripts reveal about Dickinson's personal life and creative process to what they reveal about her attitude toward the lyric genre. Cameron argues that Dickinson did not publish because she could not choose how to publish her poems (52). For Cameron, the manuscripts of the fascicles show Dickinson choosing not to choose in a variety of ways—how to publish, how to end a poem, how to include variants in a poem, how to make a whole poem.

Hers is an intricate and subtle reading of the fascicles, but, at this point in studies of Dickinson, Cameron's work poses certain problems. For the first major reading of the fascicles to come out of Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, Cameron's habit of citing poems from the three-volume Johnson variorum edition (1955) seems a peculiar expediency. She does concede that it is important to her argument that readers see the associations of the poems in Dickinson's fascicles and visualize the variants on the manuscript page, but she refers them to appendices where she provides transcripts from fascicles 13, 15, 16, 20 and a facsimile of fascicle 20, and to Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. In her text, she simply uses the much questioned Johnson edition. Thus, at the outset, one must ask, How important is the visual text that Cameron suppresses even as she builds her entire argument on it?

Here, Cameron seems to be the victim of the historical moment in which she writes. The visual text is both available in Franklin's edition and not available since it is too expensive to be generally circulated, and most readers will have great difficulty deciphering Dickinson's script. Because every serious scholar of

Dickinson has looked at the Franklin edition, it remains, if not in the mind's eye, at least in the mind as a serious reminder of the inadequacies of the Johnson edition. And so, one grows increasingly uncomfortable with Cameron's textual references.

Moreover, Cameron's work raises questions because it fails to take note of the important work already done on the manuscripts by Howe and others. Anyone who has read Howe is prepared for Cameron's thesis that, in leaving variants of her poems, Dickinson chose not to choose, or, in the parlance of today's textual editors, her final intentions toward the text were to have no final intentions; but neither Howe nor McGann is mentioned in Cameron's study. It is true that Cameron's elaborate development of this thesis does take it well beyond Howe's devotion to the detail of Dickinson's choices into considerations of the multiple ways in which the poet refused to choose and, refusing, "dramatizes the impossibility of wholeness understood as boundedness" (182), in short, as the lyric poem. But Cameron is reading the manuscripts as if they aspired to printed text, and, despite Howe's and McGann's warnings against such a reading, she makes no defense for her position, placing her work instead in the context of earlier narrative readings of the fascicles.³

For Cameron, Dickinson's habit of choosing not choosing—by binding her poems into fascicles and then privileging the unboundedness of the poems by including variants—creates the single most prominent feature of her work—"the opening up of spaces allowed to remain open." "For the spaces *between* the poems, more drastically than the spaces *in* the poems, though not essentially different in kind from the latter, illustrate the uncontainability of what is being represented," she claims (188).

Reading a single poem in the context of the fascicles, reading poems that are paired in a fascicle, exploring ways to read the multiple variants of poems and to read poems that are variants of each other—Cameron offers a vast array of new possibilities for approaching Dickinson. She then gives readings of two fascicles: "Fascicle 20: Choosing" and "Fascicle 16: Not Choosing." Tracing the associations of the poems in these fascicles, Cameron pursues the intricacies of their connection. But her conclusions are not always so original as her readings. For example, she concludes about fascicle 16, "these multiple refusals of choice explain the prevalence of paradox and antithesis at a deeper level in Dickinson's poetry" (155). Yes, but unless Cameron can explain what that deeper level is, her reading of the fascicles is not necessary to an understanding of Dickinson's paradox and antithesis. At this point she fails to be specific, claiming:

Finally the multiple refusals of choice indicate why readings that cast the conjunctions and division we have seen throughout the fascicle in the narrative terms of a love affair or a marriage seem explanatorily deficient, as do readings that oppositely make conjunctions and divisions wholly identic, psychological or self-referential. For identity as deployed in these poems, and in the fascicles that organize them, is neither wholly relational nor wholly self-referential—thereby precluding the exclusivity of either of these interpretations. Thus if subjects, conventionally understood, are redefined in Dickinson's poetry, so too—in the last of these evaded choices—is subjectivity. (155)

As a reader, Cameron has a talent for making the most of a text. She draws out what Howe has called “the Illogic of Sump-tuary Values” into attenuations of interpretation, binding fascicles into contexts, unbinding poems from their printed limitations, that will stretch the imagination—and occasionally the credulity—of even the most seasoned Dickinson scholar. The entire argument depends on the assumption that Dickinson had an intention in putting the fascicles together. Cameron claims categorically, “we know that Dickinson intended something. After all, she copied the poems into the fascicles” (18). Not everyone is quite so sure: Franklin thinks that one motive Dickinson had in constructing the books was simply to reduce the disorder of her manuscripts (*ix*); Howe suggests that the poems may have been copied in random order, that the size of the paper may have dictated a series, that maybe none of these is true (144). What if Dickinson did not have any intention? Finally, who can know?

To move from these studies to Shurr's *New Poems of Emily Dickinson* is to descend rapidly to another area of scholarship entirely, where the refined sensibility of Howe, the wide-ranging energies of McGann, the scrupulous attention of Smith, and the elaborate designs of Cameron have no place. Bypassing entirely the careful scholarship on the manuscripts and the letters (worse yet, citing only the dissertations of such published and distinguished Dickinson scholars as Vivian Pollak and Smith), Shurr has simply read through the three volumes of the Johnson edition of the letters, listening for what he claims is the Dickinson line of choice—what he calls the “fourteeners,” a line of iambic tetrameter followed by a line of iambic trimeter—and attending to other elements of her signature such as her use of a dash for a pause, the use of initial capitals to emphasize words, and her idiosyncratic use of “it's” as a possessive. As a result of this care-

ful listening and looking (although how the two are connected is nowhere explained), Shurr claims that his study "has yielded nearly five hundred new poems" (2) that he categorizes into five types: epigrams, prose-formatted poems, miscellaneous poetic forms including riddles, fragmentary poems, and a collection of juvenilia.

Nearly 500 new poems! Surely not. There may be new poems by Dickinson to be discovered; there may even be new manuscripts of letters in which Dickinson included poems, but Shurr has not found them.⁴ Rather, apparently not even consulting the manuscripts of the letters that might yield the eccentricities of lineation that Johnson often regularized and that might indicate an actual poem, Shurr has found only what he sought, evidence of the "fourteeners" that caught his ear as he read the printed edition. Even here, as Ellen Louise Hart has pointed out, his choices are eccentric. He has whittled, shifted, and arranged letters into poems, and, in support of his project, he has marshaled the evidence of those who have done the same, including Johnson and Dickinson herself. Of course, Johnson, who was not infallible, was actually working with the manuscripts, and Shurr makes no claim to be doing that. Dickinson did rearrange her poems, but she stands in a relation to her writing somewhat different from Shurr's. Overlooking the work of Howe and Smith, Shurr does avail himself of McGann's principle that an editor must recognize "a poem's changing life in human society" (12). This principle, Shurr claims, "suggests that editing must take into account the perceived needs of a present audience as well as the literary insights of the editor who is working on the text. It is along these more liberating or even transgressive lines that these new poems of Emily Dickinson are presented" (12). Writing here like an anchorite newly escaped from the monastery, Shurr fails to explain what he perceives the needs of the present audience to be. We can only assume that these needs have to do with "transgressing" the rules of responsible scholarship because certainly they could not have to do with being duped by false advertising. One cannot say that Dickinson did not imagine a reader like Shurr. After all, she did write, "Infection in the sentence breeds." Still, if Howe and Smith and Cameron are correct in their various estimates of Dickinson's intentions about publishing as she did in an original way, then the poet cannot easily be "liberated" from her own habits. Refusing typographical print, Dickinson made her work vulnerable to, even as it resists, such reduction as Shurr's.

With this recent rush of books, Dickinson has become a poet whose decision not to publish in conventional typographi-

cal outlets is the central fascination of her work. Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* and *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1986) have directed critical and creative attention to the visual reality of the manuscripts, and they await careful study. Suddenly, the order of the fascicles as well as the different marks and variants on them seem essential to an understanding of the poetry. For readers used to the canonical Dickinson of the Johnson edition, reading Dickinson in the context of her manuscripts is as startling a change as turning from Todd and Higginson's edition to the Johnson edition in the 1950s. Suddenly, there is a new poet, and these new books—with the exception of Shurr's—have just begun to explore her work.

If the editing of Dickinson has become a feminist issue, it is not just that a patriarchal institution has limited access to her manuscripts. After all, that very same institution rescued the manuscripts from the legal battles between the Dickinson family and the family of her first editor, Mabel Loomis Todd—all women—over their possession and rights of access; but that is another topic with implications for feminist critics that need to be examined, as does the fact that the ongoing editing of Dickinson attests to her status as a major writer. The editing of Dickinson is an issue feminists must confront because returning the texts to their handcrafted condition brings back to life the quirks and oddities of her composition that Johnson simply regularized. It reveals the unfinished state of her work; it emphasizes the process of creation over the finished product; it brings out the marks of self-editing or censorship; it shows the artist's indecisions as well as her deliberate interest in the visual text. At the same time, it shows a more fluid writer than the printed text does, a poet whose lines dominate the page where space is limited. The editing offers a close view of Dickinson at her original scene of writing, a site that feminists—who have done so much to rescue her from that scene—must now examine for the wealth and variety of cultural information it contains about the woman writer. Known as the author of her poetry, Dickinson must now be studied as its editor and publisher. Here there is plenty of work for the next generation of both caterpillars and butterflies in Dickinson studies.

Notes

1. Some editing projects by feminists are in process: Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart are working on an edition of Dickinson's letters to her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert Dickinson. Howe's students Marta Werner and Jeanne Holland are editing the late fragments.

2. Pollak also studied the relationship between Dickinson and her sister-in-law and concluded that, while materials for Dickinson as a suppressed lesbian are certainly there, "'Carnality,' however was not the major focus of her relationship with Sue" (79).
3. Cameron relegates to a footnote mention of three earlier studies of the fascicles that find a single discernible principle of order (16–17n12). She fails to discriminate between Ruth Miller's powerful reading of the fascicles as a narrative of a woman's move from hope of faith to doubt and then to a strengthened faith in *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (1968) and William H. Shurr's less convincing reading of the fascicles as a narrative of marriage in *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson: A Study of the Fascicles* (1983).
4. Smith *has* discovered what she calls the new genre of the "letter-poem," but she has worked from the manuscripts of Dickinson's letters rather than the printed text, and, in her discussions, she is careful to embed the poem in the context of the letter.

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