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**“WITNESS FOR HER”: THE VANDERBILT VARIANT OF “FURTHER IN SUMMER
THAN THE BIRDS” AND THE STAKES OF TRANSCRIBING EMILY DICKINSON’S
MANUSCRIPTS FOR PUBLICATION**

by

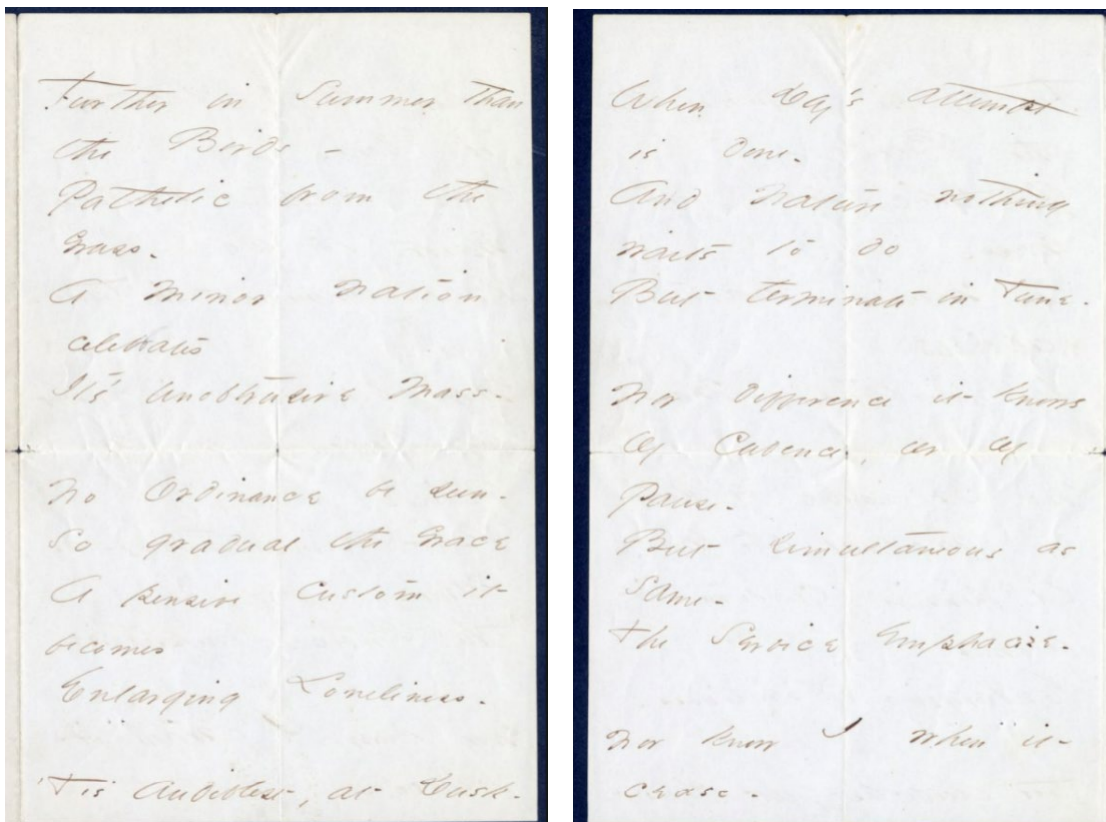
ISABEL EVANS

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR THOMAS KOENIGS
PROFESSOR TESSIE PRAKAS**

12 DECEMBER 2022

For more than eighty years, scholars believed that the earliest version of Emily Dickinson's "Further in Summer than the Birds," a major mid-career poem often regarded as "one of Dickinson's finest" (McSweeney 155) and "best-known poems," had been lost (Franklin, "The Manuscripts" 552). They only knew of the existence of this elusive variant because Dickinson's first editor, Mabel Loomis Todd, made a transcript in the 1890s, marking the last recorded sighting of Dickinson's original manuscript before its mysterious disappearance (Franklin, "The Manuscripts" 553; Johnson, *Poems* 754). Yet, against all odds, the manuscript survived (see Figure 1), resurfacing miraculously at Ella Strong Denison Library, the special collections library at Scripps College in Claremont, California, in 1986, exactly a century after Dickinson's death. This poem, known as the Vanderbilt Variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds," continues to be overlooked and under analyzed by Dickinson scholars, even fifty years after its remarkable recovery, a critical gap this essay endeavors to intervene in.



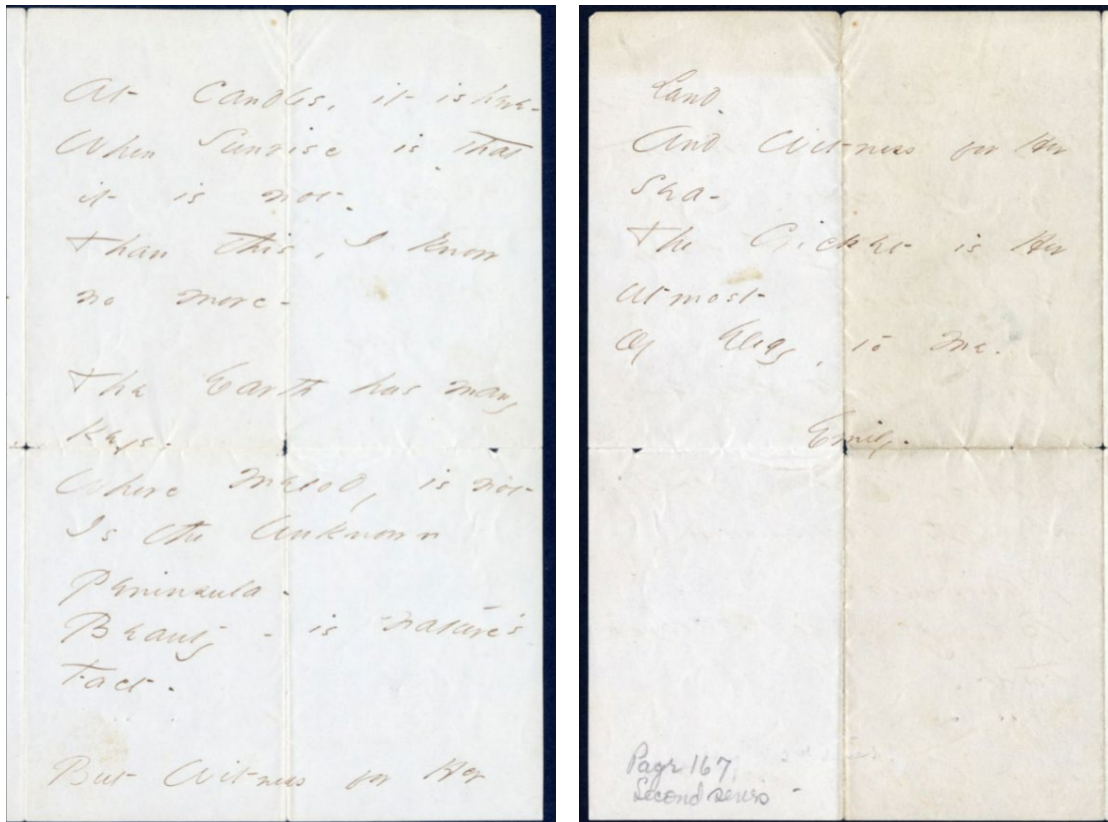


Figure 1: The manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant of “Further in Summer than the Birds,” located at Scripps College’s Denison Library

Most readers of “Further in Summer than the Birds” will never encounter the Vanderbilt variant or even learn of its existence, an important factor contributing to the ongoing critical negligence of the Vanderbilt variant. With the major exceptions of the variorum editions of Dickinson’s poetry edited by Thomas H. Johnson (1955) and Ralph W. Franklin (1998), anthologies and collections of Dickinson’s poetry generally offer only one variant for each poem, including in instances like “Further in Summer than the Birds,” where multiple versions survive, and it is not clear which text Dickinson preferred or deemed final. Even Johnson and Franklin constrain the readers of their respective *Complete Poems* (1955) and *Reading Edition* (1999) – both of which are technically aimed at a more general audience than the variorums but are widely used by scholars – to a single version of the poem. For instance, in *Complete Poems*, Johnson chose the variant Dickinson sent to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1866:

Further in Summer than the Birds
 Pathetic from the Grass
 A minor Nation celebrates
 It's unobtrusive Mass.

No Ordinance be seen
 So gradual the Grace
 A pensive Custom it becomes
 Enlarging Loneliness.

Antiquest felt at Noon
 When August burning low
 Arise this spectral Canticle
 Repose to typify

Remit as yet no Grace
 No Furrow on the Glow
 Yet a Druidic Difference
 Enhances Nature now (Johnson, *Complete Poems* 487).¹

While different variants have been treated as the definitive text of “Further in Summer than the Birds” across the poem’s publication history, Dickinson’s editors have always selected one of the three surviving four-stanza versions, never the seven-stanza Vanderbilt variant, which has effectively concealed the Vanderbilt variant from scholars and readers alike.

In his landmark 1978 essay on the multiple versions of “Further in Summer than the Birds,” still one of the most thorough critical investigations into the Vanderbilt variant, Franklin claims, “The Vanderbilt version has never been published accurately” (“The Manuscripts,” 554). This essay contends that, after fifty years and two more printed versions – the first to be made directly from Dickinson’s manuscript – the Vanderbilt variant has still not been published correctly, another significant barrier to the creation of scholarship. The first of these printed

¹ I reprint Johnson’s selected text here, as a stand in for the four-stanza version of “Further in Summer than the Birds” typically presented to readers, because prominent contemporary anthologies continue to reproduce his choice variant of the poem. Although “Further in Summer than the Birds,” surprisingly, does not appear in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, *Library of America: The American Poetry Anthology*, or *American Woman Poets of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*, Johnson’s preferred version of the poem is included in *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* (2006), which was compiled after Franklin suggested a different variant, the version Dickinson sent to Todd in 1883, as the new definitive text (181 – 182).

editions of the Vanderbilt variant, *My Cricket* (1986), was transcribed, typeset, and published by Susan M. Allen, the reference librarian at Denison Library who uncovered the Vanderbilt variant buried in the library's Perkins Autographed Letter Collection. Allen's rediscovery of the Vanderbilt variant, as she narrated it to me during our conversation in November 2022, was intimately intertwined with her growing interest in printing and publication, a fascination incited by the newly reopened Scripps College Press ("A History"). This is a striking detail in the context of Dickinson's famously ambivalent relationship to publication, the process she memorably imagined as the "Auction / Of the Mind of Man" in a poem that has, ironically, become one of the most frequently reprinted works from Dickinson's oeuvre. At the time Allen unearthed the Vanderbilt variant, she was looking for unpublished materials in the Denison collections she could use as the raw source material for a codex-bound volume, which she would design, typeset, print, and publish to gain experience as a printer. The resulting text, Allen's rendition of the Vanderbilt variant as an artist's book, suggests that printing is a transformative and editorializing process, a quality Ruth Mortimer, the curator of the Rare Books Collection at Smith College, picked up on, presumably without even seeing the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant, when she wrote in her review: "*My Cricket* has more of the printer than the poet" (Mortimer 185).

Likely because Allen published *My Cricket* in a small impression of 150 copies, the Vanderbilt variant would not begin to receive a fraction of the attention that it deserves from Dickinson scholars until 1998, when Franklin made a more accurate transcript of the Vanderbilt variant widely available for the first time in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*:

Further in Summer than the Birds –
 Pathetic from the Grass –
 A Minor Nation celebrates
 It's unobtrusive Mass –

No Ordinance be seen –
 So gradual the Grace
 A pensive Custom it becomes
 Enlarging Loneliness –

'Tis Audiblest, at Dusk –
 When Day's attempt is done –
 And Nature nothing waits to do
 But terminate in Tune –

Nor difference it knows
 Of Cadence, or of Pause –
 But simultaneous as Same –
 The Service emphacize –

Nor know I when it cease –
 At Candles, it is here –
 When Sunrise is – that it is not –
 Than this, I know no more –

The Earth has many keys –
 Where Melody is not
 Is the Unknown Peninsula –
 Beauty – is Nature's Fact –

But Witness for Her Land –
 And Witness for Her Sea –
 The Cricket is Her utmost
 Of Elegy, to Me – (Franklin, Variorum 831 – 832)

Since its publication, Franklin's transcript has become a stand-in for the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant, treated as if it were the text itself by the few scholars who have written on this version of "Further in Summer than the Birds" in the last twenty years. However, this essay contends that the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant contains powerful ambiguities in lineation, spacing, meter, and mark, which are not discernable in the print transcripts of the poem. As the first extended analysis of the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant as a self-contained poem to date, this essay attends to such ambiguities and restores focus to the frequently overlooked middle three stanzas of the poem in order to assert that noticing these important details

fundamentally alters how we read the Vanderbilt variant and how we understand its relationship to the larger thematic questions it raises about the sanctity of the natural world and the processes by which humans observe it.

Unlike Mortimer, who placed blame for the discrepancies between Dickinson's manuscript and the published texts on the individual editor, this essay insists that the editors who prepared the poem for publication are not the root of the problem; Allen and Franklin did a great service to Dickinson scholars and readers by making a more accurate version of the Vanderbilt variant accessible. Rather, I argue that their inability to precisely reproduce the Vanderbilt variant in print is ultimately an error of translation, not of transcription. Teeming with rich ambiguities, each of which suggests multiple interpretive possibilities, the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant cannot be fully captured by a traditional printed transcript. There remains an essential quality about Dickinson's manuscript that is untranslatable, which cannot be adequately communicated by a printer's set of standard characters and their uniform arrangement of text on the page. Using the Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" as an extended case study, this essay explores larger questions about the stakes and ethics of publishing Dickinson, such as: How does the process of transforming Dickinson's handwritten manuscripts into printed texts change her poems? What is lost and what is gained from reading Dickinson's poems as printed texts, rather than in their original manuscript form? To what extent is meaning in a Dickinson poem contingent upon the form that that reader encounters it in?

The Complex Manuscript, Publication, and Reception History of the Vanderbilt Variant

The poem other scholars and I refer to as the Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" takes its name from its first reader, Gertrude Lefferts Vanderbilt (1824 – 1902) of

Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York, to whom Dickinson mailed the poem during the summer of 1865.² Although Dickinson and Vanderbilt likely never met in person, they knew each other through Dickinson's close friend and sister-in-law Susan Dickinson, with whom Vanderbilt went to school (Jackson 68). In *Dickinson's Misery*, Virginia Jackson plausibly argues that Dickinson and Vanderbilt's relationship might have extended beyond their individual connections to Susan. Drawing off the work of Karen Dandurand, Jackson contends that Dickinson could have sent three poems, now known collectively as Dickinson's *Drum Beat* poems, to Vanderbilt in early 1864 to publish on her behalf (68 and 68n3). Numbering among the ten poems and one letter known by scholars to have been published during Dickinson's lifetime ("Publications"), the *Drum Beat* poems were printed in a Brooklyn paper called the *Drum Beat* as part of a fundraiser in support of the U.S. Sanitary Commission's effort to better the living conditions of Union Army troops (Jackson 68 and 68n3). If Jackson is right, and Vanderbilt was involved in the publication the *Drum Beat* poems, then the seven-stanza version of "Further in Summer than the Birds" is already, by virtue of its association with Vanderbilt, tied up in the issues of publication that this essay will grapple with.

Less than two weeks after the third and final *Drum Beat* poem ("These are the days when birds come back") appeared in the paper's 11 March 1864 edition ("Publications"), Vanderbilt suffered a near-fatal gunshot wound, a scandalous event that drew national attention (Jackson 68; Franklin, "The Manuscripts" 553). In what the *Brooklyn Eagle* and the *Springfield Republican* called "an attempt at revenge," a farm laborer named William Cutter, the spurned suitor of

² In writing the first two paragraphs of this section, I am indebted to Ralph Franklin and Virginia Jackson, who reconstructed the details of the Vanderbilt-Dickinson relationship and the circumstances that led Dickinson to mail this earliest version of "Further in Summer than the Birds" to her. I synthesize and summarize the key findings of their respective works here. For a more comprehensive account of the historical context informing Dickinson's composition of this poem and her choice to share it with Vanderbilt, see pp. 552 – 555 of Franklin's "The Manuscripts and Transcripts of 'Further in Summer than the Birds'" and pp. 68 – 79 of Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery*.

Vanderbilt's servant Anne Walker, attacked and shot both Walker and Vanderbilt (qtd. on Jackson 68). Perhaps to aid Vanderbilt during her recovery, Dickinson sent four letter-poems to Vanderbilt during the year after her injury (Franklin, "The Manuscripts" 553; Jackson 68). The Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" was one of them.

The circumstances surrounding Dickinson's composition and dissemination of the Vanderbilt variant are more than a compelling story; this historical context illuminates new avenues for interpreting and understanding the poem. Jackson, for instance, makes a convincing case for reading the "Elegy" of the "Minor Nation" in the Vanderbilt variant as an exploration of the political and cultural anxiety that possessed the newly re-united United States during the summer of 1865. Her incisive argument showcases the potential that this historical context offers as an entry point into rich discussions of the poem's meaning. This essay argues that the Vanderbilt variant's equally complex publication history, its life after Dickinson mailed it to Vanderbilt, requires the same kind of extended scholarly attention. The poem's fraught journey to publication continues to shape the terms on which scholars engage with the Vanderbilt variant and the interpretive possibilities they see – or fail to see – in the poem itself. For this reason, I will trace the complex publication and manuscript history of the Vanderbilt variant, documenting a part of its past that has only been partially recorded, but that has nonetheless defined how scholars imagine and write about this poem.

"Further in Summer than the Birds" was published for the first time in 1891, when Todd and Higginson released *Poems by Emily Dickinson, Second Series*. This volume contains a heavily edited version of "Further in Summer than the Birds" based loosely on Dickinson's revised 1866 text (Franklin, *Variorum* 835). Around the same time that Todd was preparing the three installments of *Poems* for publication, possibly even the same year the *Second Series* was

printed, Vanderbilt showed Todd the poems she received from Dickinson after her injury, from which Todd made a transcript.³ Although the full text of the Vanderbilt variant of “Further in Summer than the Birds” would not be published from Todd’s transcript until 1960 and from Dickinson’s manuscript until 1986, the poem’s final two stanzas appeared in print decades earlier as a separate poem. This strange turn in the Vanderbilt variant’s publication history occurred because, when Todd made her transcripts, she copied the last two stanzas onto a new page (see Figure 2). Millicent Todd Bingham, Todd’s daughter, who carried on her mother’s project into the twentieth century, misinterpreted these stanzas as their own, self-contained poem and published them as such in *Bolts of Melody* (1945).

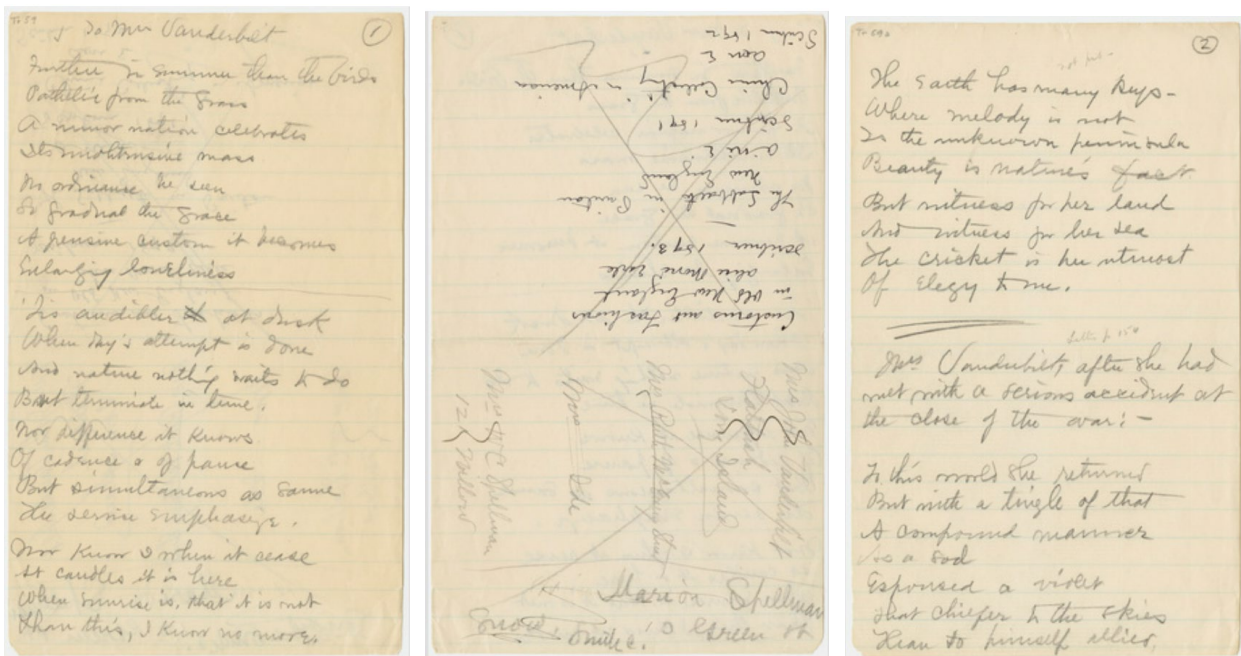


Figure 2: Shown here are the first three pages of Todd’s transcripts of the poems Vanderbilt received from Dickinson. “Further in Summer than the Birds” begins on the first page (left), cuts off after the fifth stanza, and continues onto a separate sheet of paper (right). Because the paper Todd used to copy the first five stanzas poem has other crossed out notes on the back (center),

³ There is no scholarly consensus about the precise date when Todd made her transcript. Amherst College Archives & Special Collection, where the transcript is located, provides the broadest range: between 1886 and 1896 (Todd, “Transcripts”). Franklin speculates that Todd created the transcript between 1893 and 1894 based on the combination of an entry in Todd’s diary, which states that she met Vanderbilt in Brooklyn at a 27 February 1893 gathering, and the crossed-out notes on the back of the first page of the transcript (see Figure 2), which mention a book published in 1893 (Franklin, “The Manuscripts” 553n2). Jackson, meanwhile, claims that Todd transcribed the Vanderbilt poems in 1891, though she does not give evidence of how she came to this conclusion (Jackson 68).

the transcripts insert an illegible gap in the middle of the poem, disappearing the logical progression present in the manuscript from “That this, I know no more –” to “The Earth has many Keys –.” By contrast, the division between what we know now to be the last two stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant and the next poem Todd transcribes (“To this World she returned”) is much less ambiguous (right). Looking at Todd’s transcripts, it is easy to see how Bingham mistook this unintelligible divide as marking the end of the poem.

The stanzas beginning “The Earth has many keys –” would continue to be misrepresented as a separate poem, including in the first collected works edited by Thomas H. Johnson, until 1960 (Franklin, “The Manuscripts” 554). That year, Todd’s complete transcript was published for the first time in a critical text called *Emily Dickinson’s Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* by Charles R. Anderson, though the mistake wouldn’t be widely corrected until Franklin’s landmark essay “The Manuscripts and Transcripts of ‘Further in Summer than the Birds’” appeared in 1978. In a way, though, this error persists to this day. My own paperback copy of Johnson’s *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, still regarded as a definitive edition for readers, contains Poem 1775: “The earth has many keys,” even though I purchased the book new in March 2022. Most Dickinson scholars will own Franklin’s updated three-volume variorum edition, but for the common reader of Dickinson, for the student, for the high school teacher, and even for the college English professor whose specialty lies elsewhere, Bingham’s error lives on.

While most recent scholars writing on the Vanderbilt variant have not, technically speaking, reproduced Bingham’s mistake of identifying its final stanzas as a separate poem, critics overwhelmingly continue to privilege the last two stanzas as the part of the Vanderbilt variant most deserving of extended analysis. This, in praxis, has a similar effect as printing “The Earth has many keys –” as its own poem: it exaggerates the importance of the Vanderbilt variant’s last two stanzas, while rendering the poem’s middle three stanzas invisible. Even Jackson, whose analysis of the Vanderbilt variant in the chapter “Lyric Reading” from *Dickinson’s Misery* is generally exemplary, focuses narrowly on the poem’s first two and last

two stanzas. Jackson's only explicit reference to the three middle stanzas comes in the form of a rhetorical question ("Is a 'Tune' without 'Cadence' or 'Pause' a song?") that sets up her more in-depth discussion of the poem's final stanzas (77).

Some scholars have even misread critics' and editors' preference for the final two stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant as Dickinson's own. Mistaking Todd's division of her transcript of the Vanderbilt variant onto two pages as a choice Dickinson made in her manuscript, Helen Vendler writes in *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries* (2010), "Initially, [Dickinson] found the last two stanzas of the first version worthy of retention. (They were once thought to be a separate poem, because they were found on a detached leaf of paper[])" (362). This error and Vendler's reading of it as an indication of Dickinson's greater attachment to the final two stanzas provides implicit rationale for Vendler's decision to largely ignore the poem's middle three stanzas in her analysis. While she dedicates just four lines to stanzas three, four, and five combined, Vendler spends nearly a quarter of her chapter about "Further in Summer than the Birds" discussing the last two stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant, a surprisingly large amount of time, considering she does not limit the scope of her brief essay to a single variant.

The amount of attention Vendler gives to each part of the poem corresponds with the relative degree of literary value she assigns them. Vendler repeatedly praises "those last exquisite stanzas" of the Vanderbilt variant, even calling "the beautiful lines of these two stanzas" a display of what Dickinson "is best at" (362). Meanwhile, she uses more reserved, even indifferent language when describing the middle stanzas of the poem. For example, to support her claim that some of the revisions Dickinson makes between the different variants of "Further in Summer than the Birds" are "startling," Vendler cites a line from the third stanza: "At first the cricket song is 'Audiblest, at Dusk.' How did that perception ever metamorphose into 'Antiquest

felt at Noon’?” (363). Though this rhetorical question may seem neutral when read in isolation, this account of the rewriting of stanza three comes into stark relief beside Vendler’s depiction of Dickinson cutting the Vanderbilt variant’s final two stanzas. Vendler could be describing a violent sacrifice when she writes with fervor, “It must have cost Dickinson a good deal to give up the splendor of the asseverations in these two cut stanzas. But with the ruthlessness of the exacting artist, Dickinson rejects, in her final version, her memorable closing stanzas and their ringing certainty” (362). Juxtaposed with such ardent, forceful sentences, Vendler’s account of the emendation of “Audiblest, at Dusk” to “Antiquest felt at Noon” seems disinterested in the change or, in the most extreme reading, suggests a slight preference for the revised version. Vendler’s verb “metamorphose” could simply mean “to change in form” or “to turn *into* or *to* something else,” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it (“metamorphose,” def. 1). However, “metamorphose” could also connote a positive transformation, from a caterpillar into a butterfly, from an “ugly duckling” into a swan, or, for Vendler, from the middle stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant to a later, better version of “Further in Summer than the Birds.”

The fact that many scholars, like Vendler and Jackson, overwhelmingly focus on the final two stanzas when analyzing the Vanderbilt variant is not a coincidence; it is an enduring legacy of the Vanderbilt variant’s complex publication history, in which *Bolts of Melody* allowed the final two stanzas to enter the critical conversation and cement themselves firmly in the critical imagination decades before most scholars would even learn the poem contained five more stanzas. If the Vanderbilt variant had a more conventional publishing history and the whole poem was made readily and widely available at one time, it would not matter as much that Dickinson scholars regularly overlook the poem’s middle three stanzas. But, because these recent scholars’ engagement with the poem constitutes all the critical attention the Vanderbilt variant

has received in the more than one-hundred-fifty years since Dickinson wrote it, their works, together, effectively disappear the rest of the poem. This erasure is compounded by the inaccessibility of the full manuscript text, relative to its last two stanzas, which scholars continue to, redundantly, reprint. Beyond the Franklin variorum, which, by definition, suspends all the variant versions of Dickinson's collected works beside one another, Franklin's "The Manuscripts and Transcripts of 'Further in Summer than the Birds'" and Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery* are the only scholarly works I have encountered that reprint the Vanderbilt variant in full. More typically, scholars will only excerpt the Vanderbilt variant's last two stanzas, if they include an extended quote from the poem at all (see Vendler 362 and McSweeney 156). When Kerry McSweeney, for example, sums up the Vanderbilt variant as a poem with "seven stanzas rather than four: the first two are virtually identical with those of the final version; the next three describe the crickets' sound ('audibler at dusk,' no difference of 'cadence or pause,' of indeterminate cessation)" before quoting the entire last two stanzas of the poem, she relegates the middle three stanzas to the role of prelude, subordinate to the final stanzas, and meriting only a quick gloss (McSweeney 156). Yet, since the full text of the Vanderbilt is only available in three scholarly texts, in the 150 copies of Allen's *My Cricket*, or in the original manuscript at Denison, this gloss becomes a stand-in for the poem's middle three stanzas. It cuts off the poem's capacity to contain meaning in its middle three stanzas and limits the reader's ability to see anything in this part of the poem beyond what McSweeney tells them. Responding to this erasure, my essay seeks to restore the rich possibilities present in the middle three stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant as well as the meanings that can only be accessed by looking at the poem as a whole.

After Vanderbilt shared the poems Dickinson sent to her with Todd in the early 1890s, the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" disappears from

the historical record for more than fifty years, before resurfacing in 1952 at Denison Library. Vanderbilt seems to have retained the poems after showing them to Todd, seeing as Todd's transcripts were Bingham's only source when she published the last two stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant in *Bolts of Melody*. However, it is unclear what happened to them after Vanderbilt's death in 1902. The only claim I can make with confidence about this obscure period in the manuscripts' history is that they were eventually dispersed. Two of the poems Vanderbilt received ("To this World she returned" and "Dying – to be afraid of Thee –") are today housed at Princeton College (Franklin, *Variorum* 769, 877). Scholars do not think the third, "They have a little odor" survived, though the story of the Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" reminds us that it could still be out there, in the hands of a private collector, or in a library like Denison with no other Dickinson poems in its collections (Franklin, *Variorum* 516). And of course, the final manuscript, Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds," ended up in Claremont, California at Denison Library, making it possibly the only Dickinson manuscript located outside the Northeast or Washington, D.C.

The manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant was likely donated to Denison in 1952 by Emily Hart Bow Stone (1896 – 1962) of New York City and Woodstock Vermont, under the name Mrs. Fred Lyon Stone (Drake, "List of Autographed"; Wormser). Stone made multiple large donations, primarily consisting of first editions, to Denison during the early 1950s in memory of her late husband, Fred Lyon Stone (1901 – 1949) (Drake, *Memo to Hard and Dodd*; Wormser). First editions of three books by or about Dickinson – a copy of the previously discussed *Bolts of Melody*, *Ancestor's Brocades* (1945) by Bingham, and *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1935) edited by Dickinson's niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson – are included in an eleven-page list of the books Stone donated to Denison in 1952 (Wormser). Stone

appears to have chosen Denison to receive her donation because of her connection to Louise Seymour Jones (Mrs. Rex Lander Jones) of Redlands, California, a friend of Stone's who served as a Scripps College trustee and a member of Denison Library's MacPherson Society, which sought to expand Denison's collections (Wormser). In my research about the Stones, conducted at Denison Library and using *Ancestry Library's* collection of the city directories, census records and other historical documents, I have not been able to uncover how the Stones acquired the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant. My most likely theory is that Stone, her husband, or both were book collectors based in New York City, where they came across the Vanderbilt variant. The Stones seem to have lived in and frequented the same neighborhoods where Vanderbilt spent her life, and both Emily ("Emily Bow Stone") and Fred Stone ("Fred Lyon Stone") were even buried in the same cemetery, Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, as Vanderbilt herself ("Gertrude Vanderbilt"). This leads me to speculate that the Vanderbilt Variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" remained in the vicinity of Brooklyn, where Dickinson mailed it in 1865, until Denison acquired it almost a century later.

The Vanderbilt variant arrived at Denison with little of the fanfare one would expect to surround the donation of an "Unpublished Poem by Emily Dickinson," as librarian Dorothy Drake's intake records refer to it (Drake, "List of Autographed"). In fact, Denison's internal gift files suggest that the Vanderbilt variant was far from the most lauded part of the Stone donation (Wormser). That honor was reserved for the original nineteen installments that together make up the first edition of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), Charles Dickens' first novel (Wormser). Even after Allen came across the manuscript, recognized it as the missing Vanderbilt variant from Franklin's 1978 article, and published her own transcript, the knowledge she accumulated about

the poem's literary importance and complex history was not transferred into the library's records, so it was not passed on to later Denison staff.

This gap in communication could have contributed to the later displacement of the records explaining the manuscript's provenance to other parts of the Denison Library, a curious event that led to one final twist in the convoluted history of the Vanderbilt variant as material object. As part of my research process, I had to piece back together the story of the poem's arrival at Scripps, with help from Allen and Jennifer Martinez Wormser, the Director and Sally Preston Swan Librarian at Denison Library. Instead of pointing to Stone as the source of the Vanderbilt variant, the materials accompanying the manuscript identified a different Emily as the possible donor. On the front of the archival folder the manuscript is stored in, a note in handwriting of Judy Harvey Sahak, Wormser's predecessor, reads, "Probably gift of Emily Hale." This is important because the proposed connection to Hale imaginatively links the Vanderbilt variant to another great American writer, one who was part of the generation of Modernist poets inspired by Dickinson's formal innovation. In addition to being a Professor of Drama at Scripps from 1932 to 1934, Hale was the longtime muse of T.S. Eliot ("From the Archives"). Hale and Eliot's relationship even brought Eliot to Claremont from December 1932 to January 1933, during which he served as a visiting lecturer at Scripps ("From the Archives"). Years later, Hale donated her personal copies of Eliot's books, nearly all inscribed for her by Eliot, to Denison Library. Put in the context of this major gift, it would not be unprecedented for Hale to donate a literary artifact as important as an unpublished Emily Dickinson manuscript, but, unlike with the materials related to Eliot, it is unclear how she would have obtained the Vanderbilt variant. Although there is no evidence, apart from Sahak's note, that Hale – and, by

extension, Eliot – had any connection to the manuscript of the Vanderbilt variant, even the possibility is worth noting.

In the two decades since the publication of the Franklin variorum made a more accurate transcript widely available to scholars for the first time, the Vanderbilt variant has garnered surprisingly little critical attention. My literature review – conducted using MLA International Bibliography, WorldCat, Literature Online, and *The Emily Dickinson Journal* – identified eleven scholarly articles or book chapters published since 1998 that mention the Vanderbilt variant.⁴ Of these, only four engaged with the Vanderbilt variant in a more substantial way than simply alluding to its existence in a passing reference or endnote, and all of them come up short in their analysis in one of two crucial ways. The three of these works that I have already mentioned (Jackson’s “Lyric Reading”; McSweeney’s “Dickinson: The Glimmering Frontier”; and Vendler’s chapter on “Further in Summer than the Birds” in *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries*) focus primarily on unpacking the poem’s final two stanzas, an issue I have discussed extensively. The last essay, “Surround Sound: Dickinson’s Self and the Hearable” (2005) by Katie Peterson, fails to analyze the Vanderbilt variant on the poem’s own terms, only examining it as a point of comparison for understanding the later and, to Peterson, better variants of “Further in Summer than the Birds.”

Although I will consider the Vanderbilt variant alongside other versions of “Further in Summer than the Birds” when this context proves revelatory for understanding this seven-stanza version of the poem, the Vanderbilt variant is worth examining carefully, on its own terms, and largely apart from other variants because, as Cristanne Miller puts it in an essay in *The Oxford Handbook of Emily Dickinson* (2022), it “is so different from the following copies as to be

⁴ See Appendix A for a full list of the scholarly works I found in my literature review that meet these criteria.

almost a different poem” (Miller, “Writing for Posterity” 226). The differences between the later versions of “Further in Summer than the Birds” are comparably minor – that is, if any detail in a Dickinson poem can be considered minor. Between the heavily revised version from 1866 that Dickinson retained for herself, the next version she sent to Higginson in January 1866, the version she mailed to publisher Thomas Niles in March 1883, and the latest version she addressed to Todd during the summer of 1883, Dickinson only changes two words (substituting “gentle” for “pensive” in the second stanza and “But” for “Yet” in the fourth) and alters some of the punctuation (Franklin, *Variorum* 835). By contrast, the Vanderbilt variant contains five unique stanzas, which do not reoccur in any later version of “Further in Summer than the Birds,” or anywhere else in Dickinson’s oeuvre. This is more stanzas, more lines than many of Dickinson’s later poems would even contain. As Miller emphasizes in *Reading in Time*, Dickinson writes a greater proportion of short poems, defined as a poem four lines or less in length, towards the end of her career; twenty-two percent of the total poems produced in 1865, over half of 1870’s output, and more than thirty percent in 1876, 1878, 1879, and 1881 – 1886 are short poems (6). And it isn’t as if the stanzas that only appear in the Vanderbilt variant are of inferior quality to Dickinson’s other work. Jackson, rightly, describes the Vanderbilt variant as “some of the most beautiful lines [Dickinson] ever wrote” (74). This essay has also underscored that the last two stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant were treated as a separate, self-contained poem for decades, inspiring scholars and casual readers alike. It is beyond time that the Vanderbilt variant, as a whole poem, receives the scholarly attention it deserves. In this essay, I take up that call and dare to “celebrate” the “many keys” of the Vanderbilt variant itself.

“Where Melody is not / Is the Unknown Peninsula”: The Music and Meter of the Vanderbilt Variant

Before launching into my own readings of the Vanderbilt variant, I will provide an overview of the larger thematic issues the poem explores: namely, the sanctity of nature and the processes by which humans observe and find meaning in the world around them. These topics fascinated Dickinson and served as the animating force behind many of her poems, including “These are the days when birds come back” (1859), “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church” (1861), “There’s a certain Slant of light” (1862), and “A Bird, came down the walk” (1862). Interrogating the way Dickinson foregrounds these issues in the Vanderbilt variant will ultimately allow me to grapple with two important aspects of the manuscript overlooked by previous scholars and editors – the ambiguity of its meter and its mark – that fundamentally change how we read the Vanderbilt variant and its relationship to these bigger thematic questions.

Most obviously, the Vanderbilt variant is interested in enumerating the sacred character of the natural world. Dickinson repeatedly uses Christian liturgical language (“Mass,” “Ordinance,” “Grace,” “Service,” “Candles”) to paint the crickets’ song as an act of methodically structured public worship. Even language that might initially seem secular assumes a hyper-Christian meaning within the poem. For instance, when framed by the first stanza as part of the crickets’ “unobtrusive Mass,” the words “Dusk” and “Sunrise” emerge as more than the temporal boundaries of the crickets’ song. In this context, “Dusk” and “Sunrise” indicate the times when supplicants are called to worship, the moment when the crickets deliver their song as part of the Christian service. This presentation of the crickets’ music as Christian ritual serves a dual purpose in the poem: it elevates natural phenomenon to the level of the divine while also

revealing that human understanding and appreciation of the natural world depend upon constantly observing and reevaluating its value. Dickinson introduces the crickets in the first stanza of the Vanderbilt variant as a “Pathetic” and “Minor Nation celebrat[ing] / It’s unobtrusive Mass,” lines that initially define the crickets by their relative smallness and insignificance. Yet, as the speaker spends the rest of the poem carefully considering the crickets’ song and trying to describe it, these adjectives seem increasingly ill-fitting, words that fail to capture the “Beauty” the speaker comes to recognize in the crickets and their music. While the Vanderbilt variant may begin by dismissing the crickets as “Pathetic,” “Minor,” and “unobtrusive,” the poem ends by calling upon the reader to “Witness” the crickets’ song as the “utmost” emblem of nature’s sacred power, demanding that we listen to nature’s “Elegy” before trying to write our own.

In *Dickinson’s Misery*, Jackson argues that the Vanderbilt variant enacts this “revers[al]” (77) in stanza six, moving from describing the shortcomings of “natural ceremonies” in the first five stanzas to underscoring their sacred strength in the final two (76). However, the “reversal” begins much earlier in the poem than Jackson contends, starting immediately after the speaker makes her initial judgement in the first stanza that the crickets are “Pathetic,” “Minor,” and “unobtrusive.” As I will show by close reading the poem’s meter, the Vanderbilt variant ultimately figures the qualities of the crickets’ song recounted in the three middle stanzas as the key to its power, contrary to Jackson’s claim. In simply glossing these stanzas, opting not to examine them closely, Jackson misrepresents their subtle, but impactful role in the poem, while also reinforcing the historical overemphasis of poem’s final two stanzas at the expense of the Vanderbilt variant’s identity as a cohesive, seven-stanza poem.

To begin to understand the mechanics of the “reversal” the Vanderbilt variant stages, let us turn to the poem’s fourth stanza, where I locate crux of this transition from discrediting the

crickets' song to revering it. The fourth stanza celebrates the constant, unvaried rhythm of the crickets' song as an essential source of its power:

Nor difference it knows –
Of Cadence, or of Pause –
But simultaneous as Same –
The Service emphacize – (spelling is Dickinson's own).

Because the crickets can produce a uniformly melodic "Tune," which "knows" no "difference" "Of Cadence, or of Pause," they communicate their devotion to God more effectively than other supplicants. If hymn singing is a form of worship and a direct expression of faith, then stanza four encourages readers to imagine that the crickets' piety is as "simultaneous," as without "Pause" as the rhythm of their "Tune." The final line of this stanza also clarifies that the crickets' song is not simply a part of "The Service," an unexceptional fulfillment of liturgical responsibility. Rather, when Dickinson writes that their music "The Service emphacize," she suggests that the crickets actively improve the quality of the liturgy with their song, transfiguring it into more forceful and generative act of devotion.

Given the context that stanza four imbues the unchanging rhythm of crickets' song with so much significance, it is striking that Dickinson writes the Vanderbilt variant, the poem that ultimately comes to describe the crickets' music with such veneration, in an irregular and shifting meter. Broadly speaking, the Vanderbilt variant is composed of alternating iambic tetrameter (eight syllable) and iambic trimeter (six syllable) lines. However, Dickinson continually distorts this basic formal structure, beginning with the very first word of the poem: "Further." While the Vanderbilt variant, as previously noted, is predominantly in iambic meter, "Further" is a trochee. This immediate upending of expectation – occurring before the poem has even had time to establish that expectation in the first place – creates a precedent for the rest of the poem to be metrically disruptive.

Just as the reader recovers from the jarring substitution of a trochee where an iamb should be and begins to feel confident in their understanding of the poem's metrical structure, Dickinson subverts their assumptions again. Though it uses a rhyme scheme more common in standard ballad meter (abcb), the first stanza overwhelmingly conforms to hymnal common meter (8686 syllables), leading the reader to expect that the Vanderbilt variant will continue to follow this metrical structure throughout. Because the common meter was among the most popular metrical forms in the nineteenth century (Miller, *Reading in Time* 57) as well as the structure that occurred most frequently in Dickinson's own poetry, the appearance of common meter in the first stanza of the Vanderbilt variant creates a false, fleeting sense of certainty, stability, and familiarity for the reader (59). When the reader moves onto the second stanza, ready for another quatrain in common meter, they encounter hymnal short meter (6686 syllables), a subtle but impactful distortion that produces the impression that there is something slightly off, something unsettled about the poem's metrical structure. Dickinson's introduction of slant rhymes in stanza two also contributes to the vague sense of wrongness. Stanza two's "Grace" and "Loneliness" would rhyme with the words "Grass" and "Mass" in the first stanza, if not for their different vowel sounds (a "hard a" and a "short e" instead of a "soft a").

As the poem progresses, the Vanderbilt variant departs "Further" from the style of the first stanza at the same time as the reader directs their gaze "Further" down the page to read the next part of the poem. Any semblance of a rhyme scheme drops off after stanza two, and it is not restored until the poem's final stanza. Yet, in the same moment the poem returns to an abcb rhyme scheme (here rhyming "Sea" with "Me"), the Vanderbilt variant thwarts the reader's desire for continuity by switching from short meter to a new, even more unconventional metrical structure (6676 syllables). While the movement from common meter to short meter is surprising,

it is not wholly unprecedented, given that, after common meter quatrains, short meter appears most often in Dickinson's poetry (Miller, *Reading in Time* 59). Metrical shifting between different hymn meters, as Cristanne Miller has shown, is a defining characteristic of Dickinson's poetic style, especially during the earlier, more productive years of her career (1858 – 1865), when Dickinson composed the Vanderbilt variant (6). In fact, the reader of any Dickinson poem which begins in common meter should even come to expect some metrical shifting because, according to Miller, "the majority of Dickinson's 8686 poems contain some marked variation from the norm, for example, including a stanza in a different metrical form" (60). However, even for Dickinson, a 6676 stanza is both incredibly unusual and highly experimental, made even more so by the fact that Dickinson introduces it into a poem with two additional metrical forms.

Through its shifting and increasingly irregular meter, the Vanderbilt variant emphasizes the limitations of the poetic form and the failures of the human expression. As previously noted, the poem paints the crickets' song as worthy of veneration because of its perfect, unchanging melody, which "knows" no "difference" "Of Cadence, or of Pause." According to the poem's own logic, the Vanderbilt variant fails to capture the power of the natural world and translate it on the page because it cannot emulate the consistent "Cadence" of the crickets' song. Beside the crickets' controlled, unvaried music, the meter of the Vanderbilt variant seems erratic, unrestrained. This disparity is underscored by Dickinson's choice to write the poem in hymn meter. By describing the crickets' music as part of an "unobtrusive Mass," the Vanderbilt variant presents the crickets' song as a hymn. Later versions of "Further in Summer than the Birds" even use the word "Canticle," a synonym for "hymn," which makes the association between the crickets' song and hymns even more explicit. Dickinson's use of hymn meter places the

Vanderbilt variant in the same genre as the crickets' song, encouraging readers to compare them and notice the irregular, shifting meter of the poem.

Jackson makes a similar observation about the poem's inability to achieve the ideal, unchanging rhythm of the crickets' song in *Dickinson's Misery*. Instead of coming to this conclusion by looking at the poem's meter, as this essay has, Jackson makes her point by considering the possibility that the crickets' song could function as a more extreme version of birdsong in Dickinson's poetry and in nineteenth century lyrics:

If [...] birdsong represented for Dickinson and for the period as a whole a lyricism unattainable by the human poet, then we might say that the cricket's song is even 'further' removed from the capacity of human expression than is the nightingale's or skylark's or bluebird's. [...] [T]he crickets can express what the writer cannot, or can, as part of nature, themselves become the signs of seasonal wane, of summer's passing" (Jackson 74).

Of course, it is important to situate Jackson's claim here within her wider argument that the Vanderbilt variant, like the rest of Dickinson's body of work, has been taken out of its historical context in order to be read as a lyric by modern scholars. However, attending to the Vanderbilt variant's interest in the limitations of poetry can provide insight into Dickinson's own understanding of her poetry and its relationship to the lyric form. With its shifting meter, the Vanderbilt variant exposes the epistemological overconfidence that led others to try to emulate the cricket, to write as if they could achieve that "lyricism unattainable by the human poet." Rather than being a rude attempt to approximate the crickets' song, the irregular meter of the Vanderbilt variant could instead signal a refusal by Dickinson to express herself through a poor mimicry of cricket's "Cadence." With the Vanderbilt variant, Dickinson embraces imperfection and fluidity, a decidedly human mode of lyricism, which she figures as beautiful because of its bold willingness to differ from, but exist "simultaneous[ly]" alongside, that other, immutable "Beauty" which "is Nature's Fact."

Now that we understand how the poem's various metrical forms function together, it is worth examining the moment of highest metrical irregularity in the Vanderbilt variant: the seven-syllable line in the final stanza. This line, "The Cricket is Her utmost," is unusual and, therefore, difficult for several, interrelated reasons. On the basic level of comprehension, "The Cricket is Her utmost" challenges the reader because it ends in an adjective, "utmost," with no noun to modify. This leaves the reader with an implicit question – "The Cricket is Her utmost" *what?* – to which it provides no answer. Since this line does not end in a dash, which Dickinson often uses as shorthand for enjambment (see "A Minor Nation celebrates / It's unobtrusive Mass –"; "Nor difference it knows / Of Cadence, or of Pause –"; and "Where Melody is not / Is the Unknown Peninsula –"), the reader continues onto the next line, seeking a resolution there. However, the line is enjambed in such a way that it does not complete the original clause ("The Cricket is Her utmost"), but instead begins a new one ("Of Elegy"). Dickinson's choice to withhold the key word, the thing at which "The Cricket is Her utmost," and then to emphasize that act of omission through an unconventional use of enjambment ultimately shifts the reader's attention onto the absence itself, making it tangible, present.

The line continues to create a paradoxically present absence through its meter. Because of its unusual seven-syllable length, the line "The Cricket is Her utmost" leaves the last metrical foot incomplete, breaking off after the unstressed syllable "most" in the word "utmost." This places metrical emphasis on the missing eighth syllable, effectively converting the absence at the end of the line into an even more palpable presence. The weight the poem gives to the space after "utmost" extends beyond the local meter of the line. Dickinson ends twenty-one lines, or three-quarters of the total lines in the Vanderbilt variant, in a dash, a punctuation mark that indicates a grammatical pause. By repeatedly signaling the completion of a line with a dash, the poem

ultimately trains its reader to treat each line break as a formal pause. As a result, when the reader arrives at the seven-syllable line “The Cricket is Her utmost” in the final stanza, the poem has already scripted their response: emphasize the omission of the eighth syllable by pausing where it should be, at the end of the line. The reader can only recognize this prompt by reading the line “The Cricket is Her utmost” in the context of the rest of the Vanderbilt variant. Without the rest of the poem’s metrical structure to instruct them to leave a pause at the end of “The Cricket is Her utmost” and without the enjambed lines in previous stanzas to show them the oddness of the transition between “utmost” and “Of Elegy,” this present absence would become both more difficult for the reader to detect and less striking in its impact, which I will discuss in the following paragraph. Given that the last two stanzas of the Vanderbilt variant were published as a self-contained poem for decades and that scholars continue to isolate these stanzas in their readings of the Vanderbilt variant, the line “The Cricket is Her utmost” demonstrates the importance of reuniting these concluding stanzas with the rest of the poem to truly begin to understand their meaning.

By withholding a crucial piece of information and ending on this oddly present absence, the Vanderbilt variant ultimately requires the reader to put down the poem, go outside, and “Witness” the crickets’ music for themselves, rather than relying on a human intermediary, the speaker, to tell them what makes the crickets the “utmost.” The Vanderbilt variant reinforces this call to action with its last line: “Of Elegy, to Me –.” Relinquishing her claim to authorship and the sense of authority it connotes, the speaker instructs the reader to shift their attention from her poem to the “Elegy” of the natural world, which they must “read” to fill the gap at the end of the seven-syllable line. This is a fitting conclusion for the Vanderbilt variant because, over the course of the poem, the speaker comes to realize the folly, the inadequacy of any knowledge not

acquired through meticulous observation. Instead of unwittingly allowing the reader to repeat the speaker's mistake of issuing a premature judgement about the crickets' song, based on secondhand information, the poem intervenes in this cycle of epistemological overconfidence and prescribes further careful observation of the natural world.

So far, this essay has assumed that Allen and Franklin were correct in their reading of the structure of the Vanderbilt variant as comprising of seven quatrains. However, putting the Vanderbilt variant in conversation with the work of Domhnall Mitchell reveals that the poem's line breaks are more fluid and less definite than the divisions previous editors have ascribed to it. In "Emily Dickinson, Ralph Franklin, and the Diplomacy of Translation" (1999), Mitchell argues that Franklin's variorum edition tends to regularize Dickinson's often ambiguous line breaks to adhere to metrical and stanzaic convention, erasing the very real possibility that Dickinson structured her poems more experimentally. To counter this, Mitchell offers an alternative mode of transcribing Dickinson's line and stanza breaks literally, then looking at spacing and capitalization to determine if any of the lines could be enjambed. Applying Mitchell's methodology to the Vanderbilt variant destabilizes the assumption that the quatrain is the basic organizational unit of this poem while illuminating the possibility that the Vanderbilt variant deftly moves between quatrains, quintains, and sestets – a more experimental lineation and meter that pushes the poem's embrace of a fluid, shifting form to a new extreme.

As Figure 3 shows, Dickinson consistently writes up against the edge of the page in the Vanderbilt variant, likely moving down to the next line in the middle of clauses like "When day's attempt / is Done –" and "And Nature nothing / waits to do" because she ran out of space to continue writing. In this respect, the Vanderbilt variant differs from two later versions of "Further in Summer than the Birds" from 1883, in which the literal line breaks in the manuscript

could be read as corresponding to line breaks in the text, as Mitchell persuasively argues, because of the counterintuitive amount of space Dickinson leaves between her last mark and the right edge of the paper. Dickinson could have easily fit the word “typify” on the same line as “Repose to” in the version she mailed to Niles, for instance. She also left enough space after each line break in the variant addressed to Todd to include a vertical note in the right margin for the poem’s recipients: “Brother and Sister’s Emily, with love –.” Because they are unexpected, even unprecedented, these gaps appear deliberate – spaces created with intention, rather than imposed on the text by the limitations of the page.

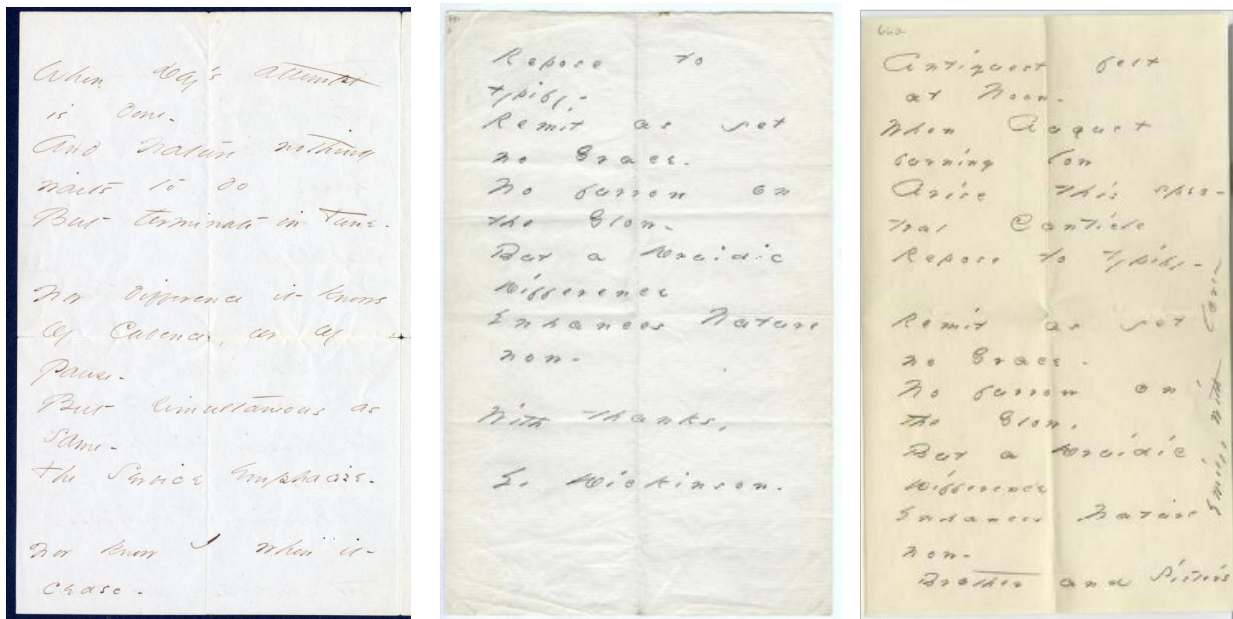


Figure 3: Pictured, from left to right, are the second manuscript page of the Vanderbilt variant; the third manuscript page of the version of “Further in Summer than the Birds” that Dickinson mailed to Thomas Niles in March 1883; and the second manuscript page of the version addressed to Mabel Loomis Todd in summer 1883.

Although it is subtler than these examples in the Niles and Todd versions, there is an unusually large space between the word “of” and the edge of the page in the fourth stanza of the Vanderbilt variant, which might signal a line break that has been overlooked by each of the poem’s editors. A line break after “of” would change “Of Cadence, or of Pause –” into “Of

Cadence, or of / Pause –” and transform the quatrain into a quintain. In her manuscript for the Vanderbilt variant, Dickinson leaves, on average, a 0.4-centimeter space between her last mark and the right edge of the paper, but some lines have a margin as small as 0.05 centimeters (“At Candles, it is here –”) or 0.1 centimeters (“And Melody is not”). Meanwhile, the margin after “of” in stanza four extends an impressive 1.8 centimeters, the largest in the manuscript, if we exclude obviously enjambed lines and lines where Dickinson has most likely continued after running out of room. Dickinson could have fit “Pause –” (2.35 centimeters without the dash, 2.75 centimeters with it) in this space, if she wrote the word just slightly smaller, or if she began the line at the average distance of 0.35 centimeters from the left edge of the page, rather than indenting it an unusual 0.7 centimeters in.

In addition to being spatially plausible, a line break at “of / Pause –” is thematically suggestive. Breaking the line at “Pause” forces the reader to leave a formal “Pause” both before and after the word “Pause,” a coincidence or metrical and semantic weight that ultimately produces a longer, more forceful “Pause.” Yet, it is important to note that the Vanderbilt variant “Pause[s]” in the exact place where the poem emphasizes that the crickets themselves “know” “No difference” “Of / Pause –.” Dickinson’s choice of verb (“know”) even indicates that the idea of a “Pause” is so foreign to the crickets that it lies beyond the boundaries of their capacity for knowledge. Consequently, having a more intense formal “Pause” here underscores the discrepancy between the rhythm of the crickets’ song and the meter of the poem, making the Vanderbilt variant’s break with the crickets’ “Cadence” and its determination to carve out its own, unique, idiosyncratic “Tune” even more legible. Reading “Pause” as the beginning of a new line also opens the possibility that there is another line break before the word “Same,” a potential division overlooked by all the poem’s previous editors, who have consistently

transcribed “Same” as the end of the next line (“But simultaneous as Same –”). Because of their spatial similarities on the page, the word “Same” could be in direct conversation with “Pause,” telling readers to interpret it the “Same” way they read “Pause” – as its own, one-syllable line. In addition to being supported by this play on words, the metrical indeterminacy of “simultaneous” allows “Same” to stand alone without forcing the fourth stanza to largely abandon the trimeter Dickinson uses more frequently in the Vanderbilt variant than any other meter. “Simultaneous” could be read alternatively as five syllables (si-mul-ta-ne-ous) or four syllables (si-mul-ta-neous), making the fourth stanza either a 651716 sestet or a slightly more regular 651616 sestet that riffs on the poem’s frequent use of trimeter.

While the crickets’ song is “simultaneous as Same” in the sense that it is ongoing, producing its perfect, unvaried rhythm continuously, the Vanderbilt variant is “simultaneous” because it suspends multiple, seemingly irreconcilable metrical structures beside one another, demanding the reader hold all the many interpretive possibilities it offers for the structure of a single stanza concurrently in their mind. When a reader looks at the fourth stanza, the ambiguity of Dickinson’s manuscript invites them to see a quatrain, a quintain, and a sestet all at the same time, to observe one stanza as three:

No difference it knows	No difference it knows	No difference it knows
Of Cadence, or of Pause –	Of Cadence, or of	Of Cadence or of
But simultaneous as Same –	Pause –	Pause –
The Service emphacize –	But simultaneous as Same –	But simultaneous as
	The Service emphacize –	Same –
		The Service emphacize –

The Vanderbilt variant does not confine its formal experimentation to moving linearly from one metrical structure to another with each passing stanza. Instead, the poem proposes a new, even more radical mode of formal innovation, in which the structure of a single stanza can be multiple, changing, and unstable on its own, without having to rely on the presence of another

stanza for a point of comparison. Written at the cusp of Dickinson's transition to writing primarily short poems in her late career, the Vanderbilt variant creates a pathway for Dickinson to continue experimenting with structure, to keep on exploding the formal constraints of poetry in her single stanza poems (Miller, *Reading in Time* 6). After analyzing the metrical structure of every poem in Franklin's *Reading Edition*, Miller claims that "Dickinson writes a smaller percentage of poems that are formally innovative" in the post-1865 period because "much of her radical play with formal structures occurs through the disruption of established rhythmic patterns within a single poem," a type of experimentation not possible in the shorter poems her later work trended toward (*Reading in Time* 6). The Vanderbilt variant's use of multiple structures "simultaneous[ly]" within a single stanza demonstrates that Dickinson's capacity for formal experimentation is more expansive than Miller contends. However, this type of innovation only becomes legible in Dickinson's manuscripts, requiring readers to return to the primary source or work from a facsimile copy to access it, forgoing the more easily decipherable print transcripts that have become the standard texts for Dickinson scholars as anything but supplementary aids.

Stay In, Damned Spot! In, I say!: The Generative Possibilities of an Ambiguous Mark

The fifth stanza of the Vanderbilt variant contains an ambiguous mark that, like the poem's metrical structure and lineation, refuses straightforward, singular interpretation. Hovering 0.4 centimeters below the bottom edge of the words "is" and "that" in the manuscript line "When Sunrise is [] that" and 0.5 centimeters above the highest point of the next manuscript line ("it is not –"), the mark is located almost exactly in the center of the space between two

lines.⁵ This placement is unusual because Dickinson typically writes her punctuation in line with the rest of the text (see “Candles,”; “here –”; “this,”; and “more –” in Figure 4). When Dickinson does occasionally stray from this norm, her punctuation is just barely out of alignment, as in the dashes after “not –” in stanza five and “Land –” in stanza seven, both of which begin 0.1 centimeters below the lowest point of the preceding letter (“t” and “d,” respectively). While the poem’s previous editors have variously transcribed the mark as a comma (Todd, Allen) or as a dash (Franklin), this essay contends that it could alternatively be read as a stray mark, or more provocatively, as a “spot,” Dickinson’s own word for a mark that is generative because it defies typographical expectations and resists legibility (Dickinson, Letter to Susan Gilbert). Reading the mark in stanza five as a “spot” ultimately refigures the relationship between the poem’s larger thematic interest in the sanctity of the natural world and in the processes by which humans observe it, encouraging readers to relish the places where they come into contradiction.

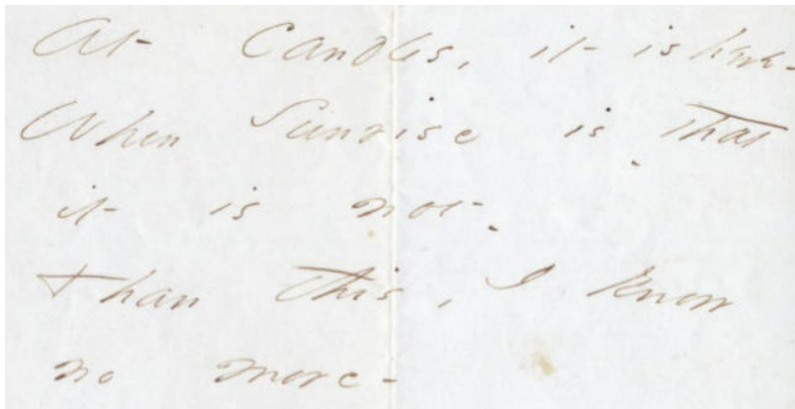


Figure 4: Stanza five of the Vanderbilt variant, shown here, includes an ambiguous mark between the words “is” and “that.” The opening line (“Nor know I when it cease –”) does not appear in this image because Dickinson began the stanza on the previous page.

Before I present my interpretation of the mark, it is worth briefly considering previous editors’ readings of the mark as intentional punctuation. In their transcripts of the Vanderbilt

⁵ Because I do not want to retract from the mark’s ambiguity and impose on readers’ ability to make their own interpretive judgments about its identity, I refer to the mark using a pair of brackets [] in my transcriptions of stanza five.

variant, Todd and Allen recorded the mark as a comma, while Franklin wrote it as a dash. After comparing the angle of the mark to Dickinson's other punctuation, I find it more plausible to read it as a dash, rather than as a comma. When Dickinson's dashes are not perfectly horizontal (–), they have a negative slope, meaning their right corner angles downwards (↘). Of the twenty-two dashes in the Vanderbilt variant, fourteen are horizontal, seven have a negative slope, and one (after “Loneliness –” in stanza two) does not have clear direction, falling somewhere in between the two. In contrast, Dickinson's commas always have a positive slope, with the left corner of the mark lower than the right (/,). For this reason, I am more inclined to agree with Franklin in his reading of the mark, than with Allen or Todd.

Horizontal Dashes

No Ordinance a sun.

The Service emphatic.

Beauty - is Nature's

Dashes with a Negative Slope

Grass.

is Com.

Phinault.

Commas

'Tis Audible, at East.

By Cabena, an of

By Uly, to Me.

Figure 5: These lines, taken at random from the Vanderbilt variant, showcase Dickinson's distinct approaches to writing dashes and commas.

While no evidence survives indicating how the poem's intended recipient and original reader, Gertrude Vanderbilt, would have interpreted the mark, Todd's reading of it as a comma in her transcript from the 1890s provides insight into how a nineteenth century reader would likely have experienced the mark.⁶ Nineteenth century epistolary etiquette demanded writers "correct and transcribe" their message if they left stray ink marks on the paper or if they made any penmanship, spelling, or grammatic errors (qtd. in Tingley 205). The inflated language of an 11 January 1850 letter from Dickinson's younger sister Lavinia to their brother Austin emphasizes the rigidity of this social mandate. Apologizing profusely for the "two wretched blots" on the page, Lavinia claims that these marks, "added to the other deformities of this sheet, render it quite unfit for inspection" (qtd. in Tingley 205). Given this historical context, it seems less plausible to read the mark in stanza five as a slip of Dickinson's pen because, in the imagination of the nineteenth century letter writer or recipient, this kind of mark was not merely a mistake – it was a violation.

However, as Stephanie A. Tingley shows in "‘A Letter Is a Joy of Earth’: Emily Dickinson's Letters and Victorian Epistolary Conventions" (1996), Dickinson's letters regularly subvert generic conventions. Instead of staying within the boundaries of letter writing etiquette, Dickinson wrote up against them, repurposing the epistle as a site for her poetic experimentation. Although it is still valuable to keep the rules of nineteenth century letter writing in mind, so as

⁶ Of course, Dickinson scholarship widely recognizes that Todd did not prioritize faithfulness to the manuscript in her process of transcribing and editing Dickinson's poems for publication. As one glance at Todd's transcript of the Vanderbilt variant (or any other Dickinson poem) will indicate, Todd regularly mistook Dickinson's formal innovations for errors or eccentricities and silently corrected them to adhere to convention. Among other changes to the poem's grammar, Todd removes all of Dickinson's dashes and, curiously, omits the commas after "'Tis Audiblest," "Of Cadence," "At Candles," and "Of Elegy," though these marks are much more certain than the comma Todd included after "When Sunrise is." Todd's decision to place a comma between the words "is" and "that" in the fifth stanza of the Vanderbilt was likely not informed by a determination to replicate the mark exactly as Dickinson wrote it. Rather, I find it more plausible to understand Todd's reading of the mark as an imposition of her own grammatical sensibilities, or an attempt to remake a stray mark into intentional punctuation that adhered to nineteenth century letter writing rules.

not to lose sight of the importance of the epistolary form for Dickinson, these guidelines, as Tingley reminds us, should not be used to police Dickinson's mark making or cut off the possibilities they suggest. A potential stray mark in stanza five is not the only error, by the standards of nineteenth century letter writing, to appear in the Vanderbilt variant. Dickinson misspells "emphasize" as "emphacize" in the fourth stanza and creates her own superlative form of the word "audible" ("Audiblest") in stanza three – both of which would make this manuscript "unfit" to send.⁷ These additional spelling and grammatical abnormalities in the Vanderbilt variant clarify that, regardless of how we interpret the mark in stanza five, the Vanderbilt variant already refuses to conform to nineteenth century epistolary conventions.

In a letter to Susan Gilbert (later Dickinson) written on 15 January 1854, Dickinson reveals that she does not subscribe to the dominant nineteenth century view, as ventriloquized by Lavinia, that ink blots are "wretched" stains. As such, this letter clarifies how Dickinson conceived of her own typographical errors, providing a useful lens through which to read the mark in the fifth stanza of the Vanderbilt variant. After spilling a small amount of ink, Dickinson interrupts the narrative flow of the letter to comment, "Susie, under that black spot, technically termed a blot, the word beat may be found – My pen fell from the handle – occasioning the same, but life is too short to transcribe or apologize –" (emphasis in original). As indicated by the definitions of a "blot" as a "a stain; a disgrace; a reproach; a blemish" ("blot," def. 3) and a "spot" as "a stain on character or reputation; something that soils purity; disgrace; reproach; fault; blemish" ("spot," def. 2) in *Noah Webster's 1844 American Dictionary of the English*

⁷ Like the mark in stanza five, if we read it as a slip of Dickinson's pen, the word "Audiblest" can be technically incorrect while also contributing substantively to the poem's argument. By adding the suffix *-est* to "Audible" to make the superlative adjective form "Audiblest," Dickinson transforms a secular term that describes the volume of the crickets' song into a new, sonically Christian word, which sounds like "Audi-" "blessed." In a poem that explicitly figures the chirping of crickets as liturgical, this is a significant change which serves to amplify the sacred power that the crickets possess in the Vanderbilt variant.

Language, the dictionary Dickinson used while composing her poetry, the words “blot” and “spot” can function as synonyms. However, Dickinson differentiates between them by distancing her mark from its “technical” name (“blot”) and offering “spot” as an alternative descriptor with fewer negative connotations. In doing so, she draws off another, more value-neutral definition of “spot” as “a mark on a substance made by foreign matter” or “a place discolored” (“spot” def. 1).

Yet, for Dickinson, the “spot” is not simply value-neutral; it is generative. Making a “spot” inspires Dickinson to suggestively meditate on the brevity of life, rehearsing an idea that she would return to throughout her career in poems like “I had no time to Hate” (1863) and “In this short Life” (1873) when she writes, “life is too short to transcribe or apologize.” On a more immediate level for the letter itself, the initial obscuring of “beat” enables Dickinson to ultimately emphasize this word. Rather than disappearing “beat,” the “spot” refocuses both Dickinson’s and her readers’ attention onto that which had been made invisible. This also produces an internal pun. Because of the “spot,” Dickinson and her readers must take a “beat” to consider a word that might have been overlooked in its original context: “There’s Austin – he’s a trifle – and trifling as it is that he is coming Monday, it makes my heart [beat].” Unpacking the impact of the “spot” in Dickinson’s letter to Sue ultimately illuminates a similar effect created by the mark in the Vanderbilt variant. As a direct result of its illegibility, the mark focalizes the reader’s gaze onto the Vanderbilt variant’s fifth stanza, demanding readers pay closer attention to a frequently overlooked part of the poem.

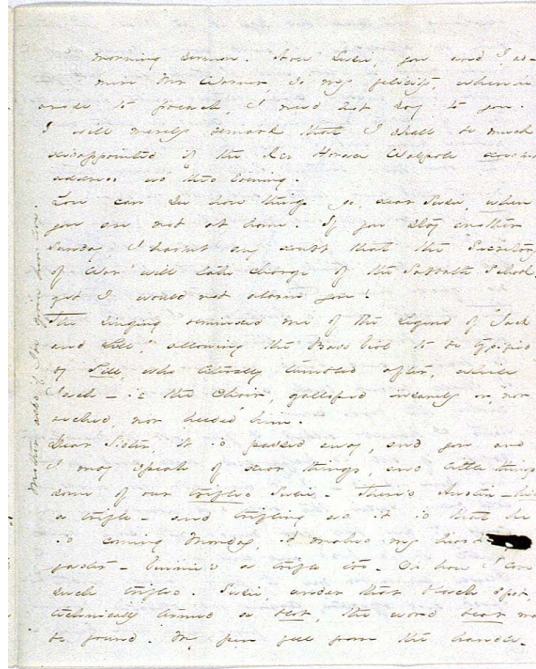


Figure 6: The second page of Dickinson's letter to Susan Gilbert from 15 January 1854, on which there is a visible ink blot

If we remove the intentional punctuation between “is” and “that” in the fifth stanza of the Vanderbilt variant and recategorize the mark as a “spot,” the meaning of the line “When Sunrise is [] that it is not –” shifts subtly, creating the possibility that the speaker observes the crickets’ song by following the scientific method. Stanza five begins with a line (“Nor know I when it cease –”) that identifies a problem: the speaker cannot pin down the moment when the crickets stop singing.⁸ In the next line (“At Candles, it is here –”), the speaker lists relevant information

⁸ Dickinson’s repetition of the unclear antecedent “it” throughout the Vanderbilt variant suggests that the speaker’s confusion could extend even beyond her uncertainty about the temporal boundaries of the crickets’ song. Although she will eventually name the crickets in the seventh stanza (“The Cricket is Her utmost”), the speaker otherwise refers to them using variations of the pronoun “it,” with the notable exception of the line in the first stanza that introduces them as “a Minor Nation.” Because it is delayed for so long, the moment when the speaker finally identifies “it” as “The Cricket” feels like a revelation, as if the speaker has only just discovered the word and is blurring out her epiphany. Given this context, the speaker’s speculation about “when it cease[s]” in stanza five emerges as part of a larger empirical investigation that culminates in the speaker accumulating enough knowledge and language to name “The Cricket” in the final stanza. By declining to use the word “Cricket” until the end of the poem, the Vanderbilt variant also invites the reader to join the speaker in seeking more information through the scientific method. Annotations on other manuscript and transcript versions of “Further in Summer than the Birds” confirm that later variants of the poem successfully enlisted readers to participate. Frances Norcross – Dickinson’s cousin and the recipient of the next version of “Further in Summer than the Birds” wrote “Cricket” in the margins of her transcript of the first two lines, the only record of the Norcross variant’s existence, since no manuscript for this text has been found (Franklin, *Variorum* 832). Norcross could have labeled this poem “Cricket” because the word

about the temporality of the crickets' song, presumably gathered through previous observation, which could provide evidence to help her determine when their music "cease[s]." The process the speaker follows in each of these lines corresponds to the initial two steps of the scientific method: first, ask a question (When does the crickets' song end? How can the speaker know?) and then, compile previous knowledge on the topic (the crickets begin singing "At Candles," or the moment when it gets too dark to see without a light). Although the first two lines gesture at similarities between the speaker's process in stanza five and the scientific method, the Vanderbilt variant doesn't cement this relationship until the stanza's third line ("When Sunrise is [] that it is not –"), when the speaker poses a hypothesis, the single most important stage in the scientific method, which distinguishes it from other empirical processes. If we read the ambiguous mark in this line as a "spot," to borrow Dickinson's own language, then the line "When Sunrise is [] that it is not –" seems more tentative than its punctuated counterpart. Deferring punctuation until the end of the line creates an odd muddle of short words ("is [] that it is") at its midpoint. This unusual syntax produces a sense of uncertainty as to how to read the line, making it sound more like a question when the reader voices it. The provisional, speculative nature of "When Sunrise is [] that it is not" is what ultimately allows this line to function as the hypothesis of the fifth stanza because, by definition, a hypothesis is "a supposition or conjecture put forth to account for known facts" ("hypothesis," def. 3).

was included in the manuscript she received from Dickinson, like in the Vanderbilt variant. Or Norcross might have simply been a more discerning reader than Higginson, the recipient of the next version of "Further in Summer than the Birds," who did not successfully determine the source of the poem's music. Higginson recorded his own tentative theory when he penciled the words "insect-sounds?" at the top of the manuscript Dickinson mailed to him in 1866. The fact that the Vanderbilt variant is the only surviving version of "Further in Summer than the Birds" to contain the word "Cricket" indicates that Dickinson originally conceived of the speaker and reader as partners in observation, whose success was mutually assured.

If we see the ambiguous mark as intentional punctuation, the stanza's third line becomes less tentative and, as a result, reads less like a hypothesis, causing the parallel between the fifth stanza and the scientific method to break down. Since both dashes and commas signal a grammatical pause, the presence of either of these punctuation marks splinters the line into distinct clauses, which the preceding line ("At Candles, it is here –") instructs the reader, by its example, to interpret as the two component parts of a statement of fact. Consequently, the version of the line "When Sunrise is [] that it is not –" that contains a punctuation mark between "is" and "that" contradicts the opening line of stanza five because it suggests that the speaker knows precisely when the crickets finish their song: "When Sunrise is." Removing the punctuation from between "is" and "that" and seeing the mark in stanza five as a "spot" resolves this puzzling tension by converting the line "When Sunrise is [] that it is not" from a statement of fact into a hypothesis, a provisional statement the speaker will test through further observation.

Though identifying the specific methodology employed by the speaker in the Vanderbilt variant might initially seem like a small detail, this change ultimately recasts our understanding of the poem's thematic interest in processes of observation. As previously discussed, the Vanderbilt variant is a poem with deeply Christian overtones, which glorifies the natural world by imagining it in liturgical terms. When put in conversation with the poem's overtly Christian framework, the speaker's choice to observe nature using the scientific method seems paradoxical. How could the scientific method be used to plumb the depths of the sacred? Yet, it is precisely through this collision of opposites – the spiritual and the scientific – that the Vanderbilt variant moves from the tentativeness of stanza five into the new, assertive voice of the final two stanzas, retrieving the confidence the speaker abandoned after her brash misjudgment of the crickets as a "Pathetic" and "Minor Nation" in stanza one. Therein lies the

power of the Vanderbilt variant itself: it revels in contradiction, bringing together the unvaried “Cadence” of the crickets’ song with the shifting meter of the poem itself, the sanctity of the natural world with the empirical process of observation, and finding beauty in the place where they crash together.

By suspending several ways of reading the mark beside one another, including as an example of Dickinson’s innovative theory of the “spot,” this essay insists that the strength of the Vanderbilt variant lies in its interpretive richness, in the way that it can suggest multiplicity with just a single stroke. Yet, at the same time as it resolves one question (How do we even begin to read the ambiguous mark in stanza five?), my analysis raises another, more practical dilemma: How could an editor preparing the Vanderbilt variant for publication conceivably represent this mark in a way that captures its ambiguity and allows several, contradictory possibilities to coexist? Using traditional methods of transcribing and publishing Dickinson’s poetry, this goal might not even be achievable. However, Dickinson scholars like Marta L. Werner are pioneering new, experimental methods for reproducing and transcribing Dickinson’s poetry with higher fidelity to her original manuscripts. In *Emily Dickinson: The Gorgeous Nothings* (2013), Werner collaborated with artist Jen Bervin to publish to-scale facsimiles of the poems scholars call Dickinson’s “envelope poems” or “scraps” alongside creative transcripts that maintain Dickinson’s dynamic arrangement of letters, words, and other marks in multiple, overlapping directions across the page (see Figure 7). For decades, scholars avoided working with the “envelope poems” because of the challenge posed by these texts’ refusal to adhere to directional, scalar, or epistolary expectations. Yet, by using the artist’s book form, which lends itself to experimentation, Werner and Bervin celebrate the very aspects of Dickinson’s “envelope poems”

that deterred previous scholars, reimagining each poem's ambiguities and idiosyncrasies their focal points.

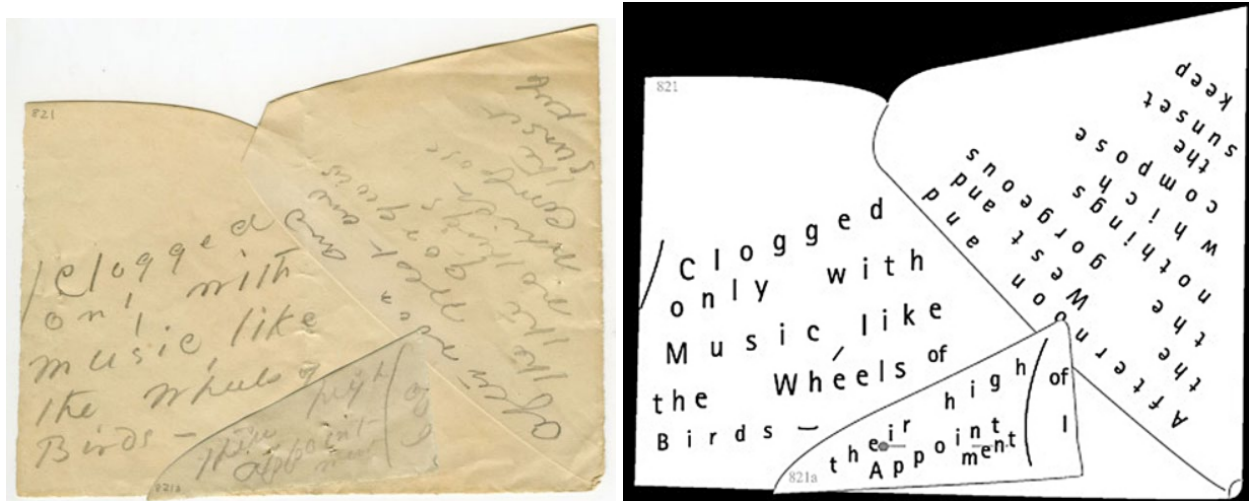


Figure 7: Dickinson's Manuscript A 821 (left) and its transcript (right), published online in *Radical Scatters* and in print in *Emily Dickinson: The Gorgeous Nothings* (pp. 172)

In his preface to *Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1890), the earliest published collection of Dickinson's poetry, Higginson claims that he and co-editor Todd made "very few and superficial changes" in preparing Dickinson's poetry for publication (*Poems, First Series* v). Yet, because editing practices have evolved and because poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have continued to follow Dickinson's example and explode the boundaries of what poetry can be, the "changes" Higginson and Todd once considered "few and superficial" now appear heavy handed and bowdlerizing. Like Higginson and Todd's *Poems*, traditional print transcripts seem increasingly outmoded compared with the rise of innovative methods for publishing Dickinson's poetry, like those Werner and Bervin propose in *The Gorgeous Nothings*. In these efforts, I locate the future of Dickinson scholarship and publication, a future that will enable poems like the Vanderbilt variant of "Further in Summer than the Birds" to be published as Dickinson wrote them, finally free from the imaginative blockades of the traditional print text.

Appendix A

Because even the most thorough researcher can miss relevant sources, I have decided, for full transparency, to provide a list of the scholarly works I identified during my literature review that were published after 1998 and mention the Vanderbilt variant. My list omits articles and books discussing only later variants of “Further in Summer than the Birds,” but it is worth noting that I found these works to be more common than scholarship referencing the Vanderbilt variant.

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